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Department: Teacher Education

Advisor: Novea McIntosh, Ed.D.

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Abstract

Within the education system and society, Black girls face higher levels of discipline and criminalization than students of other races or genders. The African American Policy Forum found that during the 2011-2012 school year in Boston, Black girls made up only 28% of enrollment, but faced 61% of all discipline, while white females made up 15% of enrollment and only 5% of all discipline (Crenshaw 19). This inequity can be credited to higher expectations for young black girls due to societal adultification. In her book *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools*, Monique W. Morris defines adultification as "Black girls being likened more to adults than to children and are treated as if they are willfully engaging in behaviors typically expected of Black women- sexual involvement, parenting or primary caregiving, workforce participation, and other adult behaviors and responsibilities" (Morris 34). One way to address these issues within schools is by incorporating culturally relevant pedagogy into the curriculum and addressing black girls' social, emotional, and behavioral needs. This research will further analyze the role of culturally responsive pedagogy and literature within schools with respect to the development of Black girls. The research will be conducted in two main phases; first, a literature review that explores data from other researchers focused on the adultification and criminalization of black girls. It will also provide culturally responsive pedagogical strategies in the empowerment of black girls as they face these issues in society. Second, research will be conducted in an urban setting gathering data through a focus group and survey with students at two urban high schools. Through these phases, this research should identify the role and impact of culturally responsive pedagogy in empowering adolescent girls.

Dedication

To Dr. McIntosh for fostering and supporting a new generation of teachers and social justice advocates, thank you for being the change students need.

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Chapter One

Introduction to the Research Study

Despite *Brown v Board of Education*, overruling the notion of "separate, but equal" and integrating schools, young black girls continue to face discrimination within our education system. In the past, research has been focused on minority boys, however, more recent research has revealed that black girls are facing higher levels of discrimination in school. Evan-Winters and Esposito (2010) explain that "Because of racism, sexism, and class oppression in the U.S., African American girls are in multiple jeopardy of race, class and gender exclusion in mainstream educational institutions" (13). Black girls are victims of an unjust education system, in which they face adultification and criminalization. Adultification is "a term used in this report to refer to the perception of Black girls as less innocent and more adult-like than white girls of the same age" (Epstein 1). The perception of black girls as more adult-like causes there to be held higher behavioral expectations from society placed on them, effectively eliminating their childhood compared to their white female counterparts. Research shows that black girls are 6 times more likely to be suspended from school than white girls (Crenshaw 17). This drastic inequities distracts black girls from their education, while continuing the cycle of discrimination that prevents them from obtaining equality in schools.

For this thesis, three main research questions will be considered: What are some of the inequities facing black girls in schools? How does adultification and criminalization impact black girls' education? And what is the role of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in empowering adolescent girls? This research is conducted in two main phases; the first phase a literature review of existing research on the subject and the

second phase will be a focus group and survey with black girls in two urban high schools. The researcher seeks to identify the role of culturally responsive pedagogy in engaging and empowering adolescent black girls. In partnership with young women at two urban high schools in Dayton, Ohio, this thesis will provide strategies for future educators to further develop agency in black girls.

Section #1: Introduction of the Problem

Due to systematic racism that spans over centuries stemming from slavery, black girls face adultification and criminalization that prevent them from getting an equal education compared to their peers. This adultification and criminalization of black girls is rooted in stereotypes of black girls as loud, sassy, disrespectful, and hypersexual. Black girls feel that the pressure placed on them by teachers and administrators based on these stereotypes prevents them from getting a proper education and having academic success because they are set up to fail. In a focus group with the African American Policy Forum, the researcher discovered several aspects of schools that discourage black girls from further pursuing their education including:

1.) At-risk young women describe zero-tolerance schools as chaotic environments in which discipline is prioritized over educational attainment.

2.) Increased levels of law enforcement and security personnel within schools often make girls feel less safe and less likely to attend school.

3.) Punitive rather than restorative responses to conflict contribute to the separation of girls from school and their disproportionate involvement in the juvenile justice system (Crenshaw 28-40).

The expectations for black girls to act more adult-like leads to harsher punitive punishments because they are assumed to have known better since they are more mature. However, the students are surrounded by school environments that portray a distrust of Black girls from administration, including metal detectors, police officers, strict dress code punishments, and punitive, instead of restorative, disciplinary actions.

Since the adultification of black girls places higher behavioral expectations on black girls, they are more likely to be punished for behaviors that do not fall within this adult-like expectation. The distrust of black girls from administration and teachers stems from implicit bias based on the stereotype, which leads to assumptions of their behaviors that may not be true. Due to the assumption that black girls are disrespectful and more mature, they face harsher punishments at higher rates because the administration does not see it as a learning process for adolescents, but a blatant violation of the social behavioral protocol that adults live by. This social behavioral protocol is subjective based on historical expectations placed on adult understanding of how people should behave. School rules and expectations are often based on these subjective behavioral expectations that differ from each person enforcing these rules. In the New York Times article "Battle for the Souls of Black Girls," Erica Green (2020) explains that "Black girls, in particular, are more likely to be punished for subjective infractions like dress code violations and insubordination." This form of subjective infractions like dress code violations and insubordination will be further explored later in the literature review. Due to these behavioral expectations for black girls to be more adult-like, they face higher levels of punishment and their behavior has become criminalized in the education system, distracting them from their academics.
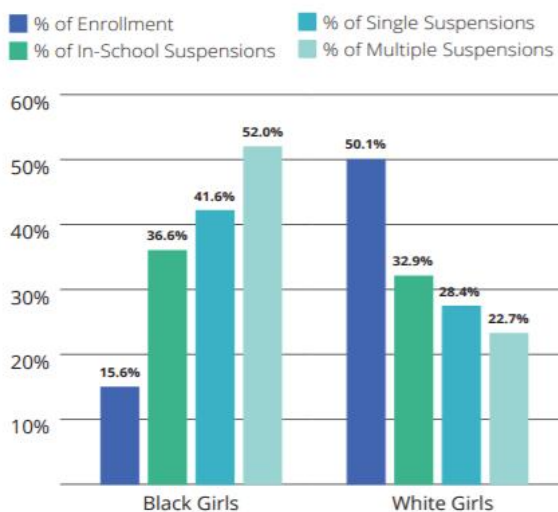
Historically, the focus of research on the criminalization of black children has been focused on black boys, however, black girls are facing criminalization at a similar rate as black boys but the lack of resources for black girls is significantly higher. Erica Green (2020) explains that,

> "Statistically, Black boys have led the country in suspensions, expulsions, and school arrests, and the disparities between them and white boys have been a catalyst for national movements for change. But Black girls' discipline rates are not far behind those of Black boys; and in several categories, such as suspensions and law enforcement referrals, the disparities between Black and white girls eclipse those between Black and white boys."

While Black boys also face higher levels of criminalization, the disparity between black boys and white boys facing punishment is much less than the disparities between black girls and white girls. This shows that black girls are criminalized based on their race and their gender, doubling the discrimination they face in schools. Graphic #1 demonstrates the disparities black girls face compared to white girls in regards to punishments relating to their enrollment in school. The National Women's Law Center found in both graphs that black girls made up only 15% of enrollment but still made up a majority of discipline issues within schools. This study is focusing specifically on the inequities and discriminations faced by black girls in the education system and the role of educators in reinforcing or combating these inequities. The purpose of this research is to determine some of the reasons for the adultification and criminalization of black girls, while also developing solutions that will combat this discrimination and empower black girls to further develop their agency in their education.

Graphic #1

Rates of Suspensions for Girls in K-12 in the 2013-2014 School Year by Race

- % of Enrollment
- % of In-School Suspensions
- % of Single Suspensions
- % of Multiple Suspensions

Black Girls: 15.6%, 36.6%, 41.6%, 52.0%
White Girls: 50.1%, 32.9%, 28.4%, 22.7%

Source: Nat'l Women's Law Ctr., Stopping School Pushout for Girls of Color 15 fig.6 (2017).

Percentage of Girls Referred to Law Enforcement or Arrested at School in the 2013-14 School Year by Race

- % of All Girls Enrolled
- % of All Girls Referred to Law Enforcement
- % of All Girls Arrested

Black Girls: 15.6%, 28.2%, 37.3%
White Girls: 50.1%, 34.3%, 30.2%
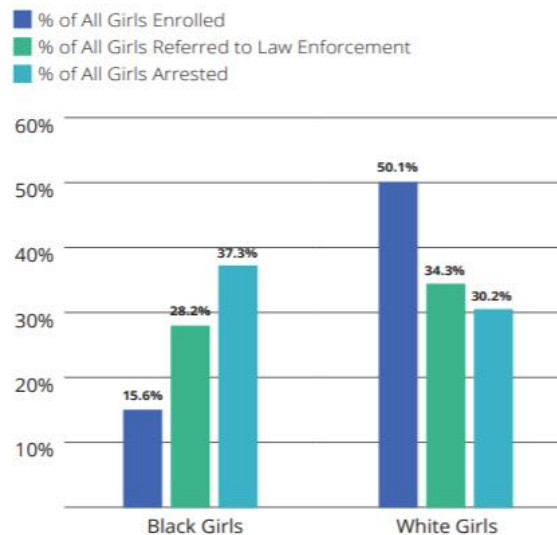
Source: Nat'l Women's Law Ctr., Stopping School Pushout for Girls of Color 13 fig.5 (2017).

Section #2: Definition of the Terms

Adultification- The expectation placed on black girls to act more mature and older than their age, causing them to seem more adult-like compared to their peers. This can include being expected to not act out, have more responsibilities, and even be sexualized. Adultification places a higher behavior, emotional, and intellectual expectation on black

girls, and when this is not met, can cause them to be punished for a false societal expectation on them.

Colorism- The discrimination based on the darkness of skin within a race. Specifically, this is referring to the difference between dark skin and light skin black people and the different levels of discrimination they face. Typically, black people with lighter skin color tend to face less discrimination and prejudice than black people with darker complexion.

Criminalization- The likening of bad behavior to criminal behavior and the over-policing of behavior that results in harsher punishments compared to the behavior itself. An example of this includes an incident where a six-year-old black girl threw a temper tantrum in her Kindergarten class and the teacher called the cops to arrest her. Criminalization stems from the adultification of young black women and the higher expectations placed on their behavior.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy- The incorporation of the diverse cultures that are represented within the classroom into the curriculum of the class. Most curriculum in the education system is eurocentric and the incorporation of different cultures engages students in the lesson and demonstrates respect for their culture. An example of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy would be incorporating African American authors into an English class that has a high population of African American students.

Fetishization- The over-sexualization and fascination of black girls bodies. This fetishization of black girls leads to the over-sexualization and adultification of black girls in society. In the article "The Colonial Roots of the Fetishization of Black Women," Caren M. Holmes (2016) describes fetishization as "a practice of reproductive and sexual management of that began before the slave era and has been reproduced in policy and societal norms throughout all of American history" (p. 7). This is rooted in the effect that romantic partners may be interested in black girls, not because of who they are as a person, but because of the over-sexualization of black girls and their bodies, providing the partners with sexual pleasure.

Microaggression- Small, subtle verbal insults or nonverbal actions directed at people of color that intentionally or unintentionally communicate mistrust or hostility, such as clutching one's purse if a person of color gets into an elevator or when store personnel follows a person of color around a store when they are shopping (Hammond 2017 p. 157).

White Washed History- The process of centering history from a white, eurocentric perspective that paints white people as the hero who civilized people of color, while simultaneously erasing the suffering and discrimination faced by people of color.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Section #1: Defining Adultification and Criminalization

Before discussing the research, it is important to understand what the adultification and criminalization of black girls in schools specifically is. In her book *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools*, Monique W. Morris (2016) defines adultification as "Black girls being likened more to adults than to children and are treated as if they are willfully engaging in behaviors typically expected of Black women-sexual involvement, parenting or primary caregiving, workforce participation, and other adult behaviors and responsibilities" (p. 34). Since the research is specifically looking at black girls, most of the studies are focusing on black girls under the age of 18-years-old being treated like black women who are over the age of 25. This causes young black girls to be held to higher expectations because society is placing adult-like responsibilities on adolescents, which they often fall short of, resulting in the criminalization of their behaviors. The article "Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girl's Childhood" highlights that the adultification of black girls takes two main forms; The first being "A process of socialization, in which children function at a more mature developmental stage because of situational context and necessity, especially in low resource community environments" and the second being "A social or cultural stereotype that is based on how adults perceive children in the absence of knowledge of children's behavior and verbalizations" (Epstein 2017 p.4). This research study is focusing the effects of both forms of adultification detailed by Epstein to develop the best strategies for combating the discrimination and obstacles faced by black girls.
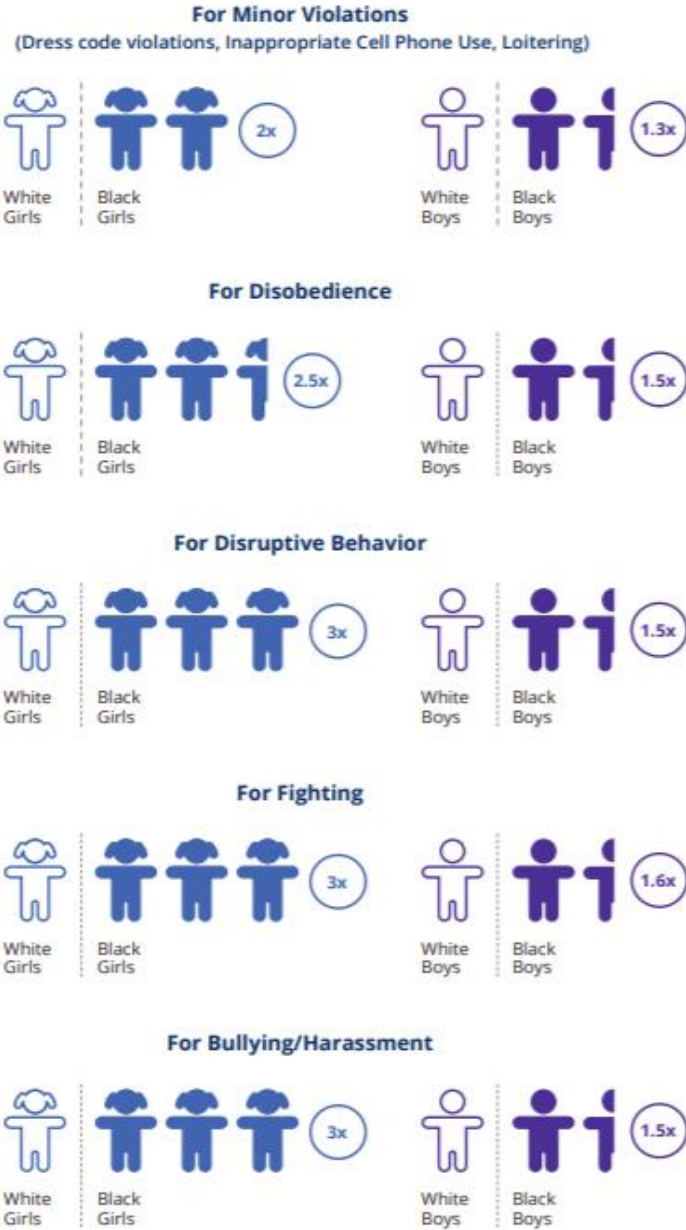
The adultification of black girls has developed multiple stereotypes that inform the way educators interact with students and the expectations they place on them. Epstein (2017) explains that "Black girls are viewed by educators as more suspicious, mature, provocative and aggressive than their white peers." This can be attributed to the expectations placed on them to behave more adult-like, such as more sexually, conniving, and disrespectful. These stereotypes and expectations placed on black girls inform the way that the public sees them and treats them, by expecting them to behave older than they are. In the book *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools*, author Monique W. Morris (2016) identifies that "the public's collective consciousness, latent ideas about black females as hypersexual, conniving, loud and sassy is predominant" (p. 34). The expectation for black girls to fulfill this stereotype is not any different in the education system. Since the education system is a place for black girls to learn about the content and how to socialize, when educators treat them and interact with them based on these expectations, black girls begin to believe these stereotypes and act accordingly because that is how they are socialized to act. Due to these stereotypes, black girls in the school systems are punished more harshly compared to their white peers because they are expected to act like adults when in reality they are still growing teenagers that are simply expressing themselves.

When black girls do not meet the behavioral expectation to act older than their age, they are punished more often and harsher than their white peers. As seen in graphic #2, black girls face higher levels of discipline for subjective infractions compared to any other demographic of students, especially white girls. Black girls face at least 2 times more disciplinary infractions compared to white females for actions that are subjective to

the administrator, such as insubordination, disruptive behavior, and dress code violations. A majority of these subjective infractions are due to misunderstanding of African American culture and mannerism by educators. These misunderstandings lead to " research suggests that teacher referral bias rather than students' actual behavior is associated with disproportionate discipline sanctions and referrals" (Blake, Butler 92). An example of this is often black girls getting frustrated and any sort of tone in their voice results in educators thinking they are purposefully being disrespectful. Research has shown that "The criminalization and social marginalization that have been described throughout this book go hand-in-hand with society's expanding prison-industrial complex and the abandonment of a basic tenet associated with juvenile justice: redemption" (Morris 2016 p. 177). Many of the subjective disciplines that black girls face are not based on learning from their mistakes, it is based on punishments that discourage the behavior and make black girls an example for other students. Due to the high levels of discipline for black girls, urban schools are beginning to resemble prison-like experiences, instead of safe places for students to learn.

Graphic #2

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

For Minor Violations
(Dress code violations, Inappropriate Cell Phone Use, Loitering)

White Girls | Black Girls | 2x
White Boys | Black Boys | 1.3x

For Disobedience

White Girls | Black Girls | 2.5x
White Boys | Black Boys | 1.5x

For Disruptive Behavior

White Girls | Black Girls | 3x
White Boys | Black Boys | 1.5x

For Fighting

White Girls | Black Girls | 3x
White Boys | Black Boys | 1.6x

For Bullying/Harassment

White Girls | Black Girls | 3x
White Boys | Black Boys | 1.5x

* Note: This study was conducted in one school district in Kentucky

Source: Edward W. Morris & Brea L. Perry, *Girls Behaving Badly? Race, Gender, & Subjective Evaluation in the Discipline of Af. Am. Girls*, 90 Sociology of Educ. 127 (2017).

The criminalization of black girls is reinforced with a school environment that emphasizes punishment and resembles a prison situation, which prohibits the students from feeling safe and comfortable in their school to make mistakes and learn. For students to succeed academically, they have to feel safe and comfortable in their environment to make mistakes and learn about the content and social situations. In her book *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools,* Monique W. Morris explains that:

> "The presence of law enforcement in schools has instead blurred the line between education and criminal justice, as daily exchanges and interactions with law enforcement expand the surveillance of youth of color and normalize prison terminology (and culture) in school settings. Approximately 76 percent of students in middle and high schools nationwide attended a school with a locked entrance or exit door during the school day in 2013, an increase from 65 percent in 2011 and 38 percent in 1999."

Many urban schools have utilized security measures that mimic a prison such as police officers, metal detectors, bag searches, and locked doors. While schools need to take certain security measures for student safety against school shooters, the presence of these security measures tells students that administrators do not trust their students, specifically black girls. The reason that the administration does not trust black girls is because they do not meet their behavioral expectations to act like an adult and are therefore punished more harshly. This misunderstanding is rooted in the miseducation of African American culture and mannerisms in the American Education System.

Section #2: Context of Black Girls Experiences in Schools

Before understanding the effects of the adultification and criminalization of black girls, it is important to establish the roots and causes of the discrimination. As mentioned previously, many of the obstacles are based on stereotypes of black girls can be summed up into these three archetypal black women:

1.) "Sapphire (e.g., emasculating, loud, aggressive, angry, stubborn, and unfeminine)

2.) Jezebel (e.g., hypersexualized, seductive, and exploiter of men's weaknesses)

3.) Mammy (e.g., self-sacrificing, nurturing, loving, asexual)" (Epestien 2017 p.5)

All three of these stereotypes carry characteristics that are broad enough to cover every black girl and if they do not immediately fit into one of these stereotypes, there is pressure from society to fit into one of the stereotypes. White society forces black girls into these stereotypes because it is easier for them to make quick assumptions about black girls based on their appearance and personality. Due to these stereotypes and expectations, it has been proven that "Black girls were more likely to be referred for defiance, disruptive behavior, disrespect, profanity, and fighting relative to their racial-ethnic representation in the school district." (Blake, Butler 2011 p. 92). This is often how schools adultify and criminalize black girls by assuming they fit into these mature stereotypes that symbolize aggressive, hyper-sexualized, and mothering women, without taking the time to understand black girls as adolescents and view them as children.

Along with being stereotyped as adults, many black girls have to assume additional responsibilities as adults do. When interviewing a young black girl who was in prison for prostitution, Morris (2016) explains that "Like other girls from poverty, understood that education is a tool for economic success, but she was also feeling pressure to find a way out of poverty soon rather than later, one of many outcomes associated with being prematurely cast as an adult" (p.99). Many black girls want to prioritize education, but when they are expected to end the cycle of poverty, they feel pressured by their families and society to earn money and work as fast as they can, leading some of them to turn to illegal ways of earning money quickly. Morris (2016) explains that many black girls turn to prostitution to try and escape the cycle of poverty or help support their family which forces them to use their sexuality to accomplish adult responsibilities. This feeds into the stereotypes and assumptions that black girls are more mature than their peers and should be punished accordingly. Since black girls are more concerned with supporting their family or ending the cycle of poverty, they often miss school to accomplish these goals, resulting in chronic absenteeism that puts them behind in school.

Due to the long history of black women resorting to prostitution to make ends meet, black girls are being hypersexualized, which adds to society's belief that black girls behave more like adults. Morris explains that the adultification and hypersexualization of black girls leads to a "nearly 19 percent, rate of sexual victimization for Black girls and young women is already the highest for any group in the nation. Girls experience sexual assault, objectification, or being seen as hypersexual in many places- including their homes, in the street, on buses and subway systems, in their places of worship, and in schools" (Morris 2016 p. 121). This objectification contributes to another obstacle for

black girls to face on a daily basis. Not only do they have to focus on their academics and adult responsibility like providing for the family, they often have to manage and avoid the sexualization of their own bodies without their consent. This additional responsibility distracts black girls from their academics and adds another characteristic for black girls to be viewed as adults, while only being adolescents. When they are constantly fighting the objectification of their bodies, "Black girls describe conditions in which their bodies are scrutinized, touched (often without permission), and objectified in ways that make them feel self-conscious and constantly defensive" (Morris 2016 p. 121). These insecurities and defensiveness can cause black girls to be stereotyped as having an "attitude," when in reality they are struggling internally.

Another way that black girls are stereotyped is when they are assumed to have an attitude or are being disrespectful when they are really defending themselves or expressing an opinion. Along with all the obstacles and pressures placed on black girls, they often feel vulnerable and act defensively, which is almost always interpreted as disrespectful. However, "Black girls 'attitudes' and 'defiant' behaviors were often in response to feeling disrespected-by institutions that constructed conditions that facilitate failure (e.g. increased surveillance, no recess, and punitive discipline policies) and by individuals who triggered them with words and/or actions" (Morris 2016 p. 94). Black girls become defensive when they are constantly discriminated against and facing pressures in all areas of their lives, however, it is often interpreted as attitude or sass, which makes them disrespectful to educators. Based on their physical surroundings in a school and the discrimination they face, black girls are constantly being worn down from the pressure they are facing and they continue to be worn down when they defend

themselves are instantly get punished and assumed to be disrespectful. This assumption of disrespect from girls not only continues the cycle of being defensive but also puts a strain on student-teacher relationships, which are vital to creating safe and comfortable environments for black girls in schools.

Along with being discriminated against for their "attitude," Black girls continue to face discrimination based on their outward appearance. One of the main debates surrounding black girls is how they choose to wear their hair. This debate is deeply rooted in black girls identity because "For both African men and women hair is intricately connected to cultural identity, spirituality, character make up, and notions of beauty" (Johnson 2013 p.87). So when society criticizes how black girls choose to wear their hair, they are essentially questioning black girls' identity. Whether black girls wear their natural hair or choose to use artificial hair, they are criticized for either way they choose to wear their hair. Morris explains that "The politicization (and vilification) of thick, curly, and kinky hair is an old one. Characterizations of kinky hair are unmanageable, wild, and ultimately 'bad hair' are all signals (spoken and unspoken) that black girls are inferior and unkempt when left in their natural state" (Morris 2016 p. 92). This is rooted in the white expectation of beauty that believes that the only "acceptable" hairstyle is well kept and controllable, so when Black girls' hair does not meet that standard, it does not meet society's standard of beauty and behavior. Because black girl's hair is so deeply rooted in their identity, when society criticizes their hair, they are personally attacking black girl's identity and cultural heritage. This is because "They can also reinforce internalized oppression about the quality of their natural hairstyles on people of African descent" (Morris 2016 p. 92). Not only is it an attack on black girls

outward appearance, but it is also an attack on their sense of self-worth that can result in insecurities and more defensiveness

Another way black girls are discriminated against is through excessive dress code violations that distract black girls from getting an education. Especially within urban schools that are majority students of color, "Researchers found that black girls in the District [of Columbia] remain 20 times more likely than white girls to be suspended, despite no evidence of more misbehavior" (Simmons 2019). When a student is taken out of class due to a dress code violation, administrators are essentially telling black girls that their lack of conformity to white beauty standards is more important than their education and forces them to take time out of their education for clothing. In *Pushout,* Morris (2016) established that "Dress codes do more than slut-shame girls. They marginalize and criminalize them. They cast them as deviant and reinforce social ideas about Black girls' identity in a way that can be very destructive" (p. 93). Not only is it distracting black girls from their education when they are removed for dress code violations, but it also reaffirms the idea that black girls are disrespectful, troublemakers to other educators and teachers, furthering the discrimination from them based on stereotypes. Excessive dress code violations continue to single out black girls as deviant students while prioritizing their outward appearance over their education.

Overall, black girls face higher levels of discrimination in all areas of their lives including strong stereotypes, additional adult-like responsibilities, hypersexualization, and their outward appearances. When they are being attacked in all facets of their lives, black girls become guarded and defensive, causing them to be labeled as disrespectful and as a result, continue to be further discriminated against and repeating the cycle of

hurt. Morris explains that this could be rooted in the "Constructions of femininity that center on and normalize whiteness penalize Black girls for speaking and acting in defense of their well-being. This definition of femininity casts black girls as unworthy of the compassion and protection given to White girls and women." (Andrews 2019 p. 2534). When black girls step out to defend themselves and explain that they are hurting, they are immediately shut down because they are not seen as worthy of protection and compassion because they do not meet white constructions of femininity. Society forces black girls into stereotypes that do not fit the standards they desire as an excuse to continue the cycle of discrimination, furthering their distractions from their education and leaving them behind their peers.

Section #3: The Importance of Culturally Responsive Strategies

One way that the research supports addressing the discrimination against black girls is by utilizing Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in the classroom. Culturally Responsive Pedagogy is the incorporation of diverse resources in the classroom that represent the diverse cultures brought by the students, such as utilizing black authors in an urban school with a mostly black population. In the book *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain*, Zaretta Hammond explains that "Numerous studies have demonstrated that culturally responsive education can strengthen student connectedness with schools and enhance learning" (Hammond 15). When utilizing Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, students are able to feel connected to their culture and use the skills and cultural background to understand the content they are learning better. Geneva Gay explains that "the academic achievement of ethnically diverse students will

improve when taught through their own cultural and experiential filters (Gay 106). It also helps to connect to the school and educators when they feel like their culture is being respected enough to be taught in the classroom to all students.

While Culturally Relevant Pedagogy can be used in the content being taught within the classroom, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy can extend into all aspects of the school, including the climate and culture of the school that is cultivated by educators. It is important that "Cultural competence and social justice need to inform school policies and be a driving force in the recruitment of new teachers" (Craig 2017 p. 28). Teachers and administrators set the tone for the school and are role models for all students, so it is important when recruiting new teachers, that administrators focus on creating a climate focused on social justice and supportive of all students, especially black girls. Schools are not only used to teach the content in classes but to educate the whole person, including socialization. Morris explains that "What can (and should) be developed and nurtured in educational settings but almost never is, is a deeper awareness of the numerous social factors- related to race, gender, sexuality, disability status, or other identities- that have the power to trigger Black girls and shape their interactions with people in schools" (Morris 2016 p. 86). Culturally Responsive Pedagogy can be used to teach students about the deeper awareness needed for social factors that influence how students interact with each other. When students see the value and perspective in different cultures from their content, they are more likely to develop compassion and empathy for other cultures and that can decrease discrimination within a school.

Another important role of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy is to educate teachers and administrators on new ways to increase cultural awareness. Since educators set an

example for students about how to interact with people who have different cultures from oneself, it is important for them to continuously educate themselves about how to be social justice educators that are culturally responsive. A few ways that administrators can support teachers in being culturally responsive is to "Sponsor schoolwide opportunities to increase cultural awareness among all members of the school community" and "Provide ongoing professional development on how to design and implement culturally competent instruction" (Craig 2017 p. 29). Administrators set the tone for the school and the discrimination within the school, so it is vital for the administration to provide opportunities for teachers to learn Culturally Responsive Pedagogy that they can use in their own classrooms. This can be extended to the students in the classroom because they follow the lead of the administration and teachers who set the example. Evan-Winters and Esposito found that "those students who were most resilient were those young women whose families not only taught them about race, class and gender oppression but also participated in family conversations that explained to them how to combat racist, classist and sexist forces" (13). When students are engaged in understanding the culture and inequities that face them through Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, they are more likely to be resilient and overcome these obstacles.

When considering classroom engagement, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy relates the students' learning to life experiences that not only demonstrates respect for the students' culture but also utilizes critical thinking skills. Due to the content being related to the students' lives, the importance of the content and lessons become clearer to the students, further engaging them. In her article "Culturally Relevant Pedagogy 2.0: a.k.a the Remix," Gloria Landson-Billing explains that:

"By focusing on student learning and academic achievement versus classroom and behavior management, cultural competence versus cultural assimilation or eradication, and sociopolitical consciousness rather than school-based tasks that have no beyond-school application, I was able to see students take both responsibility for and deep interest in their education." (Landson-Billing 76).

Teachers who focus less on discipline and more on their academic growth through Culturally Relevant Pedagogy see a higher rate of engagement in the students learning and not a passive style of learning. Engaging the students in Culturally Responsive Pedagogy allows the students to see how the content will affect their daily lives and the importance of understanding what they are learning. This leads to more engagement and a higher level of overall understanding from the students.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy can be utilized on all levels of a school and is essential in addressing the discrimination felt by black girls and connecting them with the school. From the content being taught in the class to the professional development being offered to the teachers, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy provides new perspectives to students and teachers that will decrease discrimination and directly combat the obstacles faced by black girls in urban schools. According to Zimmerman, "Teachers' negative perceptions of students' behaviors may shape their relationships with students, and in turn impact children's educational futures" (156-157). These student-teacher relationships heavily impact the students' academic success and when they are being actively discriminated against by teachers and administrators, they are further hindered from achieving their goals. The following research study focuses on the connection

between utilizing Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and addressing the direct

discrimination against black girls in urban schools.

Chapter Three

Methodology

Section #1: Sampling Process

When beginning the research process, the researcher reached out to students at two urban high schools in Dayton, Ohio to participate in a focus group and complete a survey about their experiences in schools as African American girls. The first group of students were junior and senior female African American students at an urban school with Dayton Public School District (school #1). The research reached out to every African American girl in all of their classes with an initial survey asking if they would be willing to participate in a focus group and survey about their experiences in schools. Initially, 20 girls were willing to participate but time limits and other obstacles prevented them from participating and we had 8 girls from the first school participate in the focus group. Then, the researcher reached out to the girls at the second urban school in Dayton, Ohio (school #2), and asked if they would fill out the survey. After the focus group, the research sent out a survey to all the African American girls she contacted at both school #1 and school #2, regardless of if they participated in the focus group. For the students' confidentiality, the survey was sent to them using a blind carbon copy via their school emails they provided to the researcher.

Section #2: Setting

Since the research study was conducted in November 2020, the entirety of the research study was virtual due to the Novel Coronavirus- 19 Pandemic. Due toappearancesrch being completed during a pandemic, for the safety of the participants and researcher, the focus group was held via the online video conferencing platform "Zoom." Additionally, the survey provided to the participants was sent to them virtually via a Google form platform which is familiar to the students and was sent to them on their email. Being able to conduct the research on a virtual platform allows for the students to maintain anonymity throughout the study and provide physical safety during a pandemic.

Section #3: Procedure

The students from school #1 were asked to participate in a one-hour virtual focus group on zoom. For their protection and confidentiality, the students were assigned a number which was the name on their zoom call and they kept their video camera off for the duration of the focus group. At the beginning of the focus group, the research read a brief introduction that helped the students understand the nature of the research and the purpose of the focus group. The research then proceeded to ask the students the following questions about their experiences in schools as a black girl:

1.) Do you feel like you are treated differently in school by classmates, teachers, administration, or even district policies compared to other groups such as white girls or male students? If so, why?
2.) What are some experiences you have had that make you feel like you are treated differently?
3.) What are some obstacles you feel like you face in school?

4.) What are some ways that teachers can support you in the classroom? What type of teaching strategies help you feel supported and empowered?

5.) Other comments for the researcher

This helped the researcher to address and understand both the obstacles they are facing as African American girls in school and how teachers can incorporate culturally responsive teaching strategies into their classrooms to support the students' learning.

After the completion of the focus group, the researcher sent out a survey to the participants of the focus group that included 15 questions where the participants ranked statements on a scale of 1 to 5 with one strongly disagreeing, three being neutral, and five being strongly agree. The last part of the survey included eight short answer questions. After the students from the focus group answered the question on the survey, the researcher sent the survey out to the students initially contacted to participate in the focus group for schools #1 and school #2 and asked them to fill out the survey. The survey was sent to the students through a Google form for easy access for them to answer the questions since that is a format they are familiar with and provide a quick analysis of the data for the researcher.

Chapter Four

Results and Analysis of the Data

Section #1: Focus Group Results

When asked if they felt like they were treated differently in school based on their gender and race, many of the students addressed several areas of discrimination ranging from peers to teachers and administration. Black girls feel that teachers and administration are not educated or understanding of black cultural mannerisms and are misunderstood when the students express themselves that way. One of the big ways the students felt discriminated against is when teachers, specifically white teachers, assume that they are having an attitude by the tone in their voices when they are simply expressing themselves. One student explained that in their experience:

> "Oh, we're having an attitude with me now. I'm just having a simple conversation with you, but since I'm a black girl and that stereotypical type of black girl is always mad, a black girl always has an attitude."

Black girls feel that they are often stereotyped as having attitudes when they are simply expressing themselves or may be having a bad day, like their peers. They often feel that teachers are more understanding of white students or black males having bad days, but when black girls have a bad day, they have an attitude and are being disrespectful. Additionally, when the students are more opinionated than their peers, the teacher automatically assumes that they are being rude or challenging the teacher when they are simply sharing their thoughts and ideas. This demonstrates the double standard put on black girls to have to be considerate of how they make others feel comfortable at all times, while teachers and administration do not make the effort to be considerate of black

girls having human emotions. The assumption of black girls' attitude reinforces that stereotype that black girls are rude and emotionless, which is far from the truth.

Black girls also face discrimination from teachers and administration based on their appearance, such as clothing and hairstyles. Many of the students shared stories about how they felt singled out based on how they chose to wear their hair. Some of these experiences include white male teachers making a spectacle when they change their hairstyles. One student shared a common experience where:

> "White male teachers, especially when you change your hairstyle. It's made a big deal when like I remember, I will walk into class, and it's and I know it's not like harmful, but it's kind of like, awkward, especially when they make it a big deal like will be like oh nice hairstyle and then everybody will start looking at you and then the white boys pick on that and just like, Oh, is that your real hair or is that weave and it's just progressing down when a white male does it like know why the teacher does it and then a white student sees that. Oh, I think that's okay. So I'm going to do the same thing."

Black girls in schools notice that teachers set an example for how other students can treat black girls and when they make a big deal out of normal things, black girls feel like they are being singled out by the teachers and students and are treated differently. Black girls do not want to feel like they are any different from other students and when they are singled out by their hair, they feel like they are only being noticed for their outward appearance and how it's different from their peers instead of their intelligence or personality.

The students also felt discriminated against by the administration dress coding them for wearing durags, bonnets, or clothing in general, when other students wear the same things. Additionally, many students shared experiences of being dress-coded by the administration for wearing outfits that are less revealing than white girls. One student explained that:

> "the administration, especially like dress codes. I know that black girls are a little bit curvier than like our peers like white girls. So say if I have on something that's, um, that's kind of not tight but it looks kind of tighter on, say, a black girl than a white girl then the administration will probably dress code me, but you can turn around and see a white girl wear it and oh, its oh, fine"

Administration plays a vital role in setting the tone and an example for students within the school. When black girls see that administration is being stricter on black girls for dress code than their peers, it gives black girls the message that they are in trouble for how they dress and that there is a double standard for them compared to their peers. By consistently dress coding only black girls in the same attire as their peers, the administration is telling black girls that their education is less important than their peers because of their outward appearance.

Black girls also feel discriminated against by their peers based on their appearance. Many of the students in the focus groups commented on how they feel like their peers, especially male students, treat them differently based on their skin color. Black girls are often compared to other black girls based on how dark their skin is, such as if they have darker skin, they face more discrimination from their peers than black girls with lighter skin. This can include friendship and romantic relationships, where if

they have darker skin, they are more likely to be left out or discriminated against by their peers. One student commented on the fetishization of black girls by white male students, but how this is often limited to only black girls with a lighter skin tone. The discrimination from peers on appearance extends into how they wear their hair. The students discuss the discrimination between black girls wearing their natural hair compared to weaves or wigs. The students expressed how when they wear their hair naturally, it is seen as unprofessional or nappy and they are discriminated against by their peers, or they wear weaves or wigs and are made fun of for it not being their own hair. In either situation, black girls are facing discrimination about their appearance, whether it is their skin color or how they wear their hair. A common thread throughout the focus group is that black girls in schools are constantly facing discrimination from their peers, teachers, and administration. This highlights the isolation of black girls in schools and the amount of discrimination that black them from achieving to the best of their academic abilities.

One obstacle faced by black girls in schools includes the inaccuracy of black history being taught in schools. Many of the students felt that their representation in class, including History and English, was inaccurate and contributed to the discrimination within the school from teachers, administration, and students. One of the students spoke up and expressed that:

> "I feel like the education system really fails on teaching black girls and boys about their history as it like as it really was like they have a tendency of whitewashing it and turning it into it's not really truthful and it's a second drawn-out thing."

Unfortunately, the education system and history, in general, has created content that whitewashes history and does not accurately tell African American history by continuing to paint white people in a positive light, when that is not how history happened. This leads to a censored sense of history that continues to enable systematic racisms, especially within the education system. When the history that teachers and students are learning is not accurate, it is hiding how harmful their behaviors are to black girls in schools. This can include not understanding black culture and mannerisms that can be misinterpreted by teachers and administrations, leading to black girls feeling discriminated against.

Another obstacle that black girls face in the education system is the feeling that they have to educate their peers on African American issues, while simultaneously not being heard by teachers and administrators. Especially after the Black Lives Matter Protest in June of 2020, black girls feel the pressure in the school system to speak on all African American issues discussed in classes, therefore having to educate their white peers and teachers about African American history and culture. This prevents black girls from focusing on their own education and learning when they have to act as a teacher too. The students struggled with having to teach students about African American history and culture because it is something that can be easily looked up online by white peers and black girls do not speak for their entire race. Especially with black girls in high schools, they do not want to have to act as the spokesperson for the African American community, they want to focus on being a teenager and their academics.

This reliance on black girls to educate their peers reveals the double standard that they are expected to educate their peers, but only when white people are comfortable

hearing the information. Many of the girls expressed being uncomfortable with talking about their experiences as black girls with white people because they do not want to make them feel uncomfortable too. During the focus group, the students discussed their experience with this by commenting that:

> "I feel like sometimes people of color try to talk about that and people will shy away from it or they say they're uncomfortable. And I feel like it really hurts because you're uncomfortable, but really it's hurting me. And it's affecting my life forever like it's just going to be like that."

This reveals the double standard that black girls are expected to speak on the behalf of the whole African American community during school and when the whitewashed content comes up, but when they want to express their experiences, it makes white people uncomfortable, so they don't bring it up. However, they are ultimately the most uncomfortable in this situation because they are the ones experiencing discrimination at the hands of white people. Yet again, black girls are facing discrimination and obstacles to their education and success in order to make their white peers and teachers comfortable.

During the focus groups, the students identified several ways that teachers and schools can help combat the discrimination being felt by black girls in school. One of the main solutions offered by the students is for schools to hire a more diverse staff, especially more African American teachers. This helps the students to become more comfortable in their environment and supported by staff because they understand the struggles and obstacles that the students are facing. Another solution that was offered by the students is to make sure schools are hiring teachers who actually care about their

students and their jobs. Students notice when a teacher is only there for the paycheck and the best way for them to feel supported is by teachers is to know that they genuinely care about the students and their job. By hiring teachers that care also elevates the level of learning and education in the school because the teachers are going to be putting forward their best effort for the students and combating any discrimination or obstacles all students, but especially black girls, face. Hiring diverse staff that care about their job also helps with another solution the students proposed which is for teachers and school administrators to check on students' mental health and that they actually care about their well-being. When teachers actually care about their job, they are going to do the best they can to support their student's overall well-beingdistinguished, which is important for students, especially black girls, to feel supported. Since there is a stereotype of black girls being unemotional, mean girls, they are often overlooked by educators, and hiring teachers who care and support black girls will help to combat some of the discrimination they face in the school system.

Black girls also need to see the representation of their experiences and culture in the content that they are learning in order to feel more comfortable and supported in school. Many of the students in the focus group highlighted that they would feel more supported and engaged in school if they could relate to the content being taught. While this would be more focused on Social Studies and English classes, giving the students an opportunity to express themselves and learn about experiences they can relate to will help them to feel cared about by teachers and school administrators. This will also decrease the amount of implicit bias and discrimination from peers and teachers within the schools against black girls. One student explained this by saying "Just incorporate more black

people like I'm just tired of reading the same white literature, the same hero complex like let's read something else." This not only helped the students learn a more well-rounded education, but it also helps combat discrimination going on in the school when they are learning more about different cultures. Some of the students also discussed that this can extend outside of the classroom by teaching about current events that affect black girls. One example the students gave was the Black Lives Matter Protest after the death of George Floyd in June 2020. The students expressed that when there is an unlawful killing of a black person in the news, it feels very personal for them and when they come into school, it is important for teachers to acknowledge this and care for the students because they are grieving. The students in the focus group explained that when they can relate to the content being taught and discussed in the classroom, they feel that they are supported and cared about, while also fighting against the discrimination they face on a daily basis.

Throughout the entirety of the focus group, the students helped to identify several obstacles that black girls face such as discrimination based on their hair and the pressure of having to represent all black girls in schools. They also discussed a few solutions to these obstacles such as hiring a more diverse staff and teaching more diverse content. Based on the results of the focus groups, black girls face discrimination and distractions from their education in almost every aspect of their lives.
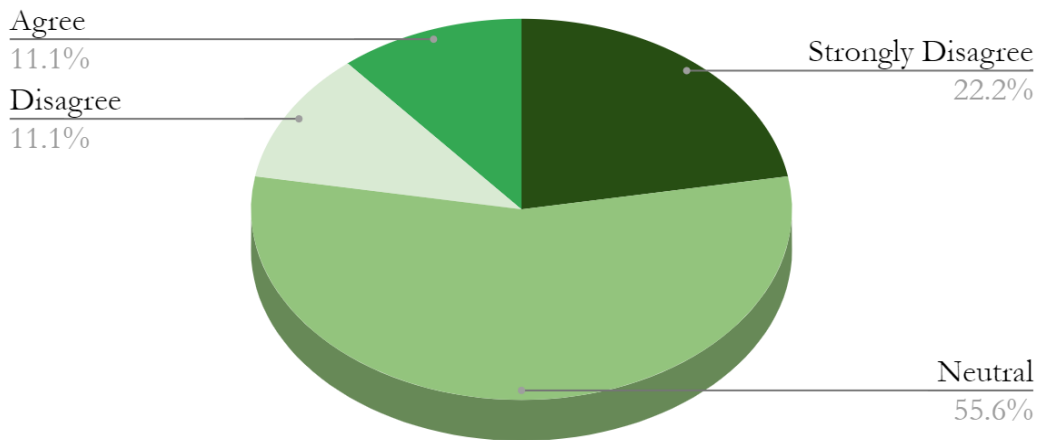
Section #2: Survey Results

After conducting the focus group, participants were asked to complete a survey that further discussed the topics and questions from the focus group. The survey included 15 statements that the girls ranked on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being strongly disagree and

5 being strongly agree with the statement about their experience as a black girl in an urban school. Graph #1, Graph #1, and Graph #3, below demonstrate the findings for three of the statements from the survey. The students chose either strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, or strongly agree with the following statements.
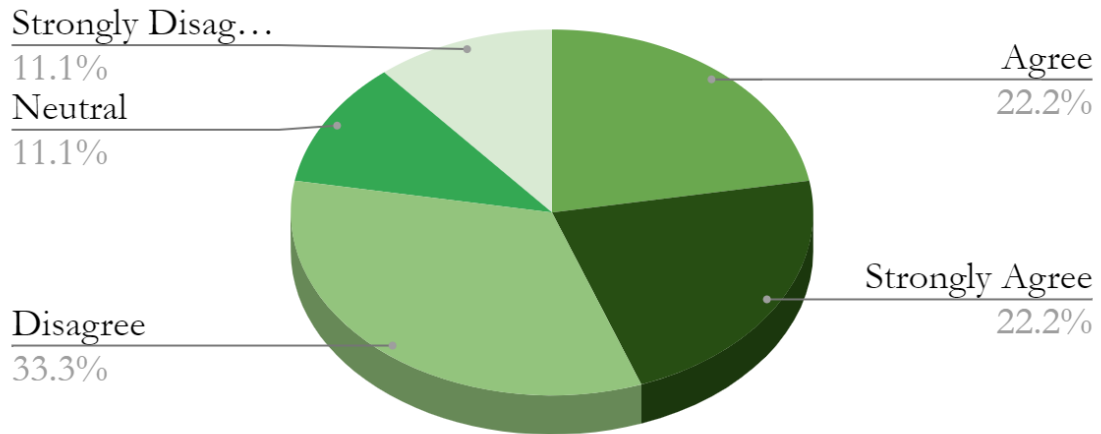
Graph #1

"I feel safe in my school to express myself openly"

Agree
11.1%

Disagree
11.1%

Strongly Disagree
22.2%

Neutral
55.6%

Graph #2

"I feel like I am held to a higher standard for my behavior compared to my peers"

Strongly Disag…
11.1%

Neutral
11.1%

Disagree
33.3%

Agree
22.2%

Strongly Agree
22.2%

Graph #3

"I feel like my life experiences are represented in the content I am learning in school"

Neutral
33.3%

Strongly Disagree
22.2%

Disagree
44.4%
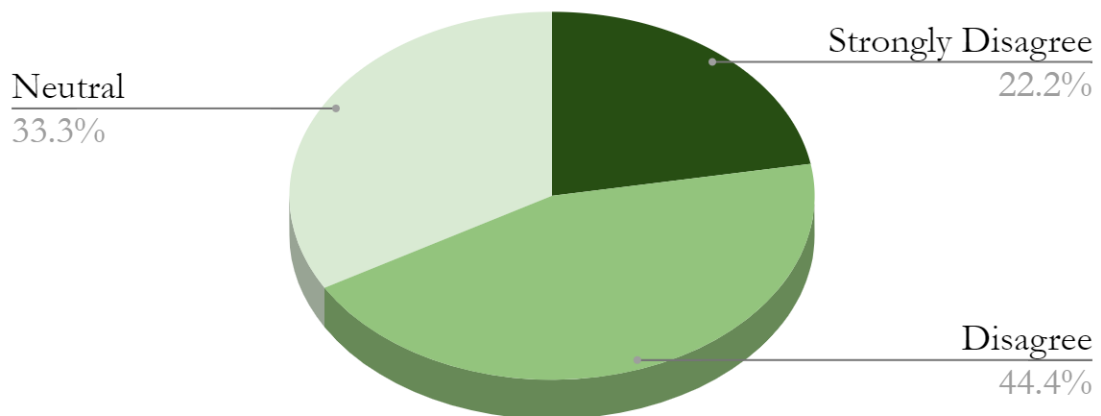
Consistent with the previous research and the focus group results, a majority of

black girls in urban schools feel that they are expected to act more mature than their

peers, and when they do not meet this expectation, they are punished more severely for it compared to their peers. Additionally, in support of previous literature, only 44% of the participants felt that the physical environment of the school supported their learning. This is because one of the schools has metal detectors and all students have their backpacks searched every day upon entering the building, similar to a prison. While a majority of the students don't feel physically safe in their schools, only 22% of the students feel emotionally safe to express themselves within the school as well. In order for students to succeed, all of their basic needs are based on Maslov's Hierarchy of Needs, and one of those basic needs is safety. Students need to feel safe in their environment to vital for students to succeed academically and when black girls are facing constant discrimination from peers and staff, along with the environment of the school, that fundamental need of safety is not being met.

Again, similar to previous research and the focus group, black girls do not see themselves being represented in the content they are learning in school. 0% of the students felt that their life experiences were represented in the content they learn and only 44% of students felt that their race was represented in the content they learn. Along with feeling safe in schools, it is important for students to feel that they are respected and cared about and when they do not learn content that relates to them, they feel like their life experiences are respected and therefore, not cared about by teachers, administration and students. This is why incorporating Culturally Responsive Pedagogy into the classroom is important for students to feel safe and respected, further promoting academic and emotional success for all students, especially black girls.

Graph #4

"Being represented in content I learn at school would help me be more engaged in my learning"
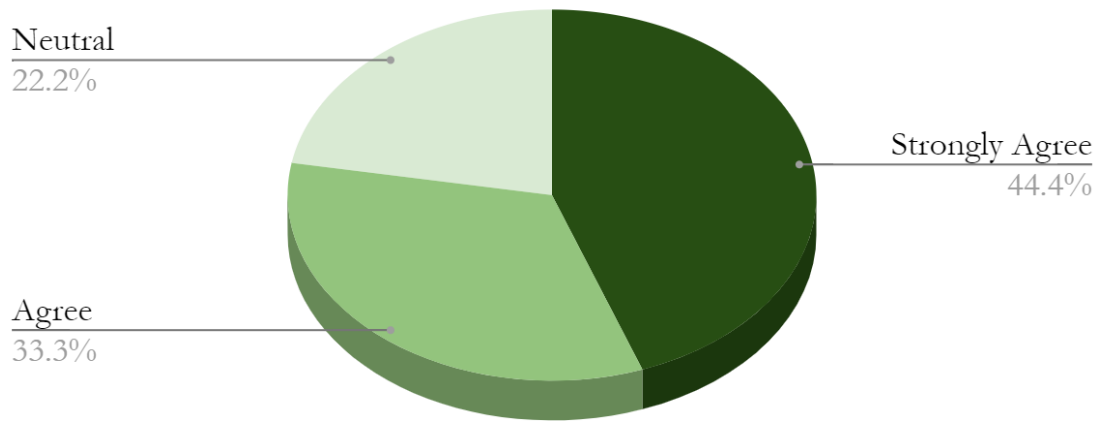
Disagree
11.1%

Neutral
22.2%

Strongly Agree
33.3%

Agree
33.3%
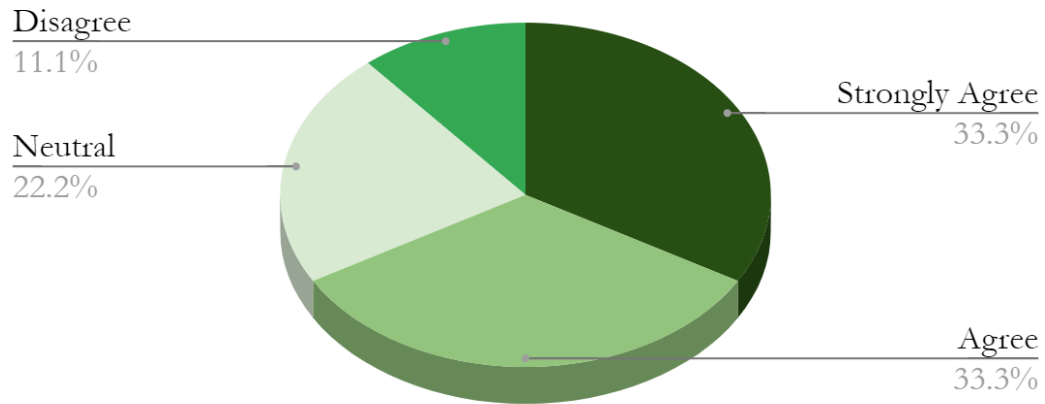
Graph #5

"Learning material that I can relate to makes me feel respected"

Neutral
22.2%

Strongly Agree
55.6%

Agree
22.2%
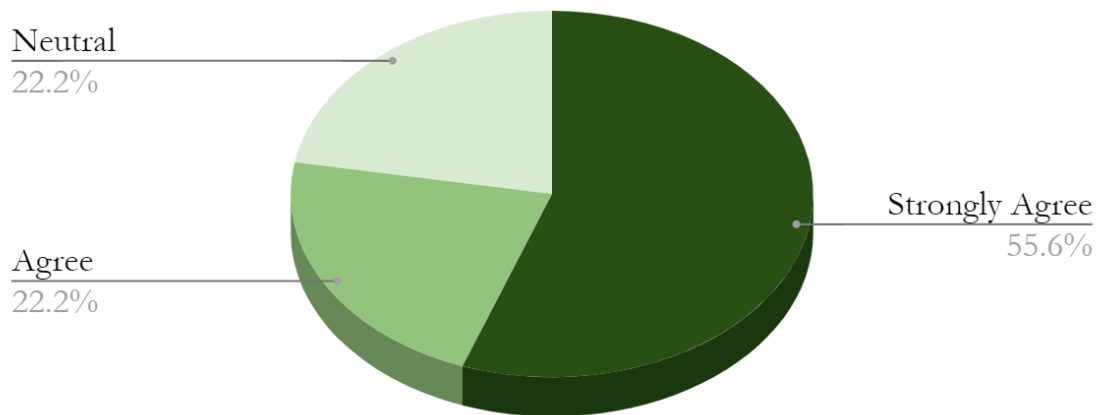
Graph #6

"Learning material that relates to my life would help enhance my experience in school"

During the second half of the survey, the students were asked to rank statements about how teachers and schools can support their learning. Graph #4, Graph #5, and Graph #6 above demonstrated how many students agree with the statement about ways to improve their learning and academic success. According to the participant, 77% of black girls agree that learning content that relates to their life and experiences would enhance their experience and make them feel more respected in schools. Additionally, 66% of the students agree that they would be more engaged in their learning if the content they learned represented their life experiences, including race and gender. The data above supports the research that utilizing Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in the classroom would improve black girls' experiences in schools, combating discrimination by making them feel respected and cared for by teachers and administration.

After the participants ranked the statements based on if they agreed or disagreed with them, the survey participants answered eight short answer questions. One of the

questions asked the participants to describe their relationship with teachers at their respective schools. A couple of the participants commented on exceptional relationships with their teachers, but a majority of the students felt that they either had no relationship or a bad relationship with their teachers. Many of the students mentioned that they felt a lack of respect from the teacher and a lack of willingness to help them when they ran into a problem in their school work. While some of them drew the distinction between just having an amicable, but average, student-teacher relationship, others explained that "[she's] had white teachers most of my life with almost none who look like me. As far as relationships go I know my teachers to an extent. I've never felt like they respected me or cared about if I needed help on work if there were other kids there because I'm supposed to have all the answers." Many of the students shared this sentiment that the teacher knew them on a surface level but did not respect them or discriminated against them because of their race.

Similarly, when asked about their relationship with the administration, every student mentioned that they do not have a relationship at all or a negative relationship. As mentioned in the focus group, the administration is stricter on dress codes for black girls compared to their white peers, creating a negative relationship between the students and administration. One student characterized it as a "prison/ prison warden" relationship. This is not conducive to creating a safe environment when the students feel respected and cared about, especially from leaders within the building. Having a good relationship between administration and students, especially black girls, helps to set an example for other students about how to treat students of color. These powerful relationships are especially important between the administration of color for black girls. One of the girls

explained that "My relationship with the administration at my 8th-grade school was great. She was my color and would communicate with my parents if I wasn't getting something or she noticed something was wrong. She helped all the kids with their math work and even taught us a bit extra." This relationship between an administrator of color provides black girls with an example of leadership and support for the students, while actively fighting discrimination within the school on a higher level in the school.

When asked about some obstacles they face outside of school, a few of the students commented that their home lives and mental health made academic success more challenging for them. While both factors can be obstacles for any student, as black girls, they are at higher levels and are often dismissed by teachers, administrators, and even family. As mentioned previously in the focus group, black girls feel that their mental health is often dismissed because of the stereotype that they are mean and emotionless, when that is far from the truth. Additionally, the students mentioned that their home life, such as relationships with parents and responsibilities around the house can cause distractions for them from their schoolwork and add more pressure than they already face with their school work.

At the end of the survey, the students were asked to suggest ways that teachers and schools can support black girls and, similar to the focus group, the students recommended that schools hiring a more diverse staff, furthering education on black culture, and providing more opportunities for black girls and students of color in general. Like the story of the girl who could relate to her African American administrator, having staff that reflects the cultures of the students in the school helps students to envision themselves in positions of leadership, along with actively fighting against discrimination

in the school. The relationship between black girls and African American administrators also offers a support system that understands the pressures that black girls are facing in high schools. Another way that educators can support black girls according to the survey is by educating school staff and students about black culture and history. By educating students and staff about black culture, they are able to better understand black students and their mannerisms, leading to less discrimination within the school because there is a mutual understanding. Lastly, a few students mentioned that black girls would feel more supported if schools provided more opportunities for black girls through clubs, classes, scholarships, or educating them about Historically Black Colleges and Universities. This will add to educating staff and students about black culture, along with providing black girls with unique opportunities that will empower them and give them agency in their future plans.

Section #3: Limitations and Strengths

After the completion of the research, there are some limitations in the process that should be considered. The first limitation is with the global COVID-19 pandemic that began in March 2020. This limited the research methods that can be utilized because it was unsafe for the researcher and the participants to conduct research in person and had to be moved to a virtual setting. Additionally, it was challenging to keep participants accountable for completing the survey and attending the focus group because all communication was through email with the restrictions of being entirely virtual. Another limitation to the data is the consideration that the two high schools used are urban schools that actively work against discrimination and racism in their schools. While that does not

mean there is no discrimination within the high school, the efforts made by educators have decreased some of the discrimination meaning that many of the girls have had more positive experiences than other black girls across the nation. That does not negate their experiences as invalid, it is just believed that some of the numbers and findings would demonstrate high levels of discrimination with different urban schools.

One of the strengths offered in the research is the utilization of black women in all aspects of the research. When finding sources for the literature review, I relied on almost entirely black female authors and only black girls in the focus group and survey. This is because they provide the best insight into the research because they live through the experiences and are first-hand sources for the research. The research also provides insight on several aspects of discrimination faced by black girls and their roots, along with different solutions to combat the discrimination that can be implemented on every level of the education system, from students to administration. Lastly, this research is grounded in education needs at the time with the relevance and prominence of the Black Lives Matter movement in support of ending racial inequities in the United States. This research extends this historical movement into the classroom and the role educators play in addressing these inequities.

Chapter Five

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Section #1: Significance of the Study

The significance of this research lies in the lack of academic research on the subject of the adultification and criminalization of black girls. While there are a few strongly supported research studies and resources done on black girls, a majority of the focus of the research has been on black boys. There is a need for research on the discrimination and criminalization facing black boys, but black girls are often left out of the conversation on discrimination and forced to act as if the discrimination is not occurring. It is important for the research to identify the discrimination they face and educators' role in decreasing the discrimination they face within the school. Education is the basis of all learning for students, so it sets the tone for how students will be socialized and taught, which is why it is important for teachers to be educated on the discrimination faced by students and some of the solutions that they can utilize to combat the inequities in the school.

Since education is the basis for all student's learning, it is important for teachers to be social justice advocates and allies for all of their students. As a social justice educator, students need to have a teacher that understands their struggles and how they can make their students feel safe. Students have the right to feel safe in their school to learn and be vulnerable enough to struggle productively and make progress in their education. It is important to provide safe spaces for all students when being a social justice advocate and part of that is decreasing the discrimination they will face in the schools, specifically the classroom, and being respectful and supportive of their cultural backgrounds.

This research is also significant and relevant because of the Black Lives Matter Movement that has taken place over the past few years, but specifically during the Summer of 2020. The Black Lives Matter movement has brought to light a lot of inequities in society against the black community and many of those inequities are in the education system. Through the movement, it has become apparent that there are many double standards held against black girls such as behavioral expectations, defense of self, and outward appearance such as clothing. This research further examines these inequities that black girls face in schools and aligns its solutions with the current Black Lives Matter movement in regards to reducing the discrimination and double standards that face the black community, like further educating all students and educators about Black culture, which is the purpose of this research study.

Section #2: Summary of the Study

Throughout the study, students have proven that black girls face a variety of obstacles within schools including discrimination based on their appearance, their mannerism, and lack of education on African American culture and mannerisms. Since black girls are quickly judged on their appearance and the lack of education on their mannerisms, they are often discriminated against for their behavior and expected to be mature, leading to the adultification of black girls. Black girls are often stereotyped as sassy, unemotional, hypersexual, and rude, causing people to believe they are older than they are and holding them to a higher standard than their peers. However, Black girls deserve to be treated like their peers and not held to higher standards for their behavior because of the added pressure of being expected to be more mature and the obstacles that come with that distract them from their academic success. Because teachers and

administrators expect black girls to be more mature, when they act their age and disagree with someone, they are assumed to be disrespectful towards authority figures. This stems from the lack of education on behalf of the education system on African American culture and mannerisms. Due to teachers, administrators, and students lacking a well-rounded education of African American culture, they often make assumptions and microaggressions based on stereotypes that they are familiar with causing black girls to feel less respected and cared for compared to their peers. This misunderstanding of black girls' maturity leads to harsher punishments for their behavior, causing a criminalization of black girls in schools.

In urban schools, black girls do not feel physically or emotionally safe in schools due to the environment of the schools and the higher punitive punishments for their behaviors based on the assumption that they are more mature than their peers. Throughout the study, many of the students emphasized that they do not feel like the physical environment of the school and their relationships with administration supported their learning and mirrored a prison environment. Additionally, they felt that they were often singled out or treated unfairly for their behaviors compared to their peers. One common example of this is for what they wear like if they wear an outfit, they will be dress coded and asked to change, while a white girl can wear the same outfit and not be asked to change. This criminalization can be extended into other situations where a black girl may ask a question or voice an opinion and teachers instantly assume it is disrespectful and send them to the principal's office. Furthermore, black girls feel that even talking about black issues or topics have been criminalized because it makes white people uncomfortable, but ultimately they are the ones suffering from the discrimination

and injustices. All of the obstacles faced by black girls in schools stem from the miseducation of black culture throughout the education system.

Despite the systematic discrimination faced by black girls, there are a few solutions to help combat these obstacles in schools, such as hiring a more diverse staff, utilizing Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in the classroom, and further educating school staff on African American culture and mannerisms. During the focus group and survey, the students felt that they would be more supported in schools if districts hired staff that reflected the cultures within the school. This will help students feel respected and more cared for when they have leadership that understands the obstacles and struggles that the students are facing. This will also help to further educate the school staff and students within the school because they will have more experience with people of other ethnicities and genders to help them become more understanding of cultural differences. Educators need to be further educated on the realities of African American culture and history instead of the whitewashed history that is often in textbooks. Once the teachers and administrators have been properly trained and educated on African American culture, this can extend into Culturally Responsive Pedagogy into the classroom with students. This can include incorporating current events with Black Lives Matter, utilizing African American authors, going more in-depth with African American history, and discussing African American Achievements in the field of study. This will help to create a well-rounded education for students, teachers, and administrators that will combat the inequities and discrimination felt by black girls in schools.

Section #3: Conclusions

After the completion of the study, several conclusions regarding the reality of black girls' experiences in schools and the role of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in combating the inequities they are facing. When addressing the first research question, *What are some of the inequities facing black girls in schools?,* the study revealed several inequities including misunderstanding of mannerisms, discrimination based on appearance, lack of mental health support, and not feeling physically or emotionally safe in school. Due to the stereotype placed on black girls, they are often misunderstood by authority figures as disrespectful, when in reality they are simply expressing themselves or maybe having a bad day. Black girls are automatically classified as sassy or rude based on their skin color, which is often not the case but can lead black girls to be punished at a higher rate than their peers. Additionally, black girls are often singled out or punished for their appearances such as their hairstyle or clothing which can cause them to become embarrassed for feeling like they are only being noticed for their appearance. By being embarrassed, black girls do not feel emotionally safe to express themselves in schools because they feel like their culture is not respected by teachers and administrators. They also feel physically unsafe in urban schools when they have metal detectors and have their bags searched every day. All of the pressure and injustices can wear on the students, affecting their mental health, however, many black girls lack the support needed to meet their needs within their family and the school itself. Along with the typical pressures faced by adolescents, black girls face additional obstacles because of their race, gender, and societal pressures.

The study also addressed the second research question, *How does adultification and criminalization impact black girls' education?,* by analyzing the effect on their academic success by creating distractions for black girls in schools. Due to the obstacle mentioned previously, black girls are often distracted from their school work because they are being punished for not meeting the higher expectations placed on them by teachers and administrators. When they are being punished, they are not being able to focus on their academics or even removed from the classroom itself. Additionally, because of the discrimination they are facing by being adultified and criminalized by authority figures, black girls lack the mutual respect and care needed to feel engaged and supported in their learning, further distracting them from the content and destroying their desire to learn. Many of the students felt that because they were black girls, some teachers do not support them or answer their questions in class, putting them further behind their peers. Black girls feel that the discrimination and obstacles they face because of their skin color and gender, along with the higher expectations placed on them to be more adult-like, has negatively affected their academic performance.

Finally, the study analyzes the last research question, *what is the role of culturally responsive literature in empowering adolescent girls?,* by analyzing the impact of incorporating the students' cultural background into the classroom. The survey and focus group supported the claim that black girls would be more engaged and feel more supported in the classroom and by administrators if they saw their experiences and culture represented in the content they were learning in the classroom. When students are given examples of successful people and experiences that reflect them, students are more likely to feel empowered to achieve their goals. Specifically, in regards to culturally

responsive literature, students are more likely to enjoy reading literature that they can relate to, furthering their understanding of the content they are learning in the classroom. When combating the obstacles and discrimination black girls face in schools, Culturally Responsive Literature can empower and educate them and their peers, increasing everyone's understanding of African American culture and decreasing discrimination based on misunderstandings.

Section #4: Recommendations for Educators

Looking into the future, this study revealed a few recommendations for educators to combat discrimination and obstacles for black girls in urban schools. One of the main recommendations is to incorporate Culturally Responsive Pedagogy into their classrooms. This includes teaching content that reflects the diverse cultures present in your classroom, but when specifically addressing obstacles for black girls, utilizing black female authors or historical moments for black women. This will provide an example of successful black women for them that can empower them to achieve their goals and overcome these obstacles. It also demonstrates respect and care for black girls in the classroom, allowing them to feel safe and focus on academic success. Utilizing Culturally Responsive Pedagogy also educates other students in the classroom that are not represented by the content about the different cultures in the classroom and can decrease discrimination and microaggressions against black girls. Culturally Responsive Pedagogy engages other students in critical thinking when thinking about how black girls feel, creating compassion and understanding.

In regards to English Language Arts, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy is significantly beneficial through the use of diverse literature and authors. Unfortunately, the education system has put a heavy emphasis on white, eurocentric male authors and their writing, such as Charles Dickens, Mark Twain, and William Shakespeare. While there is literary merit in those author's writing, it is important to introduce all students to different styles and authors to give them a well-rounded education. Additionally, as supported by the survey results, black girls will be more engaged and interested in their education when they see themselves and their experiences represented in the content they are learning. There are a plethora of diverse authors with unique cultural backgrounds and identities that write literature of the same literary merit as white, eurocentric authors, such as Toni Morrison, Zora Neale Hurston, and Maya Angelou. Attached in Appendix D is a list of literature written by black women that can be incorporated into a high school English classroom. It is important for students to see themselves represented in the stories they are reading and help other students understand their perspectives.

Another way to combat the discrimination faced by black girls is by providing students with opportunities to talk about their experiences and contribute to the conversation and content they are learning. When discussing content that the students can relate to and have experience with, give the students opportunities to contribute their knowledge and understanding of the topic to the discussion. This can include letting them present on topics they are passionate about or interested in learning about or choose a novel that they want to read. By allowing the students to take ownership of their learning, they are going to be more engaged in their learning and become independent learners. Specifically regarding black girls, providing black girls the opportunity to share their

experiences, as it relates to the content, gives other students insight on obstacles and discrimination black girls face in schools. An example of this would be giving black girls the opportunity to present on beauty standards in the United States and the different white and black girls while reading *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison. This experience will allow black girls to bring their cultural background knowledge into the classroom, while also further educating their classmates about something they are passionate about. Providing the opportunity for black girls is beneficial, but it is also a wonderful opportunity for all students to talk about something they are passionate about, keeping them engaged in the content and creating a Universal Design for Learning that supports all students.

When bringing in the students' cultural backgrounds, teachers can support black girls learning by engaging the class in current events that pertain to the students and the content. Students are more engaged in their learning when they can see the connection and application to their real life, so when connecting the content to current events provides that for the students. Especially with the Black Lives Matter Protest in June of 2020, black students have felt a lot of pressure, and giving them a safe space for them to talk about their feelings releases some stress allowing them to focus on their academics. Additionally, this demonstrates respect and care for black girls, when the teachers and students are engaged in world events that affect their lives. During the focus group, some of the students mentioned that during the Black Lives Matter movement, they did not feel like the teachers supported their passion for a movement that directly affected their lives and it discouraged them from caring about it. The teacher's main job is to teach the students and content and in order to do that, students need to feel supported in their needs

and having a safe space to talk about events in the world that affect them. Engaging all students in current world events not only helps them relate the content to their lives, but it also helps to educate students on perspectives that are different from their own, decreasing discrimination because of the development of compassion.

Along with educating students about different cultures, another way to combat discrimination against young black girls is to educate teachers and administrations about African American culture. American history has whitewashed history and eliminated the truth surrounding African American history due to the discrimination the African American community has faced, causing systemic racism that is prominent in the education system. As educators and life-long learners, it is our responsibility to act as social justice advocates and fight against injustices in the education system, which involves educating all staff about discrimination in the school. This can take the form of Professional Development, weekly meetings, or even discussions between teachers and administrators. It is vital for educators to continuously educate themselves on race and gender to fully support their students and create a safe space for them to learn. Students need educated teachers who will be flexible to support their unique needs, especially for black girls.

It is also important for schools to hire diverse staff members that reflect the diversity within the school. No matter how much people educate themselves on the topic, they will never truly understand the experience of being a black girl and some of the obstacles they face. This is why it is important for black girls to have teachers that reflect their skin color and gender so that they have a support system that truly understands their life experiences. During the focus group, some of the girls mentioned they felt like

having a black female teacher would make them feel more comfortable in the classroom because they would have a deeper connection with the teacher. This provides a safer environment for them to learn. A diverse staff also provides different perspectives and ideas that can improve the school for the students based on their unique cultures and backgrounds, while also providing role models for the students because they can see themselves in leadership positions and making a change in the school. Hiring a diverse staff of teachers and administrators provides a great example for black girls and simultaneously provides them with a safe, supportive environment to learn in with teachers who understand their life experiences.

In order to address and combat the discrimination and injustice facing black girls in schools, reform needs to occur on every level within a school district. Beginning on a district level by addressing curriculum needs that do not address Culturally Relevant pedagogy in the classrooms. Within the school itself, administrators need to be examining and addressing bias within themselves and other teachers to combat microaggressions and other discrimination within each classroom. Teachers need to be making an active effort to educate their class on Black culture and mannerisms through culturally responsive strategies. This will help them address some of the implicit biases within themselves and challenge the other students in the classroom to look at their own biases and how they contribute to discrimination against black girls. Education is the foundation of all of society and it is vital for the education system to support and actively fight against the discrimination of black girls in urban schools.

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Appendix A
INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH
Surveys and Interviews
Research Project Title: Adultification and Criminalization of Young Black Girls: A Case Study Using Culturally Responsive Education to Empower Adolescent Girls in an Urban School

You have been asked to participate in a research project conducted by Jordan Bailes from the University of Dayton, in the Department of Teacher Education.

The purpose of the project is to identify the role of culturally responsive teaching strategies in combating the adultification and criminalization of young black girls in schools.

You should read the information below, and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

- Your participation in this research is voluntary. You have the right not to answer any question and to stop participating at any time for any reason. Answering the questions will take about 60 minutes.
- You will not be compensated for your participation.
- All of the information you tell us will be confidential
- If this is a recorded interview, only the researcher and faculty advisor will have access to the recording and it will kept in a secure place.
- If this is a written or online survey, only the researcher and faculty advisor will have access to your responses. If you are participating in an online survey: We will not collect identifying information, but we cannot guarantee the security of the computer you use or the security of data transfer between that computer and our data collection point. We urge you to consider this carefully when responding to these questions.
- I understand that I am ONLY eligible to participate if I am over the age of 18.

Please contact the following investigators with any questions or concerns:

Jordan Bailes, bailesj2@udayton.edu, (513) 907-4270

Dr. Novea McIntosh, nmcintosh1@udayton.edu, (937) 206-0812

If you feel you have been treated unfairly, or you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please email IRB@udayton.edu or call (937) 229-3515.

Appendix B- Survey Questionaire

Research Questions About Educational Experience

Please fill out the following question as truthfully as possible. Your answers will remain anonymous. 1 meaning "I strongly disagree with this statement" 3 meaning "I am neutral about this statement" and 5 being "I strongly agree with this statement"

I feel like I am respected by my teachers in my classes *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	O	O	O	O	O	Strongly Agree

I feel like I am respected by my peers in my classes *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	O	O	O	O	O	Strongly Agree

I feel like I am held to a higher standard for my behavior compared to my peers *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	O	O	O	O	O	Strongly Agree

I feel like I am treated fairly for my behavior compared to my peers *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	O	O	O	O	O	Strongly Agree

For the most part, I feel like my teachers support my learning *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	O	O	O	O	O	Strongly Agree

I feel like my physical school environment provides a safe space for me to learn

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	O	O	O	O	O	Strongly Agree

I feel safe in my school to express myself openly

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	O	O	O	O	O	Strongly Agree

Research Question about Representation

Please fill out the following question as truthfully as possible. Your answers will remain anonymous. 1 meaning 'I strongly disagree with this statement' 3 meaning 'I am neutral about this statement' and 5 being 'I strongly agree with this statement'

I feel like my life experiences are represented in the content I am learning in school *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly Agree

I feel like my race is represented in the content I am learning in school *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly Agree

I feel like my gender is represented in the content I am learning in school *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly Agree

Learning material that relates to my life would help enhance my experience in school *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly Agree

Learning material that I can relate to makes me feel respected *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly Agree

Being represented in content I learn at school would help me be more engaged in my learning *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly Agree

Being represented in content I learn at school would help me be more interested in my learning *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly Agree

Research Questions About Personal Experiences

Description (optional)

Describe your relationships with your teachers *

Long answer text

Describe your relationships with the administration at your school *

Long answer text

What are some outside factors that impact your experience in school? *

Long answer text

Please explain any experiences where you felt like you were treated differently in school because of your race or gender *

Long answer text

What are some ways that schools can support young black women? *

Long answer text

Give an example of how teachers can support young black women? *

Long answer text

Please use this space to say anything you would like the researcher to know about your experience in schools as a young black woman and how teachers and schools can support your growth. *

Long answer text

How has COVID precautions such as virtual and hybrid classes impacted your experiences in school? *

Long answer text

Appendix C- Focus Group Questionnaire

1. Do you feel like you are treated differently in school by classmates, teachers, administration, or even district policies compared to other groups such as white girls or male students? If so, why?

2. What are some experiences you have had that make you feel like you are treated differently?

3. What are some obstacles you feel like you face in school?

4. What are some ways that teachers can support you in the classroom? What type of teaching strategies help you feel supported and empowered?

5. Other comments for the researcher

Appendix D- Additional Literature Resources

- *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools* by Monique Morris

- *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison

- *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neal Hurston

- *Brown Girl Dreaming* by Jaqueline Woodson

- *Well-Read Black Girl* by Glory Edim

- *Soft Magic* by Upile Chisala

- *Nectar* by Upile Chisala

- *Fire Like You* by Upile Chisala

- Various Poetry by Maya Angelou

- "Still I Rise"

- "Continue"

- "Caged Bird"

- And many more

- *The State of Black Girls: A Go-To Guide to Creating Safe Spaces for Black Girls* by Marline Francois-Madden LCSW

- *I Know Why the Cage Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou

- *Ain't I a Woman?: Black Girls and Feminism* by bell hooks