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Invisible Girls: The Effects of Disproportionate Discipline of Black Girls in K-12 New York City Schools

Emily Joachim
Bard College

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The Effects of Disproportionate Discipline of Black Girls in K-12 New York City Schools

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by

Emily Joachim

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"The burden of protecting Black girls should not be placed on the shoulders of Black girls alone."
- Study Authors

Abstract

This thesis examines the effects of the disproportionate discipline of Black girls in K-12 New York City schools. It will do this by looking into the experiences of ten Black girls who have experienced different forms of discipline. It will anchor itself in stereotypes that social media often pushes on Black girls through controlling images and the ways that Black girls have been negatively affected within educational spaces. It will also explore solutions and other aspects of this experience. By looking into the history of New York City schools, literature, and my participant's interviews, we will get an understanding of the discriminatory practices and struggles that Black girls face in New York City schools.

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Without *God*, none of this would be possible. Thank you for protecting, guiding, and putting people in my life who would help me along this journey.

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To My Participants:

You are seen and heard; now, the world will know your story. Thank you for sharing your stories and making my project what it is.

To Those I have met along the way and those who I leave behind:

Thank you!

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An open letter to the Black girls

Dear Black girls,

I sit here teary-eyed, reflecting on the words on these pages that I cannot wait to share with you about this topic. Here are a few things that I have learned. I have learned that your experience, my experience, and our experience are not all we are. Society will try to tear you down, dim your light, and put you in a box that you may not always fit in. They may tell you you need to do this, or you need to do that, or you need to look like this or look like that. Listen to me when I tell you that all you need to be is you. I would be a fool not to recognize the foundation that our society is built on, and I would be the first to apologize for how society might treat you. I will be the first to say you deserve so much better, and I wish I could hide and shield you from the things you might experience, but I cannot. However, I can only remind you of how incredible you are. Remind you that despite what you might experience, you WIll make it.

To the ones who came before me, thank you for paving the way for young Black girls like me to share my story.

This page is intentionally left blank to leave space for all the untold stories of Black girls in New York City and worldwide. For the Black girls who remain invisible. I hope that one day you will be seen.

Introduction: *Firecracker*

Chills were going through my body as I sat on the train home that day. I had listened to music to calm my nerves, but I knew I would have to prepare for my punishment for how I behaved in school earlier that day. It was a 4th-period freshman year English class. I was in my school dress code of kayak pants, blue shirt, and whatever shoes I had chosen to put on that day. As always, at the time, pants never seemed to fit. They either fit at the waist but were too long that I would trip over them or just right in length but too big in the waist. I had opted for just the right length and two big in-the-waist pants. I had figured I would just wear a belt. On this particular day, I was running late to school and had forgotten my belt, so I spent most of the day sliding my pants back up when they would slip. I had already been uncomfortable, as if anything else was embarrassing. Not having your clothes fit in a New York City (NYC) school is the ultimate combination for getting picked on. A boy in my class had started making fun of me as he saw me sliding my pants back up. I spent most of my time not saying much. After what felt like endless hours of being picked on, I turned around and told him to shut up.

At this point, the teacher, who seemed not to have heard his constant picking on me, had told me to be quiet and not to use such language in her classroom. I tried explaining what was happening to the teacher, and she simply told me I was being disruptive. After some quiet time, the picking continued, and I got up and raised my voice and loudly told the boy to stop and shut the F*** up. This time, the teacher yelled my name across the classroom and told me to go outside. I began to argue back and forth with her, explaining that she had not done anything about him picking on me and refused to go outside several times before finally giving in. She explained that I was disrupting her classroom and the educational space of others and that a phone call home would be made. I shrugged my shoulders, grabbed my belongings, and left. I sat

on the train reflecting on this moment, and what my punishment would be once I got home. I did not understand why; my outburst was the only thing seen as wrong.

Once I entered my apartment, I could sense the tension in the air, and before I could even take my shoes off, my mother called me into the living room. She sat me down and told me that I had three things against me in this world: I am Black, a Woman, and Haitian. Those three things would influence how people perceive me. She described me as a "firecracker" and went on about taming my flame in certain places and igniting it in others. She referenced how if I had continued to act this way, I would not be presented with opportunities because no one would hire "the angry Black girl[1]." I learned that day how to be invisible without her telling me, and I had never worn kayak pants again.

It taught me that I often had to be quiet when defending myself, which is why I always got into trouble in school. Someone would antagonize me, and I would react, but I would be the only one in trouble; any time anyone needed someone to speak loudly, to yell for everyone to listen, I was praised for how I could call attention to a room full of people. I learned to make my voice useful, and that was only the case when it was for the benefit of others, not for myself.

Here at Bard, I often fought to go against the stereotypes[2] that people thought of me, not necessarily because the college or my professor would discipline me for the way I behave, but rather because it has been so ingrained in my system from the years of mistreatment simply because of the race and gender I was born into a Black girl. During my freshman year of college, I struggled with imposter syndrome[3] , not only because I was navigating a white space but also

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[1] A controlling image of the Black girl that leads society to believe that Black girls are aggressive in nature
[2] stereotypes, which is an oversimplified idea of a person or a group of people
[3] Imposter syndrome" is defined as a psychological pattern in which an individual doubts their skills, talents, or accomplishments and has a persistent internalized fear of being exposed as a "fraud." Josh. "Facing Imposter Syndrome." AWBW, 23 Dec. 2021, https://awbw.org/facing-imposter-syndrome/.

because I was trying not to come off as the ghetto Black girl. I learned how to code-switch[4] in

spaces, comb my hair in specific ways, and become a Black girl was socially acceptable in

societal space . This was not necessarily because Bard had taught me to be this way but simply

because of my past experiences in educational spaces. In my time in higher education, I

recognized how my past educational experiences have negatively impacted me. This can be from

the way I speak, dress, and even present myself as a young Black Woman, and through this and

conversations with my other friends/peers, I have realized that the system that was meant to

teach us all along was instilling negative impacts on to us that we(Black girls) never asked for

and the "discipline" that was bestowed upon was nothing compared to others.

As a native New Yorker who has experienced discriminatory discipline, I wanted to make

the city my primary location to see if other Black girls like myself have had similar experiences.

I primarily lived and learned in Brooklyn New York, which will be my main focus, although I

hope to branch out to the other boroughs. I seek to highlight the experiences and voices of Black

girls, which are often unheard, and add to the emerging research surrounding the impact of

school discipline on them. In this project, I define discipline broadly, from verbal discipline (e.g.,

a teacher telling a Black girl she is too loud) to expulsion from school. I use a broad definition

because even a "small" disciplinary action on the part of a teacher or administrator can affect the

student negatively, causing damage to her self-esteem or changing her view of education for the

worse[5].

The discipline of Black girls by the school administration (teachers, counselors, school

safety officers, etc.) is often rooted in damaging stereotypes such as the "angry Black girl," the

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[4] Code switching is the way in which a member of an underrepresented group (consciously or unconsciously) adjusts their language, syntax, grammatical structure, behavior, and appearance to fit into the dominant culture.*What Is Code Switching and How Does It Impact Teams?* https://www.betterup.com/blog/code-switching.

[5] Wun, Connie. "Unaccounted Foundations: Black Girls, Anti-Black Racism, and Punishment in Schools." *Critical Sociology*, vol. 42, no. 4–5, July 2016, pp. 737–50. *SAGE Journals*, https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920514560444.

belief that Black girls are more aggressive and hostile than white girls. Black girls are often

viewed from the "adultification bias,"[6] perspective which is the belief that Black girls are less

innocent, more mature, and less in need of protection than their white schoolmates. This subject

has yet to be widely researched or discussed, but it has begun to receive attention from

academics and journalists in the last few years. One author and researcher who explores this

subject is Connie Wun, who argues that Black girls are vulnerable to disproportionate discipline

in schools[7]. Another author, Monique Morris, scholar and founder of the Grantmakers for Girls

of Color Fund, also documents cases of excessive punishment of Black girls, especially

expulsion and suspension from schools[8]. I would like to see how much my research confirms the

previous findings. I believe I can contribute to this literature about the disproportionate discipline

of Black girls by studying girls in the urban setting of New York City.

I will begin this research paper with a literature review, which will go into the literature

surrounding Black girl experiences. It will show the data that displays the rates at which Black

girls are getting disciplined in comparison to other races and genders; it will also delve into The

various types of discipline that Black girls face, why Black girls are being disciplined, and the

effect that it has on them. Following my literature review, I will go into my methods and research

design section, which will show my research question, research method, participant interview

chart, and a summary of my participants and their backgrounds.

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[6] Wilson, Cristin. "Study: 'Adultification' Has Black Girls Facing Harsher Punishments." *ABA Journal*, vol. 103, no. 11, Nov. 2017, pp. 20–20.
[7] Wun, Connie. "Unaccounted Foundations: Black Girls, Anti-Black Racism, and Punishment in Schools." Critical Sociology, vol. 42, no. 4–5, July 2016, pp. 737–50. SAGE Journals, https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920514560444.
[8] Morris, Monique W. Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools. The New Press, 2016.

This will be followed by a glimpse into the past with my school in the session section, which will talk about the origins of the New York City school system, touching on the African Free school system, Brown v. Board, and the fight for equality. I will also discuss the role of Black girls and how the NYC school system became what we know them to be today. What will follow is where the experiences of my participants will take place. From their perspective, I will discuss their experience with the education system. I will also discuss ways they will try to avoid discrimination. Their experiences in the classroom, the effects of their experience, and how to improve the education system for the better.

My research paper will end with a conclusion on my overall research and an answer to my research question. After I conclude my research, I will also discuss my limitations within this research and suggestions for future research, including but not limited to recruitment and other potential topics that can be included in future research. Toward the end, I will speak about my experiences and the origins of this research topic and share my research information.

Literature Review

Kimberlé Crenshaw, a law professor at Columbia University, coined the term "intersectionality," a term she defines as "a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects"[9]. Crenshaw used this term to show the ways that racism and sexism subjugate Black women who face discrimination due to their race *and* gender. Understanding this is important because when it comes to the discrimination that Black girls face, their race and gender are equally the reason for this treatment, not simply their race *or* their gender. Seeing this intersectionality helps to understand the discrimination that Black girls face because of it. Another critical understanding of why Black girls experience this is due to stereotypes, which is an oversimplified idea of a person or a group of people. Stereotypes affect how people are treated and respected and impact their life experiences.

When looking into Black girls and the ways their gender and race play in the effects of the disproportionate discipline in K-12 New York City Schools, we need to understand the types of discipline these girls are experiencing, the reason why these types of discipline are occurring, and the effect that it has on them. In recent years, more studies have been conducted to understand these concepts better and why they are relevant. Throughout this section, I will tie in these literature concepts to deepen our foundation of these experiences.

Disproportionality in Discipline Between Black and White Students

Before we specifically look at disparities between Black girls and other races and genders, we first will look at the Black community as a whole in comparison to other races. This is to show that the Black community as a whole has been disciplined at disproportionate rates,

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[9]Crenshaw Kimberle. Kimberlé Crenshaw on Intersectionality, More than Two Decades Later. https://www.law.columbia.edu/news/archive/kimberle-crenshaw-intersectionality-more-two-decades-later.

but Black girl stories are those that often go untold and unrecognized. According to research done by Mitchell, O'Brennan, and Leaf, [10], "Black students are about three to seven times more likely than White students to be suspended." In looking into the research for why this occurred, it was found that "Black students were more likely to be referred to the office for subjective offenses (e.g., disrespect, threat, excessive noise). In contrast, White youth were more likely to be referred for objective behavior problems (e.g., smoking, vandalism). [11] The research shows a disproportionate gap in the treatment of Black students because they are three to seven times more likely to get suspended. It also shows that teachers have a distinct view of offenses, in this case, offenses that were subjected and those that were objective. For Black students, those subjective behaviors are based on bias based on a stereotypical understanding of Black students that they are loud and disrespectful. Instead, white students' objective behavior is based on their actions and clear indications that what was done was indeed wrong, like the vandalism of property. Overall, even though white students are committing apparent, dangerous, and incorrect behavior, Black students' subjective behaviors are the types of behaviors that are often being disciplined and attempted to be corrected the most.

Not only are Black students being disciplined for subjected behaviors, but the ways that administrators, teachers, and school officials speak about Black children also affect the ways that Black children are seen and disciplined. Looking into an article by Jayanti Owens, Associate Professor of Sociology and Public Affairs at Brown University, we see how Black children are spoken about differently. In her description of teachers' different approaches to discipline based

[10]Bradshaw, Catherine P., et al. "Multilevel Exploration of Factors Contributing to the Overrepresentation of Black Students in Office Disciplinary Referrals." Journal of Educational Psychology, vol. 102, no. 2, May 2010, pp. 508–20. DOI.org (Crossref), https://doi.org/10.1037/a0018450.
[11] Bradshaw, Catherine P., et al. "Multilevel Exploration of Factors Contributing to the Overrepresentation of Black Students in Office Disciplinary Referrals." *Journal of Educational Psychology*, vol. 102, no. 2, 2010, pp. 508–20. *APA PsycNet*, https://doi.org/10.1037/a0018450.

on race, Owens writes, "For example, a teacher for a Black boy wrote, "[Name] turned over the chess board during recess, showed rude and disrespectful behavior to his peers and called them losers," which contains one negative emotion term (e.g., *rude*). Owens then describes how the same teacher for a White boy wrote, "[Name] threatened to stab another student with a pencil. He was not able to be honest although there were several witnesses," which is descriptive and does not contain negative emotion terms[12]. This quote is important because it shows how teachers use different lenses to understand and frame Black children's behavior in comparison to white students. If teachers merely speak about students in this light, it is only imaginable how students are treated in the classroom. The use of negative emotions and connotations for Black children and not white students plays into the stereotypical perception that Black children are displayed in a negative light, but not white children. This also further shows that Black children are punished or spoken about in more harmful and demeaning ways for subjective offensive things compared to students who commit objective offenses. Next, we look at the rates of Black girls versus other girls being disciplined.

Disproportionality in Discipline Between Black girls and other Girls

When looking into the treatment of Black girls in comparison to other girls, we look to Kimberle Crenshaw, Priscilla Ocean, and Jyoti Nanda, who were all involved in the creation of the Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Overpoliced, and Underprotected report[13]. This report was created in 2015 and aimed to explore the experiences of Black girls in the education and juvenile system. It also highlights not only the reasons why Black girls get disciplined at disproportionate

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[12] Owens, Jayanti. "Double Jeopardy: Teacher Biases, Racialized Organizations, and the Production of Racial/Ethnic Disparities in School Discipline." *American Sociological Review*, vol. 87, no. 6, Dec. 2022, pp. 1007–48. *SAGE Journals*, https://doi.org/10.1177/00031224221135810.

[13] Crenshaw, Kimberlé. *BLACK GIRLS MATTER: PUSHED OUT, OVERPOLICED AND UNDERPROTECTED*. *DOI.org (Crossref)*, https://doi.org/10.1163/2210-7975_HRD-9978-2015002.

rates but also describes how important these stories are and why they need to be highlighted. In the Black Girls Matter report, they mention that in New York City, during the 2011-2012 school year, " ninety percent of all the girls subjected to expulsion were Black"[14]; as the report continued, it mentioned that there were no white girls expelled during that period. This finding is important because it highlights not only the rate at which Black girls are expelled in comparison to white girls but also that there is a lack of documentation of white girls being disciplined if they are. During that same year, it was seen that Black girls were "nearly ten times more likely to be suspended than their white counterparts."[15] This rate further shows the disproportionate rates at which Black girls are being disciplined.

Similarly, sociologists Edward Morris and Brea Perry, in "Girls Misbehaving?", find that "Black girls are three times more likely than white girls to receive an office referral; this difference is substantially wider than the gap between black boys and white boys. Moreover, black girls receive disproportionate referrals for infractions such as disruptive behavior, dress code violations, disobedience, and aggressive behavior"[16]. This article shows the intersectionality that Black girls face in their educational experiences because not only are they fighting against the stereotype that they are disruptive because of their race, but also against stereotypes about their bodies by being dress-coded because of their gender. As stated in the previous paragraph, these are, again, subjective behaviors that these Black girls are being punished for based on the stereotypical ideals that people have. It also shows that white girls are either not being disciplined for the same things or are being disciplined at such small rates that it was not

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[14] Crenshaw, Kimberlé. *BLACK GIRLS MATTER: PUSHED OUT, OVERPOLICED AND UNDERPROTECTED*. *DOI.org (Crossref)*, https://doi.org/10.1163/2210-7975_HRD-9978-2015002.

[15] Crenshaw, Kimberlé. *BLACK GIRLS MATTER: PUSHED OUT, OVERPOLICED AND UNDERPROTECTED*. *DOI.org (Crossref)*, https://doi.org/10.1163/2210-7975_HRD-9978-2015002.

[16] Morris, Edward W., and Brea L. Perry. "Girls Behaving Badly? Race, Gender, and Subjective Evaluation in the Discipline of African American Girls." *Sociology of Education*, vol. 90, no. 2, Apr. 2017, pp. 127–48. *SAGE Journals*, https://doi.org/10.1177/0038040717694876.

reported in the study. Lastly, it highlights the gap between Black boys, white girls, and white boys' experiences compared to Black girls.

Research shows that not only were Black girls being disciplined at disproportionate rates in comparison to white girls, but Black girls' bodies were also being targeted as a means of punishment as it was deemed "distracting for their male classmates. The report "Dress Coded: Black Girls, Bodies, and Bias in DC Schools" by the National Women's Law Center (NWLC)— which is a non-profit organization that focuses on advocating for gender justice and equality—sheds light on the ways that Black girls are targeted in Washington, D.C. when it comes to dress coding. In the report, it states, "Black girls, and especially curvier students, are disproportionately targeted. Disturbingly, schools tell girls they must change in order to avoid "distracting" their male classmates — or to avoid being sexually harassed"[17]. This idea not only gives Black girls wrong ideas about their bodies and negatively affects their understanding of their bodies as it relates to their education, but it also puts sexual harassment blame on the Black girls and not on the people who commit the sexual harassment. It also perpetuates that school is not simply about their academic work but also about the Black girl's appearance, including body types, and how the men in the class space react to such appearance, especially revolving around their bodies. Lastly, it emphasizes that Boys are more in need of protection against "distraction" than girls are against sexual harassment.

Black girls' bodies are not only deemed distracting to male counterparts but also Black girls also face adults' stereotyped perceptions that they are more sexually provocative because of their race. Thus, they deserve more punishment for a" low-cut shirt or short skirt"[18]. This statement from the Dress Coded report shows that it is not only their "curvier" body types, but

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[17] National Women's Law Center. 2018. *Dress Coded: Black girls, Bodies, and Bias in DC Schools.*
[18] National Women's Law Center. 2018. *Dress Coded: Black girls, Bodies, and Bias in DC Schools.*

Black girls live in this stereotypical perception despite their body types. The idea of being

"sexually provocative" touches on the controlling images often pushed by the media that Black

girlhood and womanhood are inherently sexual or hypersexual. Thus, the cycles of these

stereotypes not only continue, but the punishment they receive for their bodies(which they can

not control) rises. These ideals are heavily based on the adultification bias, which deems Black

girls as adults and, therefore, does not need to be protected. This will be explored more later in

this section. Next, we will explore a series of experiences that Black girls have faced to show

that discipline does not have a specific age or type, but Black girls of all ages are being

disciplined at disproportionate rates.

Types of Discipline

A 12-year-old girl who was hyper and giddy gets stripped and searched in school by the

school nurse in search of contraband that was never found.[19]

A 6-year-old had her hands tied behind her after throwing a temper tantrum in school.[20]

A 9-year-old was virtually suspended for sending too many messages.[21]

In an Orlando private school, a 12-year-old girl needed to change her hairstyle if she did

not want to get suspended.[22]

These stories remind us that, regardless of age, Black girls are being disciplined for

various things that result in arrest, suspension, and expulsion. This section will focus on the

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[19] Green, Erica L., et al. "'A Battle for the Souls of Black Girls.'" *The New York Times*, 1 Oct. 2020. *NYTimes.com*, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/01/us/politics/black-girls-school-discipline.html.

[20] *A 6-Year-Old Had Her Hands Zip-Tied at School. Florida House Passes on Setting a Minimum Age for Arresting Kids – Orlando Sentinel*. https://www.orlandosentinel.com/2020/03/04/a-6-year-old-had-her-hands-zip-tied-at-school-florida-house-passes-on-setting-a-minimum-age-for-arresting-kids/.

[21] Green, Erica L., et al. "'A Battle for the Souls of Black Girls.'" *The New York Times*, 1 Oct. 2020. *NYTimes.com*, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/01/us/politics/black-girls-school-discipline.html.

[22] Crenshaw, Kimberlé. *BLACK GIRLS MATTER: PUSHED OUT, OVERPOLICED AND UNDERPROTECTED. DOI.org (Crossref)*, https://doi.org/10.1163/2210-7975_HRD-9978-2015002.

behaviors that school administrators and teachers deem punishable. These behaviors can range from disruption during class lessons to dress code violations and aggression in and outside the classroom.[23] In my research, there has been a range of types of schools (public, private, charter) ranging in grade levels K-12 as well as different ways these researchers have collected their data from survey data and personal interviews from Black girls, but what has stayed consistent is the disproportionate rates that these Black girls are being disciplined at.

Recent research has found that "Black girls experience discipline rates six times higher than White girls; and that they experience suspension rates higher than 67% of boys as well."In their research, they found that most of their participants were punished for dress code violations, using profane and physical altercation.[24] When specifically looking into the disciplinary rates in New York, it was found that "In New York City, Black girls in elementary and middle school were about 11 times more likely to be suspended than their white peers in 2017" [25]. As we can see, Black girls in New York City are being subjected to disparate discipline for different offenses, such as being giddy, loud, and other subjective offenses.

Now that we have explored the data that shows the rates of Black girls being disproportionately disciplined and the different types of discipline they would be disciplined for in comparison to other genders and races, We can now explore the reasons why these Black girls are being disciplined.

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[23] Joseph, Nicole M., et al. "Black Female Adolescents and Racism in Schools: Experiences in a Colorblind Society." *The High School Journal*, vol. 100, no. 1, 2016, pp. 4–25.

[24] Annamma, Subini Ancy, et al. "Black Girls and School Discipline: The Complexities of Being Overrepresented and Understudied." *Urban Education*, vol. 54, no. 2, Feb. 2019, pp. 211–42. *SAGE Journals*, https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085916646610.

[25] Green, Erica L., et al. "'A Battle for the Souls of Black Girls.'" *The New York Times*, 1 Oct. 2020. *NYTimes.com*, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/01/us/politics/black-girls-school-discipline.html.

Why are Black Girls More Vulnerable to Disciplining?

A study conducted by Georgetown University found that adults viewed black girls as young as five as less innocent than white girls, especially between the ages of 5-14 years old[26] Adultification bias is a term that was coined in this study that showed that Black girls are perceived as less innocent and more "adultlike" than their peers[27] Not only are these girls seen as socially mature with their outspokenness, but also physically mature with the growth of their bodies. The physical maturity that is displayed in these Black girls leaves room for hypersexualization of these girls[28]. Meanwhile, the demonstrated social maturity leaves room for these girls to be seen as loud and sassy. The more "adultlike" these girls are perceived to be, the less protected they are in societal spaces and, thus, more vulnerable to harsher punishment.

Also, in the Black Girl report study " Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Overpoliced and Underprotected"[29], we hear of a story in New York City about a 15-year-old girl whom a police officer arrested due to using a MetroCard that is valid only for youth younger than 19. The 15-year-old girl was held in handcuffs(she later received treatment at the hospital for the damage from the handcuffs) until her mother was able to bring her birth certificate, even after both parents and the teenager herself had verified her. We learn in the study that "on average, African American girls mature physically at a faster rate than white girls and as a result can be perceived as older the damage the handcuffs inflicted on her "[30]. This scenario of this 15-year-old girl in

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[26] Wilson, Cristin. "Study: 'Adultification' Has Black Girls Facing Harsher Punishments." *ABA Journal*, vol. 103, no. 11, Nov. 2017, pp. 20–20.

[27] Wilson, Cristin. "Study: 'Adultification' Has Black Girls Facing Harsher Punishments." ABA Journal, vol. 103, no. 11, Nov. 2017, pp. 20–20.

[28] Epstein Rebecca, Blake J Jamilia, Gonzalez Thalia "Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls' Childhood" (Master's thesis, Georgetown University, 2017

[29] Crenshaw, Kimberlé. *BLACK GIRLS MATTER: PUSHED OUT, OVERPOLICED AND UNDERPROTECTED. DOI.org (Crossref)*, https://doi.org/10.1163/2210-7975_HRD-9978-2015002.

[30] Epstein Rebecca, Blake J Jamilia, Gonzalez Thalia "Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls' Childhood" (Master's thesis, Georgetown University, 2017
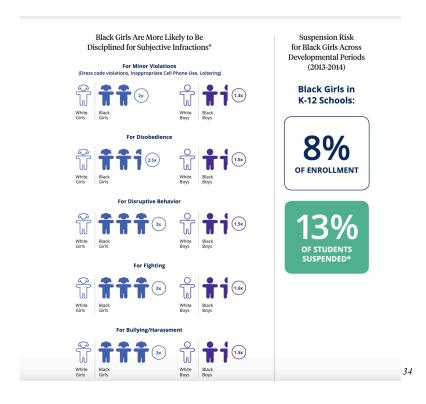
New York City highlights the issues of perception and the ways Black girls are policed. Although not only the teenager but also her parents verified her age, it did not stop the police from continuing their assumption about the teenager's age. It also further perpetuates the stereotype that Black girls appear older and, therefore, receive harsher and stricter punishment despite not being the perceived age.

Looking into this more deeply, metrocards are typically given out by school officials during the first couple of days of the school year. In this case, it would have been the school that issued an incorrect card(if the teenager was overage), and it would not have been a case where the teenager was doing something wrong. Furthermore, when looking into how these officers could have handled this case, they chose to use excessive means, which resulted in her needing medical attention instead of simply speaking to the teenager about the issues. Although this is not a school-related incident, it is related because school safety [31]and police officers can often be found in the halls of New York City schools, and if forced into a scenery involving a metro card, imagine what would happen if a fight, dress code, and other disciplinary deem actions[32].

The concept of adultification bias is important because it sheds light on how the perception of Black girls as older not only robs Black girls of the advantages of having a childhood but also allows them to receive harsher punishment compared to white girls[33]. Below is a chart taken from the Black girl's report that shows explicitly the rates at which Black girls are disciplined in comparison to white and black boys, as well as white girls.

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[31] School Safety Agents provide security and ensure the safety of students, faculty and visitors in the New York City Public School buildings and surrounding premises by patrolling and operating scanning equipment, verifying identity and escorting visitors and by challenging unauthorized personnel *School Safety Agents - NYPD*. https://www.nyc.gov/site/nypd/careers/civilians/school-safety-agents.page.

[32] Turner, E. O., and A. J. Beneke. "'Softening' School Resource Officers: The Extension of Police Presence in Schools in an Era of Black Lives Matter, School Shootings, and Rising Inequality." *Race Ethnicity and Education*, Mar. 2020. world, *www.tandfonline.com*, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13613324.2019.1679753.

[33] Epstein Rebecca, Blake J Jamilia, Gonzalez Thalia "Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls' Childhood" (Master's thesis, Georgetown University, 2017

Black Girls Are More Likely to Be
Disciplined for Subjective Infractions*

Suspension Risk
for Black Girls Across
Developmental Periods
(2013-2014)

34

Stereotypes and adultification can be seen as a foundation for the way Black girls are treated poorly within the education system; with this foundation, we can look into how it manifests in the everyday lives of these black girls.

Morris's and Bafu's[35] research saw a specific correlation between gender and race as reasons Black girls are punished more harshly. Both researchers' understanding was drawn from middle school girls and recognized that it was not simply teachers or higher education professionals using racism as a reason to treat individuals differently but also using gender as a factor. The intersectionality described in the previous sentence makes the girls are twice as likely

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[34] Epstein Rebecca, Blake J Jamilia, Gonzalez Thalia "Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls' Childhood" (Master's thesis, Georgetown University, 2017

[35] Bafu, Ruby. "The Impact of School Punishment on the Racial Understanding and Educational Outcomes of Young Black Girls." *Conference Papers -- American Sociological Association*, Jan. 2019, pp. 1–22 SocINDEX with Full Text,

to be punished for being girls or Black girls[36]. The racism that these Black girls experience because of their intersectionality makes room for bias to appear, such as the adultification bias.

To put stereotypes into practice, we will look into the controlling images [37]and how they set the standard within mainstream media and add to the negative stereotypes that Black girls face. We will understand what these controlling images are and how these media are shown in different forms, such as TV and media. Later in this paper, see how it ties into their experience within the education system.

Media's Controlling Images of Black girls

Coined by sociologist Patricia Hill Collins, controlling images are " designed to make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life" [38]. To fully understand my participants' experience, we first must understand how harmful stereotypes are consumed by society. Political scientist Melissa Harris-Perry argues that historically, Black girls and women's stereotypes fall into three major categories. The first is Jezebel, which is often associated with a hypersexualized Black girl. The second is the Mammy or the Black girl who cares for others and is often seen as taking the "mother" role. The last category is Sapphire, who can be described as an angry Black girl (Harris-Perry 2011[39]).

The stereotype of Jezebel, for instance, can be seen in movies like Carmen Jones (1954)[40], whose character Carmen Jones, played by Dorothy Dandridge, shown in the picture

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[36] Crenshaw, Kimberle. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review*, vol. 43, no. 6, 1991, pp. 1241–99. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039.

[37] Controlling Images are designed to make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life
[38] Marie. "Controlling Images." *Medium*, 13 Dec. 2017, https://medium.com/@mgb49/controlling-images-fcfa46ec58a8.
[39] Harris-Perry, Melissa V. *Sister Citizen. [Electronic Resource] : Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America*. Yale University Press, 2011.
[40] Otto Preminger, Carmen Jones, Twentieth Century Fox, 1954, film.

below, is seductive and goes against all social norms. Jezebel's appearance often includes

makeup and hair that match the beauty standards that are in current media. For Black girls, this

can be seen as wearing colored nails, wearing specific clothing, and their knowledge or action

within sexual nature experiences.

The Mammy is depicted in 1934 in Gone With the Wind,[41] shown in the picture below,

where the Mammy supports and nurtures the other characters. The Mammy is often portrayed in

headwraps/headscarves with an apron or doing some domestic work. For Black girls, it also

resembles the role of support, which can be seen within friends' socialization.

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[41] Gone With the Wind, directed by Victor Fleming, performance by Clark Gable and Vivien Leigh, Selznick International Pictures, 1939

Lastly, Sapphire, who can be seen in the 1951 TV show Amos and Andy[42] shown in the picture below, whose character name was Sapphire Stevens, played by Ernestine Wade, held up the stereotype of an angry Black woman throughout the TV series. Sapphire is often portrayed in assertive clothes and hairstyles. For the Black girl, Sapphire can be perceived as having a loud or sassy attitude, which teachers often attribute to "disrespect," as research by sociologists Morris and Perry show (Morris and Perry 2017)[43]. All attributes that make their voices in schools unheard [44].

These are just some of the TV shows and movies that continue to depict Black girls in a negative light. Seeing that many of these TV shows and movies were made prior to the 2000s, I use it to show that these stereotypes have been consumed by society for many years.

These categories are constantly being portrayed in the media, whether through the way Black girls are spoken about or the making fun of black girls on social media platforms such as TikTok; even if the recipient is aware or not, the consumption of these harmful stereotypes does affect the way the Black girl views herself and how other view her as well. In my discussion

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[42] Amos and Andy," directed by Charles Barton and Frederick de Cordova, CBS Television Network, 1951-1953, television series.

[43] Morris, E. W., & Perry, B. L. (2017). Girls behaving badly? Race, gender, and subjective evaluation in the discipline of African American girls. Sociology of education, 90(2), 127-148.

[44] Annamma, Subini Ancy, et al. "Black Girls and School Discipline: The Complexities of Being Overrepresented and Understudied." *Urban Education*, vol. 54, no. 2, Feb. 2019, pp. 211–42. *SAGE Journals*, https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085916646610.

chapter, I will explore my participants' awareness of being stereotyped and the spaces that allowed them to process these experiences. However, Jezebel, Mammy, and Sapphire are the very stereotypes Black girls have to fight against. The understanding of this by the Black girl allows for the veil, which is the barrier between what society sees and how that can be related to the Black girl's treatment, to be removed so the Black girl understands how she should navigate the world.

The Importance and Stigma of Black Girl Hair

Controlling images does not stop at attitudes but also hairstyles. Black girls are consistently subjected to negative representations and conversations surrounding their hair in the media and society that translate directly into academic settings. When cornrows became "boxer braids," other hairstyles often worn by Black women became taken over by white media. Black girls continued to face discrimination over those same hairstyles. This discrimination shows that it is not merely the hairstyle but the idea that it is the Black girl wearing the hairstyle[45]. According to an article written in 2021, "Black students are three to six times more likely to be suspended or expelled from school[46] ." For Black girls, many of these citations are due to their hair and dress codes[47]. For example, Tiana Parker, a seven-year-old girl, was not allowed to enter her elementary school after her school deemed "hairstyles such as dreadlocks, afros, and other faddish styles unacceptable"[48] seen in the images below. Black girls continue to have to fight

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[45] Howard Henderson and Jennifer Wyatt Bourgeois. "Penalizing Black Hair in the Name of Academic Success Is Undeniably Racist, Unfounded, and against the Law." *Brookings*, https://www.brookings.edu/articles/penalizing-black-hair-in-the-name-of-academic-success-is-undeniably-racist-unfounded-and-against-the-law/.

[46] National Women's Law Center. 2018. *Dress Coded: Black girls, Bodies, and Bias in DC Schools.*

[47] Howard Henderson and Jennifer Wyatt Bourgeois. "Penalizing Black Hair in the Name of Academic Success Is Undeniably Racist, Unfounded, and against the Law." *Brookings*, https://www.brookings.edu/articles/penalizing-black-hair-in-the-name-of-academic-success-is-undeniably-racist-unfounded-and-against-the-law/.

[48] Persch Aline Jasmin. *School That Barred 7-Year-Old's Dreadlocks Changes Dress-Code Policy*. https://www.today.com/parents/school-barred-7-year-olds-dreadlocks-changes-dress-code-policy-8c11122821.

against these notions that their hairstyles are deemed "inappropriate." In the findings section of

this senior project, we will see how hair discrimination affected my participants and how they

changed their hairstyles to avoid discrimination. Their use of double consciousness (discussed

next) is the key to making this avoidance possible.

Controlling images within the classroom takes many forms. For instance, "teachers may

subconsciously use stereotypical images of Black females … to interpret Black girls' behaviors

and respond more harshly to Black girls who display behaviors that do not align with traditional

standards of femininity in which girls are expected to be docile, diffident, and selfless." Such

"tainted perceptions … result in patterns of discipline intended to reform the femininity of

African-American girls into something more 'acceptable'[50]. This quote shows that teachers

[49] @faith_with_an_e, "Black girl hair," Instagram, December, 2023,
https://www.instagram.com/p/C1KKoRqun5A/?igsh=NGdmeXljanY4Mmlp

[50] Morris, Edward W., and Brea L. Perry. "Girls Behaving Badly? Race, Gender, and Subjective Evaluation in the Discipline of African American Girls." *Sociology of Education*, vol. 90, no. 2, Apr. 2017, pp. 127–48. *SAGE Journals*, https://doi.org/10.1177/0038040717694876.

themselves hold a " tainted" image of what a Black girl should be. This tainted idea is the ground on which teachers decide to discipline Black girls. Not only do these tainted ideals create grounds for discrimination from the teacher's perspective, but it also shows that when Black girls do not fit the ideal of "femininity," teachers continue to mistreat Black girls. These subconscious stereotypical images stem from not only the teacher's idea but also the controlling images that are being pushed by social media daily. Next, we will see the effect that discipline has on these Black girls.

Effects of Discipline

This section focuses on the Black girl's experience and how it impacts them. This impact affects how they navigate their school systems based on their experience. Nicole Joseph(2016) [51]and Connie Wun (2016)[52] are two writers on Black girl perception.

Nicole Joseph is an Associate Professor of Mathematics Education at Vanderbilt University's Peabody College. Joseph's research included interviews with 18 Black female adolescents at Ridge High School. His research showed the role that racism plays in the school system. One of the 18 participants, Kishanna, shared a personal experience of the way she is perceived by a teacher and the way she navigates understanding. Kishanna said, " I feel like when I first walk into a school, the teacher expects, because of the way I dress and the people I talk to, they automatically expect that I am going to be disrespectful, that I do not care about learning, that I am only there, I am being forced to be there, that I am not going anywhere, and

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[51] Joseph, Nicole M., et al. "Black Female Adolescents and Racism in Schools: Experiences in a Colorblind Society." *High School Journal*, vol. 100, no. 1, Sept. 2016, pp. 4–25. University of North Carolina Press. 116 South Boundary Street, P.O. Box 2288, Chapel Hill, NC 27515-2288. Tel: 800-848-6224; Tel: 919-966-7449; Fax: 919-962-2704; e-mail: uncpress@unc.edu; Web site: http://uncpress.unc.edu/.

[52] Wun, Connie. "Unaccounted Foundations: Black Girls, Anti-Black Racism, and Punishment in Schools." *Critical Sociology (Sage Publications, Ltd.)*, vol. 42, no. 4/5, July 2016, pp. 737–50, https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920514560444.

that I am only there because I would get in trouble for not being there. So, I feel that is what they expect, so I try not to play into those stereotypes" (Joseph 2016). Kishanna's experiences with her teacher forced her to navigate these stereotypes.

In her article, Connie Wun, scholar and activist educator, explores how Black girls are vulnerable to discipline and punishment by adults and peers in the education system. Wun interviews 15 Black girls with discipline records from suspensions, referrals, and arrests. In the end, the research found that at the hands of school staff and their peers, Black girls are subjected to racialized and gendered forms of discipline. In Wun's research, we are given student testimonies that explicitly show how students decide to navigate after being punished. We first meet Stacy, one of the girls interviewed, who claimed she attempted to make herself invisible after being punished by a school police officer for almost fighting at 15. Stacey also stays quiet in attempts to be unseen by students and staff. While these behaviors could be considered an effective outcome by school police or school staff, they can also be interpreted as an effect of social control over Black girls' bodies and actions.

We also read about Simon, another Black girl in the 11th grade who stated that "Black students were often subject to hyper surveillance and punishment" because Simone had experienced it firsthand. An example was given to Simon and her advanced placement(AP) chemistry teacher, who accused her of plagiarism. The teacher claimed someone of an Asian background had done it instead." Although this encounter was not archived as a referral, suspension, or arrest, it was a form of policing and punishment that negatively affected her," Wun wrote. This experience caused Simone to feel that her teachers did not have Black students' best interests at heart and downplayed their intelligence. In the end, Simone made herself

invisible in the classroom by not asking questions and withdrawing from the subject; this was an attempt to finish the class with a minimal encounter with her teacher[53].

Joseph and Wun[54] follow Black girls and their experiences through the school system, showing how they navigate it with the understanding that their experiences are different. This shines a light on the Black girls and their experiences, allowing everyone to see how it affects them. Having to make themselves invisible in the classroom, in the halls, and over to educational staff and students directly reflects being punished unfairly and negatively affecting them. Not only is the teacher and education professional perspective essential to understanding why situations like this happen, but it is also vital to the student's perspective to see why disciplining Black girls is a more significant issue that often gets overshadowed.[55]

The Black Girl's Double Consciousness

Given the existence of these stereotypes, scholars have been interested in identifying how these affect Black women and girls. Sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois developed the term "double consciousness" to show how African Americans look at themselves in the ways that society looks at them to avoid discrimination within different sectors of society[56]. The concept of "double consciousness" offers an opportunity to understand how Black girls understand and respond to discrimination within educational spaces, which I will further delve into in my findings section. Double consciousness is a direct effect of educational experiences because

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[53] Wun, Connie. "Unaccounted Foundations: Black Girls, Anti-Black Racism, and Punishment in Schools." *Critical Sociology (Sage Publications, Ltd.)*, vol. 42, no. 4/5, July 2016, pp. 737–50, https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920514560444.

[54] Wun, Connie. "Unaccounted Foundations: Black Girls, Anti-Black Racism, and Punishment in Schools." *Critical Sociology (Sage Publications, Ltd.)*, vol. 42, no. 4/5, July 2016, pp. 737–50, https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920514560444.

[55] Joachim, E. (2002). "Emily Joachim Invisible girl lit review." Unpublished manuscript, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY.

[56] Bois Du W.E.B. *The Project Gutenberg eBook of The Souls of Black Folk, by W. E. B. Du Bois*. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/408/408-h/408-h.htm.

Black girls are learning the ways that they are being perceived and thus showing other ways to avoid it. Without the stereotypical understanding of what society thinks a Black girl should be, double consciousness would not exist. An example of this that we will see is how my participants avoid wearing certain hair times or take extra time when it comes to how they appear in educational spaces to avoid discrimination.

Understanding behaviors for which Black girls are punished and why is vital to acknowledge these Black girl experiences while shedding light on an experience and issue that is often kept in the dark. In my next section, we will delve into my research methods and examine my participants' backgrounds to understand these Black girls' experiences further.

Methods & Research Design

Research Question

To accurately understand the extent to which Black girls are disproportionately disciplined in K-12 schools and how excessive punishment impacts them, my study aims to explain the extent to which school discipline affects Black girls, what preceding events led to them being disciplined in schools, and their understandings and reactions to these experiences. In order to answer these questions, I conducted a qualitative study that consisted of ten interviews with Black women who attended schools in New York City when they were under 18. I intended to obtain their recollections of what it was like to attend schools in New York City as a young Black girl.

Recruitment and Participants

I used purposeful sampling methods to recruit participants. My recruitment started in January 2024 when I posted a recruitment flier[57] seeking participants who identified as Black Women between 18-24 and had at least two years of educational experience in New York City on my public Instagram page. I initially struggled with gaining participants; however, after reaching out to my contacts via Instagram DM (direct message),[58] I was able to interview and collect data from 10 participants,[59] of which took a couple of weeks to obtain. Messaging individuals directly was the best form of recruitment for this project since it was a personalized invitation. I could connect with individuals much faster than through a simple Instagram post.

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[57] The recruitment flier can be found on page 72 of this paper
[58] Social media contact message can be found on page 76 of this paper
[59] Participant Demographics can be found on page 38 of this paper

__Interviews__

I started interviewing during the third week of January 2024. After receiving

confirmation and obtaining my participants' emails via my Google form[60] or direct message from

Instagram, I sent each participant a consent form and scheduled interviews using their emails.

After confirming a day and time, I ensured the consent form was signed and reviewed consent

for audio recording at the beginning of each interview. If the participants did not want to be

audio recorded, I took detailed notes; if they did consent, I recorded them and took detailed

notes. I completed the interviewing process towards the end of February. Since I was two hours

from New York City, where my project is focused, most interviews took place via Google Meet.

Other interviews took place in person on the Bard College Campus when the participants and I

were closer in location. Both interview methods were efficient because they allowed me to

connect with my participants in New York City, and many of my participants were on different

schedules due to school breaks, work, or other personal matters and, therefore, needed to be

interviewed at various times during the day and night.

I began all interviews by explaining my thesis topic and thanking each participant for

their time. Many participants were people I had gone to school with K-12 and belonged to

different religious circles. Other participants were individuals recommended to me using the

snowball sampling method at the end of my interviews. After collecting the interview data, I

reviewed my notes and assigned pseudonyms to each participant. I familiarized myself with the

audio recording to recognize the themes discussed in the following chapter. I then deleted all

notes and audio recordings. Participants were asked 13[61] questions and could elaborate on

contexts and their stories if they were comfortable doing so. In general, interview questions

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[60] The QR code to the form can be found on the recruitment flier on page 72 of this paper

[61] Participants were asked 13 questions and a copy of the questions can be found on page 73 and 74 of the paper

asked participants to reflect on their personal or vicarious experiences with school discipline, the type of school they attended, and their overall schooling experience. Some of the questions I asked were: How do you think your identity shaped your experiences and attitudes as a Black girl? To what extent do you think your discipline experiences had long-term effects, impacting your education?

Throughout my interview process, I identified and connected themes by attending to repetition and centrality. Throughout this process, I found that all participants experienced similar "discipline" primarily based on how a teacher perceived them acting or how they should be acting, but in different ways. I also found that their experiences confirmed findings in most of the literature about the punishment of Black girls in schools. The basis of most, if not all, of their experiences were societal perceptions and stereotypes of how a Black girl should and should not behave and thus were displayed in the way they were treated. My participants shared heartbreaking stories, solution-oriented ideas, and feelings, and they were very engaged in sharing their stories, processing their educational experiences, and contributing to my project.

Interview Participant Information[62]

Table One shows that all my interviewees were Black women, most of whom identified ethnically as Caribbean or African. They ranged in age between 19 and 23. As of the publication date, all participants attend college or have graduated with undergraduate degrees. The K-12 schools they attended ranged from public, private, and charter schools in multiple boroughs within NYC. Their range of experiences and demographics allow us to see that the issue is not

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[62] Table 1: The table above shows all 10 Black girls interviewed in my study. The table includes their pseudonym, age at the time the interviews were conducted, ethnicity (although many of them were born in America),, type of school they attended (public, private, or charter), and lastly, if they attended college (some are currently pursuing an undergraduate education while others have graduated).

the type of education or where these schools are located but rather the systemic racism within our education system. These stories allowed my participants to share their experiences and contribute to understanding the experiences that many Black girls face in the education system. They allow Black girls to no longer be invisible and finally be seen.

Table 1: Participant Demographics

Name	Age	Ethnicity	Education Type(K-12)	Attended College
Puffs	21	Jamaican	Private & Public	yes
Rose	21	Haitian	Private & Public	yes
Star	19	Caribbean/Black	Public	yes
Tiana	21	Black Caribbean American	Public, Charter, Private	yes
Tika	23	Haitian	Private & Public	yes
Serenity	23	Haitian	Public	yes
Imani	24	Haitian	Public	yes
Bubbles	19	Ghana	Public	yes
Toni	21	Black, African American, Afro-Caribbean	Public	yes
Bell	22	Black	Public, Charter, Private	yes

Now that we have looked into the literature surrounding the disproportionate punishment of Black girls, the reasons why they have been disciplined, and now who my participants are and where they come from. We will now look into the history of the New York school system. This

will include how it was created, the ever-changing Supreme Court case Brown V Board, and how

Black girls fit into the New York City education system.

School is in Session.

Origins of the New York City school system

The integration and history of Black girls in NYC(New York City) education is rooted in struggle, racism, and a fight for equality and change. The first school for Black children was established in the 1780s, and since then, it has gone through many changes that are informed by the political dynamics of when the school was established and our world today. This chapter aims to explore and give insight into the history of the New York City (NYC)school systems and examines Black girls' experiences within this system.

The African Free School

The African Free School, the school's original name, was founded by New York Manumission in Manhattan[63], NY. The school aimed to empower Black children (free and enslaved) and educate them on the knowledge they needed for society. During the early stages of the school, boys were taught astronomy. Meanwhile, the girls were taught sewing and knitting. Classes also included in the curriculum were reading, writing, and mathematics. By the 1800s, seven schools dedicated to the education of Black children had been created, and the school, in total, had around a thousand registered and attending students. The majority of the schools and teachers of these children were also Black, as well as support from the Black community and

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[63]Founding Father John Jay started the Manumission Society with the express mission to abolish slavery in the state of New York, which was achieved in 1827 by Kates, Ariel. *African Free School, First in America for Black Students, Found a Home in Greenwich Village - Village Preservation*. 2 Nov. 2017, https://www.villagepreservation.org/2017/11/02/african-free-school-first-in-america-for-blacks-found-a-home-in-greenwich-village/.

parents of these children. Lastly, the school changed its name to Public School(P.S), which is what we know them as today[64]

In 1842, the Board of Education in New York City was established due to the [65]Maclay Act, which allowed NYC to oversee its educational curriculum. The creation of the Board of Education allowed for funding distribution, standardized curriculums, and other school logistics outside the church or private educational systems. Although P.S. (public schools) and the board of education existed, so did racism and inequality among these school systems. The fight for justice and desegregation continued.

The Difference between Public, Private, and Charter Schools

Now that we understand how New York City schools were created, we will see the different types of schools an NYC student can attend and the difference between them. The first school chosen is a public school (P.S.) for short or free students. These schools are under the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE). They are funded by state, city, local, and federal entities. The next type of school is private/religious schools, independent organizations financially supported by student tuition and are not under NYCDOE regulations to a certain extent. The last type of school is charter schools, "public schools that operate independently of the Department of Education under a charter from the State Board of Regents or the State

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[64]   Kates, Ariel. *African Free School, First in America for Black Students, Found a Home in Greenwich Village - Village Preservation*. 2 Nov. 2017, https://www.villagepreservation.org/2017/11/02/african-free-school-first-in-america-for-blacks-found-a-home-in-greenwich-village/, https://www.villagepreservation.org/2017/11/02/african-free-school-first-in-america-for-blacks-found-a-home-in-greenwich-village/.

[65] Maclay's bill passed easily and Seward signed the bill on April 11, 1842, allowing local New York City wards to operate as towns and chart their own educational course. Janos Marton. "Today in NYC History: The Great School Wars, Religious Edition (1842)." *Janos.Nyc*, 10 Apr. 2015, https://janos.nyc/2015/04/10/today-in-nyc-history-the-great-school-wars-religious-edition-1842/.

University of New York." Charter school funding consists of public funding based on the number of students in the school. However, the financial need for charter schools comes from school fundraising [66]. This understanding of these types of schools is subjective based on the school, area, and other regulations that the New York education system has; however, despite these different types of schools and funding, we will see during my findings section that discrimination and discorporate punishment happens and continues to happen in all entities of New York City schools.

Brown v. Board of Education

Like other U.S. cities and States, the New York City school system had heavy segregation within the school system [67]. Brown v Board of Education of Topeka was a United States Supreme Court case that happened in 1954 that was centered around racial segregation within the school system. In this landmark case, it was ruled that racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional since, prior to this ruling, Black and white people were separated. In this case, the "separate but equal" ideology is rejected, which was an ideology that justified segregation with the understanding that both people could be separated as long as things were equal, which was not occurring throughout not only the South but the United States[68]. This decision allowed public schools to become integrated and change the course of schools and students' lives for future generations.

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[66] "Guide: Understanding New York City Schools | WNYC | New York Public Radio, Podcasts, Live Streaming Radio, News." *WNYC*, https://www.wnyc.org/schoolbook/guides/understanding/.

[67] "Feb. 3, 1964: New York City School Children Boycott School." *Zinn Education Project*, https://www.zinnedproject.org/news/tdih/nyc-school-children-boycott-school/.

[68] *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka - Students | Britannica Kids | Homework Help*. https://kids.britannica.com/students/article/Brown-v-Board-of-Education-of-Topeka/607303.

Brown vs Board impacted and drove the push for equality and desegregation in NYC schools and schools nationwide. It pushed for increased funding in schools where the majority of Black children attended, bussing children into different school zones, among other things. Thus, the ruling was also a beacon of hope that it would fix the inequalities and give every child the same opportunities[69].

Although the Board of Education has made efforts to desegregate, "The New York City Department of Education (DOE) is the largest, and one of the most segregated school districts in the United States"(LaPorte and Porter 2021[70]). Brown V Board made it so that school could no longer be segregated. However, it did not take into consideration that systemic racism still permeated within school systems like New York City. Although funding and programs were created, Black children did not always have access to these programs. Even though Black and white children were not "separate," they were not equal even after the ruling of Brown v Board.

New York City's education system continues to face issues of inequality, systemic racism, and segregation. Black girls across the New York City school system K-12(and beyond) have experienced harsher and disproportionate punishes rooted in gender stereotypes [71]. These punishments include what teachers and admin deem "disobedient." According to Nanda, Crenshaw, and Priscilla, "Black girls are over five times more likely than white girls to be suspended at least once from school, seven times more likely to receive multiple out-of-school suspensions than white girls, and three times more likely to receive referrals to law enforcement.

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[69] Ricks, Shawn Arango. *Falling through the Cracks: Black Girls and Education*. no. 1, 2014.
[70] Thomas, Erin. "Racial Equity in NYC Public Schools: Where Brown v. Board Still Falls Short." *ICAAD*, 3 Aug. 2021, https://icaad.ngo/2021/08/02/racial-equity-in-nyc-public-schools-where-brown-v-board-still-falls-short/.
[71] Nanda Jyot, Crenshaw Kimberlé, Ocean Priscilla " Black Girls Matter: Pushed out, Overpoliced and Underprotected

Black boys experienced lower rates of the same punishments compared with white boys"[72]. The girls we will see later in this paper show resilience, drive, and thrive beyond this systemic racism.

The origins of the school system show that there has been a fight for equity for many years. This fight also shows that it is more than about funding, policies, and other aspects that have led us to where we are today, but rooted in school racism, segregation, and inequalities. In the next chapter, I will explore the types of discipline that Black girls in this study experience, the reason why Black girls experience these types of discipline tied to stereotypes and adultification bias, and lastly, the way that these experiences have affected these Black girls.

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[72] Green, Erica L., et al. "'A Battle for the Souls of Black Girls.'" *The New York Times*, 1 Oct. 2020. *NYTimes.com*, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/01/us/politics/black-girls-school-discipline.html.

Findings

The Invisible Girls Are Finally Revealed
Recognizing the Black Girl Perspective

In my literature section, I explored stereotypes, how they have manifested within the education system, and how they could impact Black girls in educational spaces. Stereotypes are the most significant to understanding why teachers and administration perceive Black girls as loud, less intelligent, or judge them based on their appearance Morris and Perry[73]. Whether it is perception based on appearance or intelligence or simply what teachers deemed " preparing" Black girls for society by pushing them to work harder than their peers in academic spaces but also reprimanding them when their outbursts are deemed "emotional," stereotypes are the foundation for this need for "preparation." However, although these stereotypes exist, the Black girls in this study also have what Du Bois called a double consciousness[74], which enabled them to identify how and why these stereotypes exist and to find ways to avoid being discriminated against because of it.

This chapter will highlight Black girls' experiences within the education system and the understanding of how these stereotypes play out in and outside of the classroom. Teachers, administrators, social media, and broader social structures created these stereotypes. Throughout the interview process, it was clear that each of my participant's "disciplinary" experiences was rooted in a specific stereotype that the school administration, classmates, or the Black girl herself believed about Black girlhood. However, we will see that although stereotypes have harmed Black girls, Black girls have been able to push those stereotypes, creating resilience by

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[73] Morris, E. W., & Perry, B. L. (2017). Girls behaving badly? Race, gender, and subjective evaluation in the discipline of African American girls. Sociology of education, 90(2), 127-148.

[74] Sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois developed the term "double consciousness" to show how African Americans look at themselves in the ways that society looks at them to avoid discrimination within different sectors of society

continuing to be themselves and proving to teachers that they are capable of much more than the teacher expects.

Ways That Black Girls Try to Avoid Discrimination

Appearance is one of the themes that my participants have discussed as a huge aspect of their mistreatment in the education system. Many understand that how they dressed and their hairstyles affected how administrators treated them throughout their educational journeys.

For example, when speaking about their education experience, Serenity, a 23-year-old woman who attended public schools for most of her life and is currently getting her undergraduate degree, recalls her time in high school and the role that appearance played in her educational experience. Serenity said,

> I would notice that it is (school) was about how you look, and what you wear is not really about academics. I still understood what I was going for, but I could take more time before I went to school to be socially accepted. I would often be late because I was trying to be presentable.

In Serenity's case, she understood that school was about academics and how you presented yourself. Although the school was still her number one focus, she realized that her physical presentation was also important. She shared that the effects of trying and wanting to be presentable resulted in her lateness. Notably, her teachers and school officials simply saw her lateness as an issue and never asked why she was late. The need to be "socially acceptable" is not only for the students around her but also for the administrators in her school due to the fact that society does judge Black girls based on how they see them. In this case, the Black girl (Serenity) must spend more time feeling confident enough to step into academic spaces like school. Black girls often have to adapt themselves to traditional white ideals of "proper"

femininity due to white gender standards (Morris and Perry 2017[75]). Once these Black girls

adhere to these "white ideals" by making themselves more socially acceptable, then they are

more likely to avoid discrimination. The double consciousness of Serenity to understand that

how she dresses can affect how she is treated ultimately helps us understand that Black girls are

fully aware of the stereotypes that they are up against.

Another aspect of appearance that my participants spoke about was their hair. A Black

girl's hair can be seen in a cultural, social, and personal identity. It allows Black girls to express

themselves and identify themselves through different and intricate hairstyles. It also represents

individuality, strength, and indescribable beauty, making Black girls unique[76]. Black women and

girls often have to change or adapt again to "socially acceptable" hairstyles because they are

often teased, excluded, disciplined, and denied professional opportunities for having certain

hairstyles.[77] As a result, the Crown Act(2019)[78] was created so that schools, places of

employment, and other sectors of society cannot legally discriminate against someone due to

their hairstyle or texture. Even though the Crown Act of 2019 was passed in California and New

York shortly after the same act, Black girls continue to face discrimination based on hairstyles.

In terms of hair within educational spaces, many of my participants have tried to conceal

or change their hairstyle to avoid discrimination. This was because they saw hair as a way of

being socially accepted by the people who were supposed to educate them. One of my

[75] Morris, E. W., & Perry, B. L. (2017). Girls behaving badly? Race, gender, and subjective evaluation in the discipline of African American girls. Sociology of education, 90(2), 127-148.

[76] Turner, Maiya, and Jemimah Young. "(Re)Claiming Our Crowns: Celebrating Black Girls' Hair in Educational Spaces." *Journal of African American Women and Girls in Education*, vol. 2, no. 1, 1, May 2022, pp. 1–7. *jaawge-ojs-tamu.tdl.org*, https://doi.org/10.21423/jaawge-v2i1a108.

[77] Onnie Rogers, Leoandra, et al. "'They're Always Gonna Notice My Natural Hair': Identity, Intersectionality and Resistance among Black Girls." *Qualitative Psychology*, vol. 9, no. 3, Oct. 2022, pp. 211–31. *DOI.org (Crossref)*, https://doi.org/10.1037/qup0000208.

[78] The first CROWN Act legislation was passed in 2019 in California says No person in the United States shall be subjected to a practice prohibited under section 1977 of the Revised Statutes (42 U.S.C. 1981), based on the person's hair texture or hairstyle, if that hair texture or that hairstyle is commonly associated with a particular race or national origin (including a hairstyle in which hair is tightly coiled or tightly curled, locs, cornrows, twists, braids, Bantu knots, and Afros).

participants, Star, a 19-year-old pursuing her undergraduate degree, spoke about a situation in high school where Star's teacher called her out in front of the whole class because she was wearing a bonnet[79]. When asked why she wore a bonnet, Star said, "Because my hair was not done." This can seem like a simple answer and reason why a person would wear a bonnet, but I wanted to find out what this had to do with her education. When I asked Star to elaborate, she replied, "I think my hair being done gives me more confidence, and it is one less thing to worry about... when your hair is done, you feel better." In Star's case, the teacher reprimanded her for wearing a bonnet without asking her why it was important to her that day. The teacher also decided to lecture her in front of the entire class. The teacher only saw a bonnet, but from Stars' perspective, the bonnet was concealing a part of her that was not giving the confidence that would have given her.

"one less thing to worry about."

Not only does hair give these girls confidence, but it is also recognized by participants as a primary reason they can be disciplined in schools. Black girls face disciplinary action compared to their white counterparts for things like their hair beads being too loud, afro being too big, or braid and twist being too long[80]. My participants were very aware of the hairstyles that were deemed more socially acceptable, such as box braids. For example, when describing how she makes decisions about how to wear her hair, Bubbles, a 19-year-old girl who attended public school for the majority of her life and who is currently pursuing her undergraduate degree, said,

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[79] Hair bonnets are special caps made in order to protect hair Editors, The French. "What Is A Hair Bonnet?" Frenshe, 17 Feb. 2023, https://frenshe.com/what-is-a-hair-bonnet/.
[80] Turner, Maiya, and Jemimah Young. "(Re)Claiming Our Crowns: Celebrating Black Girls' Hair in Educational Spaces." *Journal of African American Women and Girls in Education*, vol. 2, no. 1, 1, May 2022, pp. 1–7. *jaawge-ojs-tamu.tdl.org*, https://doi.org/10.21423/jaawge-v2i1a108.

I think in terms of choosing my hair, I chose a style that I can put away, but not like putting away something that can be more manageable or too out there. I will do braids because I can put them in a ponytail or a bun or something. Still, I will not do an afro or something seen as Black.

Puff, a 21-year-old who is in her senior year of completing her bachelor's degree, shared the same sentiment as Bubbles and said,

I actually strayed away from wigs and to box braids because I felt like people were watching me more when I had like sew-in types, so I was like, let me stick to Box braids because it seems a more acceptable form of extension for a Black person then wigs and weaves.

Bubbles' and Puff's experiences show they are aware of societal perceptions of certain hairstyles that can be negatively seen or associated with a certain type of Black person (based on stereotypes) and opt for more socially accepted hairstyles. Black girls do try to blend into the background to avoid fitting into stereotypical boxes. The understanding that braids or box braids are deemed more acceptable shows that even in the way they wear their hair, Black girls are constantly trying to avoid discrimination.

This extended to how they chose to wear their hair to school. When speaking about hair within educational spaces, Puff said,

When it comes to my hair, I want my hair to be more tamed in educational spaces because I know the type of people (especially in the college spaces) who are also applying for the same roles as me (white people). Whatever I can do to make myself feel less unique. That is so weird to say. It is not that I do not want to be unique, but I also do not wanna be completely different either because there is a level of judgment that can come into that because of the way in which I present myself.

Puffs understands the judgment that can happen when she wears different hairstyles, especially when pursuing r roles and opportunities in primarily white spaces. Puffs wanting to feel "less unique" but not wanting to be "completely different" shows the complexity that Black girls often have to face in educational settings. The idea that Black hair needs to be "tamed" to gain different opportunities in comparison to other individuals reinforces that Black girls have to

continue to fight against the perception and stereotyping of their appearance. As research also shows us, a girl as small as seven years old was denied entry from her school because of the way she chose to style her hair[81] Puff's experiences are not unique to the judgment or discrimination that Black girls often face when it comes to their hairstyles.

Understanding the role of appearance in educational spaces is crucial to understanding how Black girls avoid discrimination. Double consciousness allows them to recognize that they may face discrimination and strategize how to avoid it. Importantly, whether teachers simply see the bonnet or someone's lateness as a mode and reason to reprimand them in different ways, it does not include a conversation about the societal pressure that goes beyond what the teacher and schools see. The Black girl does understand these stereotypical ideals, like how a hairstyle can cause someone to perceive you and therefore conceal their blackness to be socially acceptable. The need to be socially acceptable plays into education because girls like Serenity spend more time getting ready for school and other educational spaces, causing them to be late, allowing schools and administration to recognize the lateness but not the reasons these things might occur. In the next section, we will go into more detail about my participant experience in the classroom and how stereotypes play a role in teacher expectations of Black girls.

The Black girls in the classroom

The Black girl's experience in the classroom will help us understand the relationship between Black girls and teachers and the ways that teachers themselves feed into stereotypes of their Black female students. The central theme of speaking to my participants about their

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[81] Persch Aline Jasmin. *School That Barred 7-Year-Old's Dreadlocks Changes Dress-Code Policy.* https://www.today.com/parents/school-barred-7-year-olds-dreadlocks-changes-dress-code-policy-8c11122821.

educational experiences is questioning a Black girl's intelligence. Many of them have

experienced doubts about how "smart" they could be from teachers and classmates.

      One of my participants, Stars, described her time as a gifted[82] student when she was

involved with the gifted and talented program, or G&T program for short, at her school during

her earlier years in the education system. A gifted program is a program that is based on testing

well on the NYC State Test [83] or testing results from the gifted and talented test. Kids who

become part of this program are high-performing students. The program has an advanced

curriculum due to the student's high-performance [84]. Star, one of those students, said this about

being a Black girl within this program. Star said,

> I have always been gifted and in the honor class stuff, just always smart. It was cool when
> I was in elementary school, but when I got into middle school, it was like, oh, you are
> smart for a Black girl. I feel like I got more aware that it is not expected of me to be as
> intelligent as I am

     In Star's experience, her awareness or the questioning of her intelligence started in

middle school. The shift in this understanding and awareness of how "smart" she is also caused

the understanding that she should not be that smart, especially in a gifted and honor program.

The erasure of Black girls' intellect, as Ranita Ray understands it to be, is not only based on

gender bias but also race bias as well[85] The phrase "you are smart for a Black girl" perpetuates

that Black girls are less than what is deemed "smart" and that the expectations for Black girls are

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[82] New York City offers two types of gifted and talented programs for children in kindergarten through 5th grade. The NYC Gifted and Talented Program is designed to foster the needs of exceptional students, identified either by their results on the NYC Gifted and Talented Test (for students entering kindergarten through third grade) or based on the student's New York State test scores (for students entering fourth or fifth grade).

[83] The test is designed to measure students' mastery of the Common Core Learning Standards for their grade level. It helps educators understand how well students are learning and whether they're ready to move on to the next grade level. *New York City Gifted and Talented Program - TestingMom.Com (2022)*. https://www.testingmom.com/tests/gifted-talented-nyc/.

[84] "Guide: Understanding New York City Schools | WNYC | New York Public Radio, Podcasts, Live Streaming Radio, News." *WNYC*, https://www.wnyc.org/schoolbook/guides/understanding/.

[85] Ray Ranita. *School as a Hostile Institution: How Black and Immigrant Girls of Color Experience the Classroom - Ranita Ray, 2022*. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/08912432211057916.

not set at the same standards as other races. This standard, like one for Black girls, can be seen in my next participant experience.

Rose, who was in high school then, spoke about the fight when trying to change her educational track and the difference in the type of people in each track. Rose said,

> There was not a lot expected of me. There is one thing about being Black, but there is another thing being Black and female. I feel like when you put two of those things together, the standards were set low. The thing with my high school was there were different programs: general program, humanities track, and stem track…. In the stem track program, there were a lot of Asians; in humanities, there were a lot of whites, Asians, and some Hispanics, but in the general track, there were a lot of Black people.

When asked why, Rose said,

> It is because the standard is set really low. Once you were on that track, there was no effort to move you. I got into their general program, and everyone was Black. After that first year or semester, my grades were pretty high. I told my counselor my grades were pretty high, and I was not being challenged. I remember she brushed it off and did not take it seriously, and I really had to push for my track change again because the standard was not set high.

In her experience, Rose understood that the bar for Black girls like her was set differently than other races. Her need to advocate to be enrolled in the Humanity track program reflects research that shows that Black and students of color are underrepresented in advanced courses(Tyson 2011 [86] & Lewis 2015[87]). Not only that, it emphasizes the difference between being Black and being a "black female." Roses points out how Black children are specifically left in lower- levels of academic space because the standards for them are very low. The discussion between Rose and her counselor also shows how the administration was dismissive of what Rose knew she needed for her educational journey. Even though Rose had a high GPA and showed that she could be on a higher level track, it was not enough at the time for the counselor.

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[86] Tyson, K. (Ed.). (2011). Integration interrupted: Tracking, Black students, and acting White after Brown. Oxford University Press

[87] And Lewis, A. E., & Diamond, J. B. (2015). Despite the best intentions: How racial inequality thrives in good schools. Oxford University Press.

This also shows that Black girls and their families have to do more to obtain better opportunities when it comes to their educational experiences (Tyson 2011[88] & Lewis 2015[89]).

The perception that Black girls or children are less intelligent or academically capable, and their emplacement in lower-level courses, does not allow Black girls to gain better educational opportunities. However, Rose was able to advocate for herself and ultimately get her track changed. I wonder how many Black girls who were also not being challenged, who also had good grades but did not or could not advocate for themselves, ended up stuck in this lower-level educational track?

Outside of the extra advocacy that Black girls must do to get themselves into higher educational spaces and educational spaces that challenge them, Black girls also have to face being silenced and unprotected in classroom space. During her 9th grade class, for example, Stars speaks on a situation where her teacher allowed for a white student's voice to be heard and protected over hers and other Black students in the class. Star said,

> Yes! White students' ideas and thoughts were more protected, and the teacher gave him the space a lot more than the Black students did. It was very weird…Why can't we voice our real opinions on politics?

In Star's experience, the white student's voice seemed more valued and protected than other students in the class. This continues to perpetuate that Black ideas, thoughts, and voices in the classroom, even in being the majority, are not protected by those who are supposed to be (the teachers). The teacher allowing this to happen set the precedent in the classroom for not only the White student but also the Black student as well.

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[88] Tyson, K. (Ed.). (2011). Integration interrupted: Tracking, Black students, and acting White after Brown. Oxford University Press

[89] Lewis, A. E., & Diamond, J. B. (2015). Despite the best intentions: How racial inequality thrives in good schools. Oxford University Press.

Not only are Black girls' opinions, voices, and ideas not protected in the classroom, but the way that adults claim that Black girls should regulate their emotions during emotionally intense situations is also regulated or perceived through stereotypical perception. Puff, for example, speaks on a situation involving an on-campus job where she was being spoken to after her employer attempted to fire her from her position. In the original situation, Puff became emotional; this was the response from her Black male employer regarding how he perceived her emotions at that moment. Puff said,

> This is the reaction they(society) want to see as a Black woman, referring to her being emotional (Black women have to be strong). As a Black woman, how you responded to this situation was wrong.

In Puffs' experience, the reaction from this Black male employer that framed her response as "wrong" by emphasizing "black women have to be strong" perpetuates that Black women and girls cannot have reactive emotions. They cannot be a "sapphire" by showing their anger. The controlling image is often associated with Black girls, especially when discussing Black girl's emotions. This experience was not seen as emotional because her job was on the line, and she could need the job for financial reasons, but it was seen as emotional because she was a Black girl, and Black girls should not be emotional[90]. The societal pressure to not have emotions or not to be emotional leaves Black girls in a space that always has to be strong.

Puff's experience was not the only participant who spoke about someone within the educational system providing "guidance" on how a Black girl should behave. When asked about her educational experience with teachers at her school, Serenity, who was in high school then, recalled her relationship with a teacher and said, "The teacher was looking out for us. This is how society would look at you and stop playing around." In Serenity's experience, she was not

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[90] Harris-Perry, Melissa V. *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America*. Yale University Press, 2011.

allowed to "play around." This emphasizes the adultification bias[91] that does not allow Black

girls just to be girls. The simple act of playing around shows joy and innocence that Black girls

are not allowed to experience and thus forces them into a "womanhood" although simply being

girls[92]. It also shows that the teacher understands how society would like these girls and tries to

"prepare" them by getting them more serious. While this may be a noble goal, it reinforces the

bias that these Black girls could potentially experience and the challenges they could face based

on how society would look at them. It also reinforces that teachers and other adults in

educational spaces understand control images (even unintentionally) and try to get Black girls to

behave in the opposite ways that they can be perceived.

Overall, these experiences show some of the injustice that these Black girls face based on

race and gender. It also shows that not only do Black girls have to fight for their space for fair,

equal, and equitable educational spaces, but they also have to regulate their emotions in ways

that do not make them be perceived in specific ways. The "preparation" that the teacher thought

they needed just emphasizes the overall world that Black girls are entering. These experiences

have had a lasting impact on these girls. The following section will address how Black girls

responded to these stereotypical behaviors. It will be resilience, change, and other effects that

these experiences have had.

The Effect of Perception: The Responses

Black girls have responded to these discriminatory perceptions by showing acts of

resistance. Whether standing up for themselves in educational spaces, creating their

self-definition, or making their own decision in their academic journey (like my participant

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[91] Adultification bias is a term that was coined in this study that showed that Black girls are perceived as less innocent and more "adultlike" than their peers. Not only are these girls seen as socially mature with their outspokenness, but also physically mature with the growth of their bodies.

[92] Epstein, R., Blake, J., & González, T. (2017). Girlhood interrupted: the erasure of black girls' childhood. Available at SSRN 3000695.pg 30

Rose)(Joseph 2016) [93], Black girls find ways to resist. Importantly, although some of my

participants find these forms of resistance helpful in creating inner resilience, others faced

negative impacts on their educational experience when speaking up.

Due to fear of being the "angry Black girl" discussed in the previous portion of my paper,

Black girls often have to regulate their emotions in different ways compared to other genders and

races. One of my participants, Bubbles, for example, not only described the change in how she

regulates her emotions because of her experience but also the self-doubt that came from it.

Bubbles said,

> One common thing I was used to doing was If I were angry, instead of lashing out and
> being seen as the angry Black girl, I would walk away and keep my feelings to myself to
> not express them. It just could've made me in terms of my emotions when I am in
> conflict with someone I am not good confrontational. I stopped talking. I felt like I had
> to retreat into myself. I felt like I had to be quiet and not be angry.

In Bubbles' case, her experience has led her to gain a coping mechanism when

expressing herself; the fear or hesitation to be seen as the "angry Black girl " is the fear and

hesitation of fitting into these controlled images that the media portrays. It also reinforces the

double consciousness that I mentioned in the literature section of this paper. This is because

Bubbles understands that society could see her as an angry Black girl, and therefore, she does the

opposite by being non-confrontational to avoid being stereotyped. The experience also shows

that Black girls often try to suppress their emotions to avoid society's perception of the angry

Black girl.

Not only do Black girls have to conceal their emotions to avoid the perceptions of a

society that ultimately cause Black girls like Bubbles to retreat within themselves, but these

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[93] Joseph, Nicole M., et al. "Black Female Adolescents and Racism in Schools: Experiences in a Colorblind
Society." *The High School Journal*, vol. 100, no. 1, 2016, pp. 4–25.

experiences have also caused self-doubt in the Black girls themselves. When discussing what

Bubbles believes is the teacher's perspective on why they indulge in these stereotypes— like

Black children being seen as less intelligent compared to other genders and races— Bubbles

said,

> They are so used to Black people also doubting themselves. Growing up as a Black person kind of instilled in you to do good, but if you do good, they are like, wow, that is an amazing feat. It always kind of makes you doubt yourself as a Black person. Like I know I am smart, but probably not as smart as some of the people around me. It also makes it hard for you to want to excel because you are going to try hard, but you are always going to need to be better, so the teachers see you as doing fine but not good enough, so it becomes a cycle.

In Bubble's case, she understands that her work in academic spaces leaves room for self-doubt

and the idea that "you are never gonna be good enough." The Bubbles reference not only

teachers but also society. The ideas "instilled" in you by society and teachers that her academic

work is not good enough will always leave the Black girl striving for excellence that they would

not achieve in these educational spaces. Bubble's experiences show how the school environment

has been harmful in the moment and throughout their academic careers. The harmful cycle

continues to be perpetuated over and over again. Even through the creation of this harmful cycle,

resilience to thrive and to push Black girls to be themselves also emerges. Importantly, Black

girls faced this even if they were not formally punished by the school. When discussing if she

ever experienced discipline, for instance, Bubbles stated,

> I would say no, but just because, especially when I got to high school, I was aware of how people perceived Black girls, so I felt like going into high school, I could not be loud or too passionate about things because it would be of course the Black girl was being dramatic right now. So I knew I should tone myself down and be more of a background character so I would not have to face those stereotypes."

As Connie Wun (2014)[94] shows in her article, Black girls face the consequences of racism and discrimination even if they are not formally disciplined (suspended, arrested in school, etc). In the case of Bubbles, being aware of these stereotypes made her develop a strategy where she avoided being perceived as "loud" or "too passionate" so that she would not be subjected to the school's discipline. However, this strategy had the effect of making her more "toned down," which ultimately affected how she saw herself in these spaces. Although Bubbles has had a negative impact on other participants, they have had the opposite reaction, and their experiences within the education have created resilience within them.

The Creation of Resilience

As we remember, Star, from early in this chapter, a college freshman, had this to say when asked about the long-term impact on her experience within the education system. Star said, "It was more so I am not going to back down because you feel a way about something that I do…. At the time, part of me was a little bit held off, but it did not stop me from being me. "In Star's words, although some of her was a little withdrawn after her experience in the classroom, her self-confidence remains. Asserting her self-confidence by not allowing who she is and how she is to be dictated to by other people shows strength. Her self-expression shows resilience because Star could bounce back and continue to be herself even though, at first, she was a bit held off.

Another one of my participants who also showed resilience is Rose, a senior pursuing her undergraduate degree. Rose says, "proving the system wrong and what they expect of it, we do the opposite and excel in places they think we are not." In this quote about the "system" and the

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[94] Wun, Connie. "Unaccounted Foundations: Black Girls, Anti-Black Racism, and Punishment in Schools." *Critical Sociology (Sage Publications, Ltd.)*, vol. 42, no. 4/5, July 2016, pp. 737–50, https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920514560444.

"they," Rose speaks about the systemic racism that happens within the school system, like the discrimination and diminishing of Black girl's intelligence. In Rose's case, not only was she excelling in the general stream, proving her intelligence and what she was capable of (to herself and others), but she also advocated for being in the humanities stream and excelled there. By advocating for herself and continuing to go against what people like her guidance counselor thought she would be capable of achieving, Rose showed her resilience.

In this chapter, we have explored my participants' experiences, how they avoid discrimination, how Black girls in the classroom are resilient, and how Black girls are resilient. Next, we will go into the solution that my participants have proposed in order to combat the disproportionate discipline of Black girls.

Education for the Better
Understanding the Solution from the Black Girl Perspective

We have explored the literature surrounding the disproportionate discipline of Black girls, and we have delved into my participants and their experiences with school and discipline. In this chapter, we will explore the ways my participants believe to be the solution to the disproportionate disciplining of Black girls. The overall understanding of what can be done revolves around addressing racism in the education system by the teachers and educational system, and also the need to start having conversations that not only uplift Black girls but discuss the effect of disproportionate discipline.

Teachers and Schools Should be Educating Their Students

When speaking about solutions, my participants often spoke about the education that schools and teachers can do about racism within the school system. As we remembered, Bubbles, from my findings chapter, is a 19-year-old currently a sophomore pursuing her undergraduate degree. When asked what can be the solution to this, Bubbles says, "early acknowledge how racism plays a part in the education system and how that can affect Black students, and it if be talked about so it does not seem like a polarizing topic."

As we know it now, when discussing topics like racism in classrooms, these topics are often discussed in a way that only addresses the impact of the Black community during a specific time zone. It fails to address not only the ways it impacts the Black community now but also how it affects different people within the Black community. In order to create a more inclusive environment for Black girls and Black students as a whole, racism and the effect of racism should be addressed in classrooms. Because racism manifests itself in different ways within the education system, we must have an open conversation that can foster a sense of understanding

and community and resolve some of the disparities within the school system. When asked who should acknowledge the racism, Bubbles went on to say,

> "It is the school's responsibility; you know that you are Black, but the school has to become comfortable with acknowledging racism that hurts people of color in the education system. Teachers have to work on educating themselves so black people do not have to be the educators

In this statement, Bubbles emphasizes the school's role and how responsible they are in acknowledging the role that racism plays within the education system. It also acknowledges that Black students understand and are aware of their Blackness, but schools do a poor job, if any job, at acknowledging their students' Blackness. It also touches on the idea that if teachers start teaching about Black students' experiences, the students themselves will not have to educate the teachers and their classmates. When teachers educate themselves, it takes responsibility off of themselves and onto the teachers. Due to the power dynamic within classrooms, if teachers did start not only educating themselves but also addressing racism and the ways that it is harmful to their students, the classroom climate could change and be a safe and welcoming environment for all students.

Like Bubbles, Monique Morris has similar ideas about how teachers can start addressing the impacts that racism can have on Black girls. Morris's perspective heavily focuses on uplifting the Black girl. In "Protecting Black Girls" s [95], she states, "Black girls make up 8 percent of K–12 students nationwide". This number is significant because even though that is less than 10 percent, as seen in the literature section of this paper, Black girls are still being disproportionately disciplined. It goes on to tell us that "Fourteen percent of black girls have received one or more out-of-school suspensions." This continues to perpetuate or showcase the idea that even though Black girls make up small amounts of a small percentage of the overall

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[95] Morris Monique. "Protecting Black Girls." *ASCD*, https://www.ascd.org/el/articles/protecting-black-girls.

population, they are still being targeted the most with harsher punishment like out-of-school discipline.

The article also gives reasons for how Black girls are being disciplined, which I have touched on in the lecture section of the paper. It lastly highlights the solutions that can be made, one of which is the inclusion of Black girls into the curriculum. Morris writes, "A culturally responsive pedagogy is not only about "naming" or locating an instructive experience in a racially identifiable context. It is also about consistently using teaching methods that uplift the oral and presentational traditions dominant in African Diasporic cultures, such as storytelling and the arts." " This solution not only identifies the Black culture but also shows how to incorporate this culture into the classroom like" storytelling and arts." Including African diaspora cultures also allows for a more inclusive environment, highlights their student identities, and shows their importance.

Similarly, in "(Re)Claiming our Crowns: Celebrating Black Girls' Hair in Educational Spaces" by Maiya Turner and Jemimah Young, [96] We learn how teachers can actively do this when speaking about Black hair. Turner and Young write, "Academic spaces throughout the P-20 pipeline are responsible for reversing negative representations and perceptions associated with Black hair. As an integral part of Black culture, it is time for multicultural educators and equity-minded community stakeholders to affirm and uplift Black hair as we seek to better understand the deep connection between their hair and their schooling experiences". This quote acknowledges the negative impact that academic spaces have created surrounding Black hair. The upliftment of Black hair by educators and teachers can change the perception placed on it,

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[96] Turner, Maiya, and Jemimah Young. "(Re)Claiming Our Crowns: Celebrating Black Girls' Hair in Educational Spaces." *Journal of African American Women and Girls in Education*, vol. 2, no. 1, 1, May 2022, pp. 1–7. *jaawge-ojs-tamu.tdl.org*, https://doi.org/10.21423/jaawge-v2i1a108.

and it will leave girls like Puff more confident in any and every hairstyle and not simple

hairstyles that she understands to be "tamed " to be acceptable to educational spaces. It also

changes the hair narrative, simply attributing to a student's look, but rather a cultural one. Lastly,

not only does it again put the responsibility on educators, but it also would start acknowledging

different aspects of being Black, such as hair.

The reason why the role of teachers is vital in changing the rates that Black girls are

disproportionately and stopping this treatment of Black girls altogether is that teachers not only

set the tone in educational spaces but also set the example for other kids within the class. Thus, if

teachers challenge stereotypes, the students will also start challenging them. It also creates a safe

and welcoming environment for all its students overall. Also, teachers have the power to not only

include more cultural awareness of their students.

<u>Starting the Conversation</u>

When speaking to my participants, not only was it important for teachers to be educated

and do the education when it comes to racism, so their Black students do not have it was also

apparent throughout my interviews that my participants expressed the need to start having a

conversation surrounding aspects that are dealing with the effects and teaching of racism.

Throughout the discussion of what could be done, Bubbles said, "There needs to be a

conversation about how detrimental negative stereotypes are on black girls, especially in terms of

self-image and things of that nature. Here, Bubbles not only recognizes the detrimental negative

stereotypes of Black girls and how they can contribute to the Black girl's image, but she also

calls for conversation. This displays two things: first, it is important to recognize that what Black

girls are experiencing is negative and allow that to be brought to light, but also give the space for

people to come together to discuss it. With conversation, awareness of what Black girls are

experiencing can happen, I believe, not only for the Black girl experiencing this mistreatment but also for society to understand the Black girl's experiences. Without both the recognition and the conversation, the change in the treatment of Black girls would not happen.

When starting the conversation about the impacts of negative stereotypes on Black girls, my other participant, Tiana, who is currently 21, proposed this as part of the solution to the treatment of Black girls. Tiana says, "Breakaway from stereotypes and what we see by the media." As we have discussed in the literature section of this paper, controlling images [97] and stereotypes that the media (TV, movies, and social platforms like TikTok) have placed on Black girls causes society to treat Black girls in unjust ways. Thus, as a society, according to Tiana, we need to break away from them. This is important because social media has constantly influenced the idea of the Black girl. Not only does Tiana showcase that in this quote, but it also calls for greater awareness of how the media portrays and resists harmful stereotypes by breaking away from them. Breaking away from the stereotypes would look like affirming Black girls their Blackness, including their appearance, intelligence, and culture, and being supported by their schools in doing so. The affirming of these Black girls would need to happen both within the media and inside classroom and academic spaces by teachers and administrators.

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[97] Controlling Images a term coined by Patricia Hill Collin was designed to make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life"

Conclusion

This research focused on Black girls ages 18-24 with at least two years of experience in the New York City education system. We specifically looked at their experiences in educational spaces like school and the ways, reasons, and effects of their discipline. I defined "discipline" broadly throughout this study as encompassing anything from verbal reprimands from school administrators (e.g., "You're too loud. Quiet down.") to expulsion from school. These Black girls, throughout their journeys, have used double consciousness to adapt to a world that has been stereotypically built against them. When arguing if Black girls are disproportionately punished for subjective behaviors like speaking too loud or being deemed as aggressive, the answer is yes. Not only does the literature support this claim, but it also fully shows the rates at which this discipline is happening in comparison to other genders and races. My study, through conversations with my participants about their experiences as Black girls in NYC schools, has also matched the experience of those of other Black girls in much of the literature surrounding this topic.

Based on the experiences of my participants, it is understood that these Black girls are well aware of the stereotypical perspective that society has on them, so much so that they have naturally created ways to avoid it, like the use of double consciousness, as we saw it to be avoiding hairstyles and appearing in ways that were deemed more socially acceptable. Still, they not only display an awareness of how they are seen by others and how these stereotypes shape their experiences in schools, but they have also developed strategies aimed at responding to this gendered racism and discrimination. Their ideas about what we can do to address discipline in schools remind us that Black girls assert that they are deserving of good treatment in schools.

I have spent the last 13 years within the New York City school system. Whether that was the Christian school around the corner from my grandmother's house where I spent the first years of my educational journey till now sitting in my college dorm room writing this paper. I have realized that each experience, good, bad, and indifferent, has led me to be where I am today. Not only have the knowledge I have learned academically curated me to be a well-rounded individual in the way I think, but extracurricular activities that I have been awarded to go to through my educational experience have allowed me to find my voice, passion, and drive.

I understood what my mother had told me all those years ago about being a firecracker. I have realized that she told me to protect myself, to guide me, and to prepare me for a world that would judge me more merely on my actions and how I looked before they ever thought about what I brought to the table with my knowledge and skills. Although it was hurtful at the time, it felt like I had to dim myself to please others. I now understand it as a tool she was giving me to avoid discrimination, just like my participants used double consciousness. I sit here four years later, reflecting on the girl who once wore khaki pants to who I am today, a person who has positively found her voice and understood how to use it. I thank my educational experience for that. This college journey has been far from easy, but it gave me the village I needed to step into who I am and tap into the potential that I, the firecracker, always had. It allowed me to be visible. It now allows my participants to be visible, and to invisible girls like me, our stories may finally be seen.

Semicolon:
The story is not over.

Limitations and Further research for the future

While doing this research, I noticed there were several limitations. One limitation is gaining participants' experiences. When I originally posted my research flier on Instagram, people did not sign up to interview me. I understand the reason for this falls into two categories. The first category is that many Black girls (even those I interviewed) had a hard time thinking of a time when they were disciplined and, therefore, did not feel they could contribute to this topic. I found the reasoning to be because many of the disciplines that tend to be more visible to people are extreme forms like suspension and or expulsion, but less about the everyday interactions that these Black girls were facing, like being called out for being too loud or wearing an Afrocentric hairstyle. The second category was that after gaining participants, many Black girls had not had the opportunity to speak about their school experiences, and my interview was the first place to speak about those experiences. Thus, it made me wonder how many other Black girls did not sign up to be interviewed for this very reason. However, as my findings and previous research show, there are many ways in which schools discipline and punish Black girls that are less visible yet still harmful. Ultimately, I decided to DM(direct message) people individually to participate in my study. Another limitation is that many of my participants were from Brooklyn, which did not allow me to show how education affects Black girls across New York City.

Although I could gain participant experiences and understand this topic more deeply, another limitation when it came to my research was that I could only capture experiences from ten Black girls from New York City; however, according to the July 1st, 2022, New York census,

New York City is home to 8,335,897 [98]people. Therefore, naturally, there are some experiences that I could not capture. Also, most of my participants talked about experiences based on perception and stereotypes; however, I did not get as many stories about more broadly known school disciplining, like expulsion, and an experience directly related to the school-to-prison pipeline. Still, my findings do point to what Connie Wun calls "unaccounted foundations" or the more routine forms of discipline that slowly affect Black girls in schools (Wun 2014).

If I had more time to continue this research, I would also include voices from the teachers themselves; this would be because I would like to know more about their perception of their Black female students and where (if the perception existed) what it is based on. I would also want to know if they see a difference in how they treat other genders and races in comparison to Black girls. I would also include aspects of this project I could not explore, for example, the role of outside factors such as home/ school experiences that can cause Black girls to appear to be misbehaving.

Outside factors and school factors are essential to take into consideration as to why Black girls are seen as misbehaving due to problems at home, interpersonal violence, and other factors that can cause guys and girls to act out in different ways. In P*ushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools*, we see many different Black girl's experiences within the education system. We meet Emma, a 16-year-old girl who was being bullied in school. She went into a depressive episode where she shut down and blocked everyone away, which ultimately led to her stopping doing her work and being more aggressive and protective over herself[99]. Although outsiders simply saw her "lack of motivation," her aggression, and the portrayal of (sapphire),

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[98] *U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: New York City, New York*.
https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/newyorkcitynewyork/PST045222.
[99] Morris, Monique W. *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools*. The New Press, 2016.

the reasoning behind this behavior is essential but often left out. Thus, I would like to incorporate stories like Emma's in future research.

Many of the effects of disproportionate school discipline included changes in student behavior, but it also caused direct links to the school-to-prison pipeline. The school-to-prison pipeline[100] is a concept that refers to the idea that schools are pushing the majority of Black and BIPOC students out of schools and into the criminal justice system. This pipeline is created with increased police presence in schools and disproportionate discipline, as mentioned in this paper. With that, I would also have liked to visit the prison system that did include Black girls receiving education to see if there are any disparities within that system and the impacts of that in New York City. I would also want to follow these Black girls into their workspaces and see if their educational experience or their perception of themselves affected them in their work aspect.

Lastly, I would have liked to see one of the solutions my participants suggested implemented to see if that did cause a solution to these experiences. Even though I was able to spread awareness surrounding this topic, I also know that my project brings awareness to a specific aspect of the Black girl's experience in New York City. However, many more experiences must be addressed in future studies.

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[100] The "school-to-prison pipeline" refers to the policies and practices that push our nation's schoolchildren, especially our most at-risk children, out of classrooms and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems. This pipeline reflects the prioritization of incarceration over education. "What Is The School-to-Prison Pipeline?" American Civil Liberties Union, https://www.aclu.org/documents/what-school-prison-pipeline.

Ending note from the Fellow Black girl

When this idea about this project came to me, I was sitting in my Junior year of college sociology classes, one about Race and ethnicity and the other about childhood, youth, and society. Both classes offered a better understanding of who I was and my own educational experience. As I read *Unequal City* by Carla Shed, based in Chicago, I noticed disparities in my city, New York City. I began to think about how small I was made to feel in educational spaces because of my big personality and how I was that firecracker that needed to be tamed. I began to think about how the way I spoke often became a conversation because of my constant use of African American Vernacular English (AAVE), which was not seen as "proper" language, and how insecure it made me feel to speak in my college classrooms. I had spent several hours crying as I finally understood that my experiences pre-college informed how quiet I had become in college spaces (it also didn't help that I came to college during a pandemic). I wanted, needed, and hoped I was not the only one.

When I finally decided to put this topic into Google, I was amazed to see stories like mine from girls who liked and identified how I did. The more I researched, the more I understood and knew that more voices and experiences needed to be brought to light. The use of the invisible girl is essential because Black girls in many different spaces within and outside of education have been unseen, pushed to the side, or treated like "the bottom of the barrel," but I nevertheless wanted to change that. With this project, I could only reflect, heal, and connect my educational experiences growing up. I was also able to bond with people who had experienced similar struggles, and I will always be grateful for not only having that space but giving that space. To end this paper, I want to say this. Society has its perception of who and what a Black girl should be, but I dare you to be resilient in the ways that work the best for you. I dare you to

wear your box braids, wigs, and weaves and be the firecracker I could not be. I dare to be the

Black girl you want to be in every aspect you crave.

Research Information

Recruitment Flier

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS NEEDED

Study on the extent Black girls are disproportionally disciplined throughout k-12 and how it impacts them.

Eligibility

✓ 18 years or older

✓ Identify as black or African American

✓ Identify as a woman

✓ Must have gone to a New York City school for at least two years this include grades k-12

Please email ej0653@bard.edu for more information and to learn ways to participate [101]

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[101] Recruitment flier posted to instagram in January 2024

Interview Questions

Demographic question

How old are you?
What is your ethnicity and Nationality?
What type of school did you attend growing up?
Are you currently attending College, or have you graduated from College?

1. Tell me about your general experiences in elementary, middle, and high school.

2. What was your attitude toward school? How motivated or engaged were you as a

student?

3. How do you think your experiences and attitudes were shaped by your identity of

being a Black girl?

4. Have you ever experienced discipline in a classroom? If so, can you describe that

experience? Do you think it was fair or unfair? Why or why not?

5. How did you feel about the discipline? At the time, did you think it was

appropriate or excessive? Why or why not? What do you think about it now?

6. Did the teacher's or administrator's discipline differ from how they treated other

students for similar behavior?

7. How did teachers, counselors, or administrators react during the disciplinary

process? If so, how did their reactions impact your experience?

8. Tell me about any other times you were disciplined.

9. Has your experience with discipline impacted the way you engaged in the

classroom or school engagement? Can you describe that experience?

10. To what extent do you think your discipline experiences had long-term effects,

impacting your education, career, personal relationships, or attitude towardauthority figures? If so, how?

11. If you believe Black girls are disproportionately disciplined, what can be done to address this problem?

12. How could the education system improve its disciplinary policies to support students better and prevent unfair discipline?

13. If you are in college, describe your relationship with teachers and administrators. How did your experiences in K inform it through 12 education?[102]

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[102] Copies of the 13 interview question that participants were asked during the interview

Highschool connection Email

(add greeting)

My name is Emily Joachim. I am a student at Bard College majoring in Human Rights. I am currently doing my senior thesis and am reaching out to see if you are willing to participate in this study. To be a participant, you must be between the ages of 18-24 years old, identify as Black or African American, identify as a woman and have completed two years of education in NYC; this includes grades k-12.

I am researching to what extent Black girls are disproportionately disciplined in k-12 schools and how it impacts them. I am defining "discipline" broadly as encompassing anything from verbal reprimands from school administrators (e.g., "You're too loud. Quiet down.") to expulsion from school. I plan to conduct interviews virtually and in person for approximately one hour. During the interview, I will ask questions about your experience with education and discipline.

I will be happy to answer any of your questions about my project via email ej0653@bard.edu

If you would like to participate, please fill out this form [I will provide a link here] so we can schedule a meeting time.

Thank you for considering my request. I look forward to hearing from you.

Best,
Emily Joachim[103]

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[103] A copy of the email sent to my High School alumni office and two other alumni offices of programs I was apart of in highschool

Social media contact

"Hello, I am Emily Joachim, a senior at Bard College majoring in Human Rights. I am researching the extent to which Black girls are disproportionately disciplined in k-12. I am defining discipline broadly from verbal discipline (e.g., a teacher telling a Black girl she is too loud) to expulsion from school. I would like to know if you are willing to be interviewed for my study. To be eligible for this study, you must be 18-24 years of age, identify as an African American or Black woman, and have completed at least two years in the NYC education system(k-12). The interview will last approximately one hour. The interview can be done in person or virtually as long as the virtual or in-person space is private and not compromised. The interview will be entirely confidential, and I will not reveal your identity in my study (a pseudonym will be used). The notes I take during the interview will be stored on my password-protected computer. If you consent to audio-recording your interview, that recording will be stored in the same file on my computer. I can send you a form that will allow you to specify days and times you are available for an interview and to choose your own pseudonym if you so wish. The form also contains a consent form that must be signed before the interview.

Would you like me to send you the form? You can take your time to decide if you'd like to participate in my study. Please email me at ej0653@bard.edu with any questions or concerns or discuss the next steps.*[104]*

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[104] A copy of the recruitment message sent out to individuals via instagram direct message

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