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**A Call for Radical Action: How Ordinary Racism, Superimposition of White Values, and The Hyper-Visible- Invisible Dichotomy Are Pushing Black Girls Out of Schools**

Joselina Tejada

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A Call for Radical Action: How Ordinary Racism, Superimposition of White Values, and The  
Hyper-Visible- Invisible Dichotomy Are Pushing Black Girls Out of Schools

By

Joselina Tejada

Dual Language / Bilingual Childhood Special and General Education

Mentor:

Mimi Rosenberg

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### **Abstract**

This paper explains and analyzes how ordinary racism, superimposition of white values, and the hypervisible-invisible dichotomy operate in K-12 schools to stymie the academic and socio emotional development of Black girls, criminalize them, and push them out of schools. A scholarly review of the literature featuring Black feminist scholars is presented. Embedded throughout are the thoughts of the author, a first generation Latinx woman of color and elementary school teacher. Highlighted as well are the powerful voices of Black girls describing their damaging experiences with racism, both micro and macro aggressions, in schools. Two prominent themes emerge in identifying the ways in which schools render Black girls invisible, hypervisible and crush their academic spirits and freedom to be themselves: 1) false beliefs about Black girls' academic potential, stereotypes and perceptions about Black girls' behaviors, 2) emphasis on Black girls conforming to White values. Recommendations that are rooted in highly successful historical and current models for building on individual and community strengths among African American girls and women are offered for supporting teachers and schools in addressing and changing racist beliefs and practices. This urgent call for action includes building teachers' understanding of the racialized gendered contexts through which Black girls experience the world. Black Feminist Theory, Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality are offered as critical areas of study for educators. Literacy circles, mirror books, and family engagement are also posed as avenues for addressing the academic and social emotional needs of Black girls.

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## Introduction

Research has shown that across the board students require various precursors in their school setting if they are to thrive academically and personally. According to the School Discipline Consensus Report (2014, p. xl), “The extent to which students are safe, connected, engaged, and supported in their classrooms and schools —collectively known as the ‘conditions for learning’— is critical to their academic and personal success.” Yet the abyss between what the reports states are necessary conditions for learning and what young Black girls report experiencing in school could not be greater. A quick internet search of Black girls’ experiences in schools will yield a breadth of headlines showing that young Black girls are being detained in schools at alarming rates. One disturbing example is that of a six-year-old arrested in Florida for a temper tantrum (Brinkman, 2019). Other headlines will show parents battling schools that have shut their talented daughters out of advanced courses (Lindholm, 2018). And Black girls looking to sources out of schools to find engaging books that reflect their identities, can be found in the case of Marley Dias, an eleven-year-old who made headlines in her #1000blackgirlbooks campaign after she became frustrated about only being given unrelatable books to read at school (Flood, 2016).

For many Black girls, schools are spaces that neither promote academic nor personal success, instead they are toxic and traumatizing environments (Carter et al, 2019). A recent boom in literature led by authors such as Monique Morris and Dr. Dorinda Carter Andrews has brought much needed attention to the experiences and voices of young Black girls in schools. The focus of this thesis will be to provide an analysis of the current literature on Black girls’ experiences in K-12 schools. In the analysis I will provide a discussion of the variables that are

pushing Black girls out of schools and rendering school building traumatic environments. In particular I will explore the concepts: ordinary racism, the hypervisible-invisible dichotomy, and superimposition of whiteness; I will discuss how they operate to stymie the academic and socio emotional development of Black girls and push them out of schools both figuratively and literally. Integral to this work will be centering the voices of young Black girls and the expertise of Black women scholars. Undergirding my analysis are principles of Critical Race Theory and Black Feminist Theory. Critical Race Theory emphasizes the notion that “race and racism are central, endemic, permanent and fundamental in defining and explaining how U.S. society functions.” (Evans-Winters and Esposito, 2010, p.15) Black Feminist Theory poses that socially and politically Black women have to deal with the concept of the “double bind” which refers to being Black and being a woman. Hill Collins (2000) conceptualized the notion that the multiple systems of oppression are interlocked and bring about their own unique set of challenges. Black girls face unique challenges in schools due their gender and racial status; those challenges are explored below.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Ordinary Racism Against Black Girls in Academic Settings**

Ladson-Billings and Tate demonstrated in 1995 how Critical Race Theory, a legal theoretical framework at the time, could be applied in school settings to address the racialized experiences of Black children. The theory has been instrumental in understanding how racism operates within academic settings and the vehicles through which racist practices can be deconstructed (Evans-Winters and Esposito, 2010). CRT has five major tenets, one tenet of concern for this thesis is that of ‘ordinary racism.’ Delgado and Stefancic, 2001 explain that

ordinary racism means that racism is difficult to cure or address because it exists everywhere.

They further elaborate:

Conceptions of equality, expressed in rules that insist only on treatment that is the same across the board, can thus remedy only the most blatant forms of discrimination, such as mortgage redlining or the refusal to hire a Black Ph.D. (p.7).

However more insidious and less blatant forms of racism continue to thrive in all areas of schooling. Stereotypes and false beliefs about Black girls have led to insidious racist practices such as a clear deviation in the academic and emotional support teachers believe they need to provide them in comparison to White students (Epstein, Blake, and Gonzalez' 2017). These false beliefs are particularly harmful to Black girls because strong student-teacher bonds have been shown to be vital for students' self esteem and their academic performance. Durham & Hebert (2008) share that "there is nothing more satisfying for students than a teacher demonstrating confidence in their ability." The connection between teachers and students is so critical, that when educators form bonds with their students and believe in students' potential to succeed they behave in a manner that promotes academic success and leads students to make greater gains. The power of this dynamic in the classroom remains one of the most important predictors of students' academic success (Durham & Herbert, 2008).

Epstein, Blake, and Gonzalez' 2017 survey of 325 American adults found that adults generally believe that compared to white girls of the same age, Black girls need less nurturing, less protection, less support, and less comfort. Study participants also perceive Black girls as more independent and more knowledgeable about sex and adult topics. The effects of the false beliefs are felt acutely by Black girls as they struggle to receive recognition and support by their



own teachers. One clear example is the experience of Destiny, a high school student Monique Morris interviewed in her 2016 book, *“Pushout”*. At sixteen Destiny was taking advanced placement courses and had shown interest in robotics, engineering, and art. In conversation with Morris, Destiny shared her observations of how Black students were treated by educators that clearly show false beliefs about Black girls needing less support in action.

“I’ve noticed that other races get more, like, special attention in class. Like if they’re struggling or like, if they want to see the teacher after class, I noticed that the teacher will be more willing to help them after class.” (Morris, 2016, p.39)

Destiny then went onto describe dismissive reactions when she sought support from teachers such as when her geometry teacher rushed her out of the classroom after she asked for help and another teachers told her “Well, you can stop by for ten or fifteen minutes, but you know, I’m not going to wait afterschool for an hour or something” (p.39). Morris describes the negative responses and limited support Destiny received from her teachers as “traumatic,” (p.39) they stymied her academic development and sent her the message that she did not have the same opportunities as other students in the school. Destiny eventually entered the prison-pipeline system and by the time she was interviewed by Morris she had been confined to a juvenile facility in which the quality and rigor of her education greatly declined, a function of the curriculum and instruction she was now being offered (p.40).

Low academic expectations is another form of ordinary racism that Black girls, regardless of their actual performance, must contend with. Implicit bias is at the heart of the center of low teacher expectations for Black girls. Implicit biases are the unconscious attribution of particular qualities (typically negative) people project onto members of a certain social group

(Greenwald and Banaji, 1995). In a 2020 study, Copur-Gencturk, Cimpian, Lubienski, & Thacker found that while teachers evaluate students' concrete correct responses on math work equally along racial and gender lines, they demonstrate bias when evaluating tasks that leave room for teacher subjectivity and partial credit. They generally assume that girls, and especially girls of color, have lower math abilities than boys of all races. According to their findings, the lowest-rated group for mathematical ability was always girls of color. Teachers' low expectations do not remain hidden to Black girls. Neal-Jackson's 2018 meta-ethnographic review found that Black female students consistently felt that school officials possessed low expectations for them: "In some cases, despite their placement in advanced courses, the students felt that their teachers assumed that they had low academic abilities and a limited future beyond high school simply because of their race and gender." Students' accounts reviewed in Neal-Jackson, 2018 revealed that Black girls understood that Whiteness formed the basis for assumptions of intellectual potential and therefore only White students had access to be perceived and treated as academically competent. I pose that these findings considered in context with the impact of teacher perception on student performance demonstrates that Black girls are placed at a significant disadvantage for academic achievement.

Black girls in Neal-Jackson's study perceived low expectations from teachers and school personnel to be directly related to their racial, and at times gender identities because they were consistently measured against their White peers' perceived superiority. The young women across the studies reviewed reported that school officials relied on prevailing stereotypes of Black women to interpret the actions of Black female students. As such, the young women felt that school officials assumed that *every* Black female student would behave consistent with

stereotypical portrayals. Students' statements indicate a lack of genuine connection and trust between teachers and students. Strong bonds between teachers and students are dependent on being able to form individualized connections in which both parties feel seen and respected. However, I theorize it is impossible for students to feel truly seen or connected if they believe that they are consistently stereotyped by educators.

The adverse effects of low teacher expectations for Black girls are so significant that statistics show that even when Black girls are high achieving and highly motivated, they still receive less academic opportunities than their white peers. A 2020 study titled *Missing in Action* by Henry Collins, Joseph, and Ford stated that "nationally, Black girls are underrepresented by 40% in gifted education." (p.57) How is this possible? Quantitative studies such as Campbell's, 2012 survey have tackled this question. Campbell examined responses from 853 Black tenth grade girls to uncover how students' behavior influenced teachers' decisions to recommend them for gifted programs. Campbell's study showed that white students who participated every day were more likely to be recommended for honors or advanced courses, yet Black girls who were active participants and therefore more visible in class were less likely than actively participating white girls to be recommended for advanced and honors classes. Campbell suggests that when Black girls routinely ask questions to ensure their mastery, teachers possibly interpret their questioning as evidence that the girls do comprehend the material and are not ready to progress to more challenging courses. Campbell found that teachers' academic expectations for Black girls is a significant contributor in recommendation for gifted program decisions, even after controlling for actual student achievement. These findings demonstrate that low teachers expectations are not only impacting students' ability to improve their academic standing, they are

also preventing teachers from recognizing high achieving Black girls and holding back students that demonstrate strong academic abilities.

Black girls also experience ordinary racism in the form of microaggressions. Microaggressions are the everyday slights, snubs, or insults that communicate hostile or negative messages to targeted people based solely upon their marginalized group status (Sue et. al., 2007). Microaggressions are often even delivered by well intentioned individuals who are not consciously aware that their beliefs, attitudes, and actions discriminate against Black girls. While microaggressions often are not consciously recognized, the effect of the aggression is always internalized, whether known or unknown to the recipient (Taylor, 2014). Sue et. al name common microaggressions based on false and racist assumptions about intelligence such as “you are so articulate” and “you are a credit to your race.” (p. 276) Other race based microaggressions include comments such as “Asking a Black person: “Why do you have to be so loud/animated? Just calm down.” (p.276)

Black girls living at the intersections of marginalized race and gender identities experience a compounding number of microaggressions due to their double minority status. These microaggressions are called gendered racial microaggressions (Lewis & Neville, 2015). Microaggressions make Black girls feel out of place and can have a lasting impact on their identity, self-esteem and social-emotional development. Interviews collected by Joseph, Viesca and Bianco’s 2016 study provide detailed accounts of the microaggressions high school aged Black girls experience. One participant, Rhianna, discussed a microaggression she received from another student.

“One day in class, in my fourth, err, my third period class, this guy was all like, ‘hey Black girl,’ and I felt like it was rude cause he knew my name but he just called me by my race instead. Interviewer: He wasn’t Black? Rhianna: No. [ ] Interviewer: Did you say something to him? Rhianna: Yeah, I said, “I have a name.” (p.17)

In this exchange Rhianna experienced a microaggression related to both gender and race. Although the student delivering the microaggression did not use any explicit insults, his comments dehumanized and stereotyped Rihanna by refusing to call her by her name and labeling her only as her race and gender.

Black girls often experience indirect gendered racial microaggressions in the form of comments and unwanted attention to their hair.

‘Why do White people think they can just touch my hair without asking?’ (5th grader) ... she grabbed her long extension braids, sucking her teeth and smiling while everyone laughed. Another girl adds ‘I’m crackin’ up because I had a teacher who always used to touch my hair until I was finally like, excuse me ... . Uh, this is not a petting zoo’ (8th grader) (Nunn, 2018, p.251).

The microaggressions experienced by students in Nunn’s study are not uncommon and signal a dangerous societal belief that Black girls’ bodies and hair are up grabs regardless of their consent (Doggett, 2020; Ritchie, 2017). Not only do Black girls experience microaggressions in the form of unwanted hair touching, Black girls also receive countless negative messages about their hairstyles being distracting in schools (distracting is code for too elaborate or not permed to

approximate the appearance of White hair) (Nunley, 2019). In extreme cases school officials go as far as banning popular hairstyles worn by Black girls (Lattimore, 2017).

To combat microaggressions and feign a sense of belonging, Black girls straighten their hair, change the clothing they wear, and practice code-switching—the practice of shifting the language you use or the way you express yourself (Brown, 2018). These tactics, which Black girls have used over the last century for basic survival when interacting with white men and women, continue today as young Black girls navigate and assimilate in mixed or predominately white spaces. Kalah Brown (2018) wrote of her racial experience as a Black girl experience in a private high school in an article for NAIS. She stated,

While we all have many sides to who we are—the languages we speak, the religions we practice, and the cultures that shape us—people of color often have to choose to be less than their full selves to feel accepted. Most often the traits that are hidden are those that may cause them to appear “more Black.” (para. 9)

She described her daily experiences as she strived to be accepted into the White dominant culture around her.

Throughout my day, in class, in the door, and in the dining hall, I read the room and the people surrounding me. I invest additional effort in filtering my thoughts on their way to my mouth. Let me be clear, I do this with students, faculty, and administrators. I intentionally code switch and worry about my perception and acceptance with my peers

just as much as I do with the adults on campus. I am aware of who I am and my potential might be determined by stereotyped views of my behavior. (para. 10)

Brown described in thorough detail the excruciating amount of energy and self management she had to use in order to combat the racial microaggressions she experienced in school. Her experiences point to a self-compartmentalization that can be painful and isolating, even when it achieves successful assimilation within the dominant group. She was strategically displaying some parts of her identity while hiding others.

### **The Hypervisible - Invisible Dichotomy**

Until recently, conversations about how to support students' color performance and socio-emotional have been centered on Black boys. The Obama administration developed the My Brother's Keepers initiative (MBK Alliance, 2014), and the president himself could be heard in speeches discussing the importance of taking care of our Black boys (White House Press Secretary, 2014). The presidents' focus on Black boys was of primary importance, yet I find it quizzical that he rarely spoke about the need for supporting Black girls considering that he had two daughters. In a 2014 article titled "The Girls Obama Forgot", Dr. Kimberle Crenshaw discusses how false information and illogical beliefs about Black girls and Black boys have led to the invisibilization of Black women in society. Dr. Crenshaw explained that there is a pervasive belief that Black men are exceptionally endangered by racism and are at the highest risk metric for involvement with the criminal justice system and poor academic performance. The same level of concern is not extended to Black women as they are believed to be better off than Black men, and thus in less need of support. However, statistics show that just like their

male counterparts, Black girls are obtaining scores at or near the bottom levels in reading and math and race wise have the highest levels of school suspension of any racial group of girls (Crenshaw, 2014). Also, crucial to emphasize are the gender-specific risks they face. For example, Black girls are at the highest risk among all racial groups to be victims of domestic violence, sex trafficking, and are more likely to be involved in the child welfare and juvenile justice system, and more likely to die violently. The ratio of at risk disparities between Black girls and girls of other races is in some cases even greater than the ratio between Black boys and boys of other races. (Crenshaw, 2014)

The presidents' emphasis on supporting the needs of Black boys while ignoring those of Black girls has been mirrored in the society. Black girls have been historically made invisible. Dr. Christopher Lebron, author of *The Color of Our Shame: Race and Justice in Our Time*, wrote a 2016 critique of the civil rights film, *Selma* in *The Boston Review*, stating,

Selma reflects how we value Black women, which is to say, how we so often render them invisible. It replicates and exemplifies wider America's limited appreciation of Black women in the historical struggle for Black rights and their ongoing struggles for equality, health, and safety. (para. 2 )

This attitude towards Black girls can be thoroughly observed in academic settings starting from school entrance in toddlerhood to graduate studies where Black women continue to be rendered invisible. In a qualitative study, three Black female academics, Haynes, Stewart, and Allen (2016) completed educational autobiographies and weekly journal reflections, to which they applied theory to reflectively analyze their lived educational experiences. A journal excerpt



from Allen about her elementary years illustrates how she was conditioned to “appear” less Black and more invisible from a young age.

My own K-12 experience was a period of indoctrination in which I learned what to do and how to do it without any questions. As I sought to keep up with the status quo, I was oblivious to the idea that I had a choice in what I would become or how I could act. Excellent grades, school involvement (scholarly and athletic), community involvement, and a quiet demeanor (in certain settings) were ultimately a part of my daily life from middle school forward. These activities were the norm for a well-rounded, disciplined student who teachers and administrators adored and accepted. I specifically recall instances being told by teachers that I was a great student because of how I sat quietly and attentively in the classroom. Such messages led to my choice of actions, and my actions led to being labeled “White, Black girl” by peers. As a Black student who was well rounded, disciplined, and adored by administrators and teachers, I learned that made me the exception to the rule. It made me the White, Black girl. It was a label I was honored to have. To act any other way was to be labeled a troublemaker; and I knew that. (p.385)

Allen’s excerpt is reminiscent of Kalah Brown’s 2018 testimony on the self policing and suppression of her Blackness that she took on in order to succeed in school and not be stereotyped. Allen demonstrates that she was made to feel from a young age that the only way to keep up with the status quo and succeed in school was to be a high academic achiever and to behave in such a way that no attention was ever brought to her. She understood that to “thrive” in school she would have to be “invisible.” To behave otherwise, would have had her labeled a

troublemaker. Invisibilization not only stifles the voices and needs of Black girls, it also emotionally isolates Black girls and greatly reduces the support they receive from school educators. In a 2016 study titled “Talking Back”: The Perceptions and Experiences of Black Girls Who Attend City High School, Terri N. Watson found that while all of the Black girls who participated in the study reported feeling physically safe at school, many believed their emotional well-being was at risk during their high school tenure. One study participant pointed to what could constitute exclusion and neglect by teachers. She stated,

In my sophomore year I was diagnosed with depression. My grades went from high 90s and 80s to completely failing the majority of my classes. It felt even worse because no one noticed my grades like “How do you go from 85 to 55? It’s not me being lazy. They just look at it as you’re being a typical teenager. Instead of actually asking me, “How are you doing? Is everything okay at home?” They don’t really care about mental health.

(p.243)

In contrast, hypervisibility makes Black girls feel unwelcomed and unsafe to be themselves at school. One study participant provided a detailed recollection of being harassed by school security guards.

I feel like the security agents are jerks sometimes. You could be doing what you have to do, walking through the hallway and they just want to put you in the Safe Room [a room where truant and difficult students are held]. The kids that are smoking weed in the hallway, they don’t catch them but the kids that are doing what they have to do, they be [sic] harassing them, “Oh, where are you going?” How about you just ask, “Do you have

a class right now? What class do you have? Okay, please go to class because we're doing a sweep [gathering truant students]." (p.243).

These students' statements point to the presence of a hypervisible- invisible dichotomy that renders Black girls the recipients of excessive negative attention (such as in the case of the student who felt constantly harassed ) while also ignoring their needs and failing to provide them much needed support (such as in the case of the student diagnosed with depression).

The students in the study above were trapped in the hypervisible-invisible dichotomy so many Black girls face in schools. The hypervisible-invisible dichotomy places Black girls at the extremes of the visibility spectrum, with the first being invisibility, in which their academic and social emotional needs are ignored and their talents discounted and the other extreme being hypervisibility. Ryland (2013) described hypervisibility as "scrutiny based on perceived difference, which is usually (mis)interpreted as deviance" (para. 2). Hypervisibility occurs when individuals and groups are recognized for their 'otherness' or variation from the established norm, in this case White and male. "Hypervisibility is associated with heightened scrutiny and surveillance where [perceived] failures are magnified and individuals lack control over how they are perceived by others" (Settles, Buchanan, & Dotson, 2018, p.63).

Dominant groups have the ability to invisibilize and/ or hypervisibilize marginalized groups to maintain their privileged status. This practice of delegitimizing marginalized groups is frequently deployed when minority groups seek to increase their visibility and recognition (Settles, Buchanan, & Dotson, 2018, p.63). Age compression, hypersexualiation, a need for discipline and control are racist and sexist lenses applied onto Black girls that are deployed to render Black girls invisible or hypervisible whenever they attempt to bring recognition to their

lived experiences. In her book *Pushout* (2016), Monique Morris describes how defiance and an “attitude” have become essential survival tools for Black women in a society that invisibilizes the intersection at which they live and denies their humanity:

Born into a cultural legacy of slavery, Black American women have interpreted defiance as something that is not inherently bad. Harriet Tubman was defiant. So too was Sojourner Truth and countless other enslaved women who dared to reject oppression. To be loud is a demand to be heard. To have an attitude is to reject a doctrine of invisibility and mistreatment. However, when there exists a prevalent lack of cultural competence and an aversion to valuing the unique intersections of race and gender, “these survival characteristics are degraded and punished rather than recognized as tools of resilience.” (Morris, 2016, p.19)

Studies such as one conducted by Blake, Butler, Lewis, and Darensbourg (2011) cite defiance as one of the top reasons Black girls are suspended. An analysis of defiance as a leading cause for suspension is critical to undertake as is indicated by data published in 2017 from the *Summary Of Discipline Data for Girls in U.S. Public Schools: An Analysis from The 2013-14 U.S.* The Department of Education Office for Civil Rights Data Collection found although Black girls represented less than a quarter of elementary school girls, they were almost six times more likely to receive one or more out of school suspensions and three times more likely to one or more in school suspensions and referrals to law enforcement than White girls. The high incidence of suspensions due to defiance is problematic because defiance is a subjective offense defined by the person who is being defied. Defiance can be characterized in many ways. Educators may deem talking back, storming out of class, or refusing to comply with classroom

rules as defiant behavior, rather than viewing student responses as connected to their feelings of being disrespected or invisibilized in moments of conflict (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010).

Stereotypes and internalized biases about Black girls increases educators' likelihood of labelling Black girls as defiant. Morris (2016) cites negative perceptions about Black girls being conniving, loud, and sassy as factors that lead to Black girls being labeled as defiant by educators. Baker (2019) explains that educators enact microaggressions that reflect their perceptions. When students respond strongly or negatively to the microaggression, they are characterized as defiant by the microaggressor (teachers, principals, or school staff). Labelling Black girls as defiant for reacting to microaggressions has two significant effects: it invalidates the emotions of Black girls and renders them hypervisible in academic settings, thus increasing their likelihood to be subjected to undue punishment in the form of in school arrest or suspension.

Other vehicles through which the behaviors of Black girls are made hypervisible while their emotional and academic needs are invisibilized are hypersexualization and age compression. Morris (2016) explains that age compression is a phenomena that permits educators to liken Black girls to adult women and assign them full conscientious judgement when they engage in disruptive behaviors and/ or adult-like behaviors. Age compression essentially strips Black girls of their childhood freedom and ability to make mistakes. This stripping of freedom becomes literal when one considers the alarming high rates of elementary school aged Black girls that are arrested in schools. One egregious but not isolated example (see Levy, 2013) is that of six-year-old Desre'e Watson who was arrested at a Florida school in 2007 for throwing a tantrum in her kindergarten class (Herbert, 2007).

Hypersexualization often functions in conjunction with age comprehension to strip Black girls of their childhood and bring excessive negative attention and judgment to their bodies. Hypersexualized Black women and girls are often portrayed as sexually deviant and are not afforded the care and consideration given to White women and girls (Carter Andrews, Brown, Castro, Id-Deen, 2019). In a series of interviews, high school aged participants in Carter Andrews et. al, 2019 study shared double standards they experienced in their school dress codes. “A guy can wear a tank top, and it’s fine, but if I wear a tank top and it’s covering everything, I’ll get in trouble. I have to go get a hoodie or something, but it feels like it’s 100 degrees in here ’cause we don’t have AC!” (p. 2546). The student’s statement illustrates just one of the ways Black girls’ bodies receive excessive negative attention and are hypersexualized. Carter Andrews et al. also point out that the lack of air conditioning in the classroom is an institutional problem for which Black girls were disproportionately punished compared with White girls as a different participant added on,

I’m not trying to be racist—these really skinny white girls wear short shorts, but [teachers] won’t say anything. But for me—not everything fits me. I have really big legs! And I can’t find shorts that go down to my knees. But they want me to call home, and I’m like, “I’m not calling home. I’m wearing clothes.” I don’t see why it’s a problem. (p. 2546)

It’s crucial to point out that the student with the shorts was being punished for not having legs that fit with White standards of body acceptability. Overall these students’ statements reveal the compounding body discrimination they experience as Black girls.

Lastly, Carter Andrews et al. (2019) also revealed that in addition to negative messages about their bodies, Black girls also lose instructional time from being hypersexualized. One student shared her particular struggles with lost instructional time.

I'll be sent to the office for a coat, rain boots, and a pair of overalls that's two times my size. And to Sally [indicating any random white student], "You go ahead to class. I'm sorry she's bothering you." So now I'm out of class, but Sally's gonna go learn and get the A, while I'm stuck with a B because my knees are showing, which [with sarcasm] are very sexual, obviously . . . [The white girls] got these white see-through shirts, and all they wear is a bra, but they put a little jacket on to cover it. But she has no clothes on. She could go to a club right now, and she'll pass. But I'm distracting everybody? No, you're wrong, and I'm not going to stand for it. (p.17)

In her statement, the student expressed indignation at having to lose instructional time and being hypersexualized and punished for being a Black girl with a body. However if she speaks out and advocates for equitable school policy implementation, she risks getting into trouble and being labelled as defiant (Crenshaw, 1989). Like many other Black girls she is rendered simultaneously invisible and hypervisible, "unprotected and punished, and adultified with regard to the sexualization of their bodies" (Carter Andrews, et al., 2019, p. 2547).

Research shows that children experience feelings of pride and self-empowerment when provided with opportunities to see themselves in the curriculum, either through text or through their cultural patterns (Davis, 2000). Furthermore, when children are able to see their life experiences reflected in the classroom through a responsive and multicultural curriculum, their opportunities for learning and academic achievement increase (Davis, 2000). Unfortunately one

of the most widespread ways Black girls are invisibilized in schools is through their absence in the curriculum. Their invisibilization from literacy is so far reaching that author Glory Edim (2018) joined forces with Black female writers to publish *Well Read Black Girl*, a collection of essays in which Black female writers share the importance of seeing themselves reflected in literature. In Edim's book, in an essay titled Go Tell It, Barbara Smith wrote,

The first thing to understand is the fifties. What it was like to be a Black girl (in truth a "Negro" girl) in the 1950s. A Black girl who loved to read. There was nothing for me, nothing to tell me who I was, nothing to tell me what was possible, no place in print where I could glimpse the slightest reflection. The world of books was a blizzard of white, but I still visited that world every chance I got. (p.52)

Smith's experiences in the 1950s are still echoed by young Black girls in schools today. Black girls are clamoring to see their identities and histories represented in their classroom curriculum. Unsurprisingly, their calls for representation are ignored and they're labelled as disruptive for pointing out racist curriculums. Hockaday (2017) examined curricula within a particular school district for practices that are responsive to the needs of Black female students. A student interviewed for the study shared:

I would ask about people not mentioned in the white-washed textbook and how we never talked about the Black inventors, authors, artists etc. that played a major part in America's history. My teacher would always try to make me look unintelligent by saying "well, what's your source?" or simply "prove it." I would get home and go on Google Scholar for hours, wait for my dad to call, tell him about the situation, then proceed to gather



information. The next class I would raise my hand, wait as [the teacher] acted as though she didn't see me raising my hand, and read her the filth. Rather than applauding my knowledge and willingness to learn I was told I was being "disruptive" and confusing the other students." (p.93)

In her comments the student is alluding to the multiple levels of disempowerment and invisibilization Black girls experience when learning in school. Not only do they not have the same opportunities as White students to see themselves reflected in the curriculum, they also are silenced when they express interest in learning about their own cultures, and reprimanded when they ask questions at higher rates than African American boys ( Morris, 2007). The connection between this student's experience and those of the participants in Carter Andrews et. al, 2019 is particularly important. The girls interviewed in Carter Andrews et al. expressed feeling that adults at their schools considered them unmotivated and unworthy of high-quality learning experiences. They recounted instances of teachers seeming uninterested in providing rigorous instruction or dismissing their questions and concerns. "They think Black people can only play sports, or sing or do some entertainment, they don't think that we know how to use our brains" reported one student. These case studies provide evidence that adults responsible for Black girls' learning are denying them opportunities to experience self empowerment and academic advancement through reflection in curriculum.

### **Superimposition of White Ideals onto Black Girls in Academic Settings**

Whiteness as property, a tenet of Critical Race Theory, indicates that social, educational, and economic value is associated with being White (Haskins and Singh, 2015). Whiteness

provides cultural capital and power, the closer in proximity individuals are to whiteness the more power and acceptance they hold. Unchallenged acceptance of Whiteness as property has led to the superimposition of white ideals onto Black girls in schools. Through the guise of neutrality, schools enact policies and standards that contribute to the racial and gendered marginalization of Black girls and uphold Whiteness as the status quo (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda, 2015). Even school programs designed to uplift Black girls and students of color frequently attempt to do so through the superimposition of White ideals. Below follow examples of two such programs that must be critiqued for their superimposition of racialized and gendered White ideals on Black girls.

Classroom Connections is a program in which students from elite New York City high school Ethical Culture Fieldston were paired with students from University Heights High School in the South Bronx. Though the two schools are located three miles away from each other in the Bronx, University Heights High School serves low income students of color while ECF has tuition rates over \$40,000 and is predominantly white. In an interview article on the New York Times, the program was praised for giving students of color the opportunity to connect with wealthier students and as a result uncover the possibilities of further education. In one throwaway sentence, the TIMES stated “They walked into Fieldston, and they were just overwhelmed. They couldn’t imagine that this was just minutes from where they lived, and they never even knew about it. One kid ran crying off campus. It made them so disheartened about their own circumstances.” This student was never mentioned again, however she was a high achieving Black girl who later dropped out of high school after being exposed to racial and

economic inequities that exist within the education system. This young student was interviewed years later by NPR, she stated:

“I felt like I didn't belong there. I just felt like I have no business in this building. I don't remember them. They were just like a sea of white, blond, blue-green eyes. I couldn't possibly bring myself into my body to actually engage with these kids. I didn't want to engage with them. This was what I envisioned as high school, what these kids are experiencing. This is what I wanted to see myself going to as a high school experience.”

(This American Life, ep. 550)

It is evident from her statement that the student's emotional response to what she witnessed at ECF was the result of coming into a keen awareness of the services she was denied by the education system. Exchange and exposure programs like the one above are problematic for Black girls because they use a deficit model and assume that Black girls and boys would “benefit and become more motivated” students from being exposed to predominantly privileged white environments. They assume the problem lies inherently within the child and ignore the documented biased and racist practices of educators that prevent Black girls and boys from academic growth.

Nyachae (2016) serves as self evaluation in which the founders of the Sisters of Promise (SOP) study how the program they created for Black girls to encourage sisterhood and promote leadership skills, aligns with Black feminism. In the program's core values were the development of sisterhood leadership, self-awareness, financial literacy, health awareness, effective communication, and womanly character. In her findings, Nyachae explains how their definition of womanly character and self-awareness are problematic because they superimpose

White ways of being on Black girls. The SOP curriculum suggests that to develop self-awareness Black girls should work to notice which behaviours are undesirable to others and modify them. In response to this Nyache posits questions such as, self-control for what purpose and undesirable to whom? “Classically, the suggestion that Black girls modify their behaviour has been in order to suppress their Blackness, not to understand why these behaviours are considered undesirable, and what social dynamics have created this racist and sexist status quo” (Nyachae, 2016, p. 13).

In SOP’s core values, womanly character is interpreted as “Embodying the poise, grace, and dignity of a sophisticated young lady.” (p. 792) According to the program ladies are women and girls who are educated and carry themselves with grace. Nyachae finds this particular message and core value of the program problematic because it reflects racists and sexist perspectives about Black girls being ontologically in need of virtue and poise. In addition, the program’s core message on womanly character is built upon White middle-class notions of womanhood, thus it reinforces discriminatory beliefs that there is only one proper form of femininity, which is that of White women.

SOP’s definition of womanly character is a prime example of respectability politics being used with the goal of uplifting Black girls by encouraging them to conform to mainstream White standards of femininity. The phrase “respectability politics” describes the efforts of the Black community to self monitor their appearance, behaviors, and speech with the intention of easing their navigation of mainstream society. Respectability politics as a movement arose during the Progressive Era (a period of social activism and political reform in the United States that spanned the 1890s to the 1920s) (Mgadmi, 2009). A common critique of respectability politics is

that though it is meant to advance members of the Black community by combating stereotypes, respectability politics centers middle class white values as the measure for success. Another critique of respectability politics is that reinforces within-group stratification in the Black community by deeming certain behaviors and traits unworthy of respect within one's group.

Discourse around respectability politics is consistently gendered and focused on Black women and girls. The Black activists' strategy of racial advancement placed an exaggerated importance on Black female deference (Mgadmi, 2009). Markers of respectable behavior include "temperance, cleanliness of person and property, thrift, polite manners, and sexual purity" the last specifically aimed at Black girls (Jefferson, 2019). Insistence on respectability has influenced binary views of Black girls. One contested example being the "Black Girl Magic" movement, a phrase coined by CaShawn Thompson to celebrate the beauty, influence, and strength of Black women and girls (Toliver, 2019). Chavers (2016) argues that although "Black Girl Magic" is meant to celebrate the accomplishments of Black women and girls which have been historically marginalized, the movement operates under the foundational beliefs of Respectability Politics to aggrandize the achievements of Black girls that confine to notions of superimposed White middle class standards and therefore marginalizes the existence of Black girls who do not.

Another critique of respectability politics is that it vastly truncates the availability of role models for Black girls. Knott-Dawson (2018) discusses the dangers of Black girls having one only type of role model to look up to. She uses Michelle Obama as an example and explains that respectability is a restrictive tool used to tell Black people that there is only one way to be respected and it is the Michelle Obama way, "[two parent] household, good schools, hard work

and the ability to be cross-cultural and non-threatening to White people.” (para. 8) Knott highlights that while she was financially poor, Michelle Obama was resource rich growing up. She grew up in a stable two-parent household and had access to selective-enrollment schools that weren’t available to most children in her community. She further elaborates,

Young Black girls face incredible obstacles and odds. For many of them, success is just surviving and living another day. That is why I believe it is pertinent that we show examples of Black women who faced the same challenge and took less respectable roads to success. (para. 10)

She discusses other potential role models such as Tiffany Haddish and LaVerne Cox who also came up as Black girls from humble beginnings but are not highlighted as mainstream role models because they do not fit the narrow mold of respectable Black women. Haddish, a comedian frequently speaks in African American English and plays into stereotype tropes and Cox is a transgender woman. She ends by highlighting that success can take many different forms and it’s vital to show Black girls that there are multiple avenues for success that do not include an Ivy League degree. (Knott-Dawson, 2018)

## **Recommendations**

### **Altering Perceptions and Reframing to Combat Ordinary Racism**

Combating ordinary forms of racism such as microaggressions, false beliefs, and stereotypes requires proactive self analysis and inquiry on the part of teachers. In particular teachers must become aware of the ways in which their perceptions of, and relationships with Black girls are shaped by racist attitudes and the imposition of White standards onto Black

girls. Educators can begin the process of undoing their racism and reframing the lens through which they view Black girls by becoming acquainted with Black Feminist Theory (Collins, 2000), Critical Race Theory (Lynn and Dixson, 2013) and other theoretical models such as Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1995) that address the unique experiences of Black girls and their multiple identities. This educational process can help teachers understand the power dynamics at play in their schools and between them and the Black girls in their classroom. (Nyachae, 2016) posits that both White and Black women teachers would benefit from using Black feminist pedagogy (as Black women teachers have also been known to reinforce White standards of being through respectability politics) to engage in transformative education and programming that resists the status quo and enact curricular decisions that are responsive to Black girls. Current teachers can seek to inform themselves through personal inquiry and research as well as requesting education training in teaching Black girls from their school administration. Current students of education can also request that their teacher preparation programs address the particular needs of educating Black girls in their curriculum.

Data from Frasier, 1997, in conjunction with the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented, found that even with all the issues of access, assessment, and accommodations, educators' attitudes and beliefs about students of color abilities' remains the most significant contributor to the disparity in recommendations for gifted programs. To truly recognize the academic potential of Black girls educators need to combat assumptions and stereotypes they hold about Black girls' traits, aptitudes, and behaviors. Educators can begin this process by arming themselves with knowledge about the different ways academic potential manifests in Black girls as it will more than likely differ than that of White students (Anderson, 2020).

Research shows that when Black girls demonstrate strong academic potential through inquiry, humor, creativity, reasoning, and problem solving educators frequently perceive their behavior in a negative manner (Evans-Winters, 2011). Therefore in addition to recognizing markers of academic engagement and potential in Black girls, educators must also be willing to engage in reflection when they identify negative behaviors as these identifications may be by-products of stereotypes about Black girls.

Anderson, 2020, provides a framework educators can use as a guide to work towards altering their biased perceptions by identifying and reframing behaviors for which Black girls are commonly stereotyped and punished. Below are components of Anderson's framework that I've applied to case studies found in Morris (2017) to demonstrate how damaging perceptions about Black girls can be reframed to show the girls in a more honest and visible light. Morris (2017) collected observational data on educators' negative perceptions of Black girls at Matthews Middle School. His field notes from one interaction between a math teacher and a Black 7th grade girl proceed as follows:

Ms. Harris goes over a sample problem from the state assessment test on an overhead projector. Referring to a drawing Ms. Harris has made with the radius and diameter, Celia shouts out from nowhere, "Why didn't you put circumference?" Ms. Harris is clearly disturbed by Celia's comment. She threatens to stop teaching because, as she describes it, Celia can now teach the class. The class yells, "No!" wanting Ms. Harris to continue teaching. (This is probably the first time I've seen a middle school class begging the



teacher to teach.) Celia puts her head down on the desk and is disengaged for the rest of the class. (p. 13)

Ms. Harris' comments to Celia were demoralizing and disrespectful. The student was clearly engaged in the academic content and asked a question that many would find valid and harmless. Unfortunately, the comments made by the teacher led Celia to disengage from learning and lose the remainder of the class instruction, clearly showing that the teachers' response to Celia had impacts beyond their immediate interaction. Anderson's 2020 framework posits that educators' negative perceptions of Black girls being excessively exuberant, overly loud, and disrespectful can be reframed as Black girls demonstrating engagement and curiosity in the academic material. In addition, teachers can also work to reframe their view of questions and comments as challenging authority to inquiry and critical reasoning on the part of Black girls. If Ms. Harris had been able to reframe her perspective on Celia's comment, she could have potentially seen the value in Celia's question and offered a response that clarified Celia's confusion and furthered her learning instead of a demoralizing retort.

Morris also collected data from a harmful interaction in which a Black female teacher reprimanded two Black 7th grade students for holding a side conversation and deviating from classroom expectations.

Ms. Boyd, 7th grade history. Ms. Boyd, a Black woman, tells Chantelle and Larissa, two Black girls, to stop talking. Chantelle responds, "We is talking, but it's about the assignment." Ms. Boyd corrects her: "We are." Chantelle seems confused. Later, Ms.

Boyd corrects her again for not saying “are.” She says, “I know this isn’t English [class], but you will speak correctly in my class.” (p.14)

In this example the teacher chastised the two girls for engaging in discourse about the academic content and further reinforced White ways of being by correcting the girls’ speech and insisting that they speak “correctly.” Through Anderson’s framework the girls’ side conversation and deviance from classroom speaking norms could be reframed as intellectual curiosity and engagement. Instead of reprimanding the students, the teacher could have responded by acknowledging the girls’ curiosity, asking questions about their interests, and encouraging additional inquiry at a more appropriate time. Furthermore, the teacher could have reframed her biased perspective of Chantelle’s oral language as the student having knowledge of multiple dialects and a versatile vocabulary. Instead of continuously calling on Chantelle to conform to White standards of communication, the teacher could have taken notice of the various languages and dialects in her classroom and engaged the class in discussions of creative ways to use language in assignments and provided multiple modalities such as audio recordings that capture nuances in language and expressiveness.

### **Using Curriculum and Literacy Circles to Combat White Superimposition and the Hypervisible-invisible Dichotomy**

As discussed throughout this paper schools are spaces that often (unintentionally) promote racist and sexist ideologies about Black girls while rendering their lived experiences invisible. Therefore, if educators are to begin truly making Black girls visible in the classroom, it is essential for them to provide honest mirrors of Black girlhood that counteract stereotypes and

center the voices of Black girls. The curriculum is one of the most powerful tools teachers can use to showcase honest reflections of Black girls and support their identity development. In particular, Price-Dennis et al., 2017 argue that the racialized gendered experiences of Black girls necessitate open discussion space in the classroom as well as the centering of literacy programs and curriculums that honor their lives authentically. Price-Dennis et al. offer modern literacy circles for Black girls as an avenue for undertaking this work. Black Female Literacy Circles first appeared in the mid 1800s, when these circles served as more than book clubs. They provided Black women a forum to engage in the critical study of literature and work towards advancing their conditions by reading, writing, and collaborating together. Within these literary circles, literacy engagement was viewed as a tool for making sense of their complex identities. Black women used texts to discuss both their collective identities as Black women and their individual self-identities.

Modern day literacy circles to support the identity development of Black girls are defined as any “acts in which Black girls read, write, speak, move, and create in order to affirm themselves, the(ir) world, and the multidimensionality of young Black womanhood and/or Black girlhood” (Price-Dennis et al., 2017, p. 5). The authors provide various examples of how Black girl literacies can be utilized in academic settings to further the identity and socioemotional development of Black girls. The examples below can be used as inspirations and models for how to center Black girls’ experiences in curricular and co-curricular content through the use of Black Girl Literacies.

Dr. Gholnecsar “Gholdy” Muhammad created the summer literacy program Black Girls W.R.I.T.E. (Writing to Represent our Identities, our Times and our Excellence) for adolescent

girls, ages 12-17 year- old. Dr. Muhammad designed the program as a space in which Black girls could meet together three days a week for three hours across 4-5 weeks each summer. Dr. Muhammad designed the program's curriculum with the intention of providing the girls with opportunities to center their histories as they furthered their literacy skills and wrote across various genres including poetry, personal narratives, essays, public addresses, letters, journals, and short stories. The activities girls in Black Girls W.R.I.T.E. engaged in reflected Black women's female literary circles from the early nineteenth century. The girls participated in discussion about the texts they read, engaged in their own writing, and critiqued each other's work. A strength of Dr. Muhammad's program is that it provides young Black girls the opportunity to develop their literacy skills in a historical context. The texts the girls engaged with immersed them in a social literacy space that reflected the history of their literary, ethnic, and gendered cultural identities. Another crucial component of Dr. Muhammad's development of Black Girls W.R.I.T.E. was her integration of multiple theoretical models to support the literacy instruction, socio-emotional needs, and identity development of Black girls. Her incorporation of models such as sociocultural theory, Black feminism, and critical theory in the curriculum made for rich and engaging writing exercises in which the girls felt highly motivated to read, write, and think.

Price-Dennis partnered with a fifth grade teacher in an urban public school in the northeast region of the United States to launch Digital Library Collective. The purpose of the partnership was to use digital tools to position Black girls as creators of digital content that addressed social justice issues that were important to them and relevant to their daily lives. Over the course of the project, Black girls in the Digital Literacy Collaborative created memes in

response to literature about racism, read poetry about social issues, performed their own spoken word poetry that later became a podcast, participated in close readings of hip-hop videos to analyze how gender power dynamics and misogyny create negative images of women. Outcomes from the initiative provided evidence that the program boosted the self esteem, critical thinking, and social emotional development of the students. Price-Dennis reported that throughout the project Black girls carefully examined issues of power and equity to disrupt status quo notions related to gender and race, worked collaboratively with peers to highlight their perspectives, and engaged in each step of the process with joy and pride.

Price-Dennis' use of digital content to center the varied voices and experiences of Black girls in schools is crucial because it vastly expands the availability of sources and materials for girls to work with. In her 2009 Ted Talk "The Dangers of a Single Story" writer Chimamanda Adichie explains that if we only hear one perspective or one story about a group of people we risk critically misunderstanding them. Furthermore, the lives, cultures, and experiences of a group can only be understood through a composition of overlapping stories. Through the use of digital media Price-Dennis achieved exactly what Adichie refers to, she greatly expanded the opportunity for Black girls to explore a wide range representations of themselves and experiences including and particularly those that are not typically found in textbooks such as Hip Hop lyrics.

When engaging Black girls in literacy tasks for the purpose of promoting their socio-emotional development, academic achievement, and sense of self it is crucial for educators to pay close attention to the types of books they use in their curriculum and have available in their libraries. Teachers can strive to provide Black girls with opportunities to see their lived

experiences rendered visible in the schools through a purposeful inclusion of ‘mirror books’ in the (class) library and in the literacy curriculum. The term “mirror books” refers to books that provide students with opportunities to see characters and stories that reflect them (Bishop,1990). Ford et. al 2019 outlines the therapeutic benefits of using mirror books in the classroom to support the academic and social emotional development of Black girls. The researchers promote the use of mirror books to support reading engagement, self-pride, empathy, motivation, and coping strategies when faced with challenges, including negative peer pressures and isolation in predominantly White classes. Unfortunately, curating a class library that centers the wide array of Black girl experiences remains a challenge due to significant discrepancies in the volume of available books that feature Black girls as a main character. Statistics provided by Low and Lee in 2018 show that as of 2017 only thirty-one percent of published children’s books were written by or featured people of color. It is noteworthy to mention that the thirty-one percent statistic encompasses all people of color of all races not just Black girls. An even more stark statistic provided by Low and Lee is that only twenty-nine percent of books published about Black children in 2017 were written by “own voices,” Black authors.

Organizations such as the Anti-Defamation League have created resources to support educators in need of books that highlight diverse cultures. One especially important resource is their Checklist for Assessing Children's Literature. The checklist provides guidance on how to not only select books that feature students of color but also books that challenge stereotypes and White superimposition. This is a crucial component of their checklist because books often reinforce existing racist, sexist, and stereotypical narratives. Repeated exposure makes young susceptible to internalize those narratives especially if they are enforced in society (ADL). Some

of the most paramount items in their checklist include the examination of books for the inclusion of diverse representations of specific cultural groups, genuine representations of diverse characters that do not reinforce stereotypes, realistic representations of cultural settings, and representations of girls in leadership roles.

Items in ADL's checklist can be further expanded to address the specific needs and experiences of Black girls. Teachers can examine and update their classroom libraries to include books that feature the voices of Black girls from a range of economic backgrounds and cultural backgrounds. Emphasis should be placed on selecting books that represent the experiences of girls whose heritage span the full Pan-African spectrum. Teachers can also search for texts that include dialogue and grammar structures that provide accurate representations of the wide varieties of languages and dialects Black girls use. Lastly, book illustrations should be carefully examined with the intention of acquiring a diverse representation of Black girls' bodies and fashion.

### **Postscript**

When I got to the end of my thesis, I conferred with two Black female teacher colleagues to share my findings and hear first hand how they view their K-12 schooling experiences. They discussed one aspect of Black girls' experience that was not explored in my thesis, that of parent engagement. I include this section on parent engagement at the end of my thesis with the intention that it will serve as an impetus for future research. It is no less urgent than the other issues that have been addressed in this thesis. My colleagues shared that in their K-12 experiences, their teachers rarely reached out to their parents. These colleagues perceived that teachers only contacted the parents of Black students to share "bad" news. My colleagues were

both considered model students in their respective schools and thus their families were rarely contacted by the schools. One colleague shared a memory of a time she won a prestigious academic award at school. She was informed about the award last minute and was asked if she would like to call her mother on the phone to come watch her receive the award and take a photo that same day. My colleague knew her mother would not be able to make it on such late notice and she teared up when she saw the parents of the other students being awarded present. The majority of the other students awarded were White. I would argue that my colleague's experience that day is an extension of the invisibilization Black girls undergo in school. My colleague shared feeling that the school did not put the same quality of effort into engaging her family as they did families of other races (especially White families).

In keeping with my colleagues' experiences, black families often feel their efforts to engage with their children's education are largely ignored by schools (Latunde and Clark-Louque, 2016). Furthermore, when conversations about the so-called "achievement gap" between Black students and white students arise, schools often imply that students are victims of parental apathy to the goals of education. My other colleague, a parent of several young children shared that when her husband goes to parent teacher conferences and meetings at schools he is often dismissed and treated as if he is uneducated and does not understand the needs of his children. A full-time teacher, my colleague often feels pressure to take time off to attend meetings in which she suspects that her children's teachers will be dismissive of the concerns her husband voices because he is Black. She feels she must remind them of her expertise as a teacher too to receive the help and support her children need. Contrary to the biased perceptions and stereotypes that schools extend to the parents of Black children, Latunde and Clark-Louque



(2016) concluded that Black parents hold high academic aspirations for their children. When I reflect on how strongly my colleague describes advocating for her children I am reminded of the following quote in Anderson and Coleman-King (in press), “Had it not been for our mothers, our educational trajectories might have been much different. Even when our teachers did not see our giftedness, our mothers did and they fought tenaciously for us to have the education we needed.”

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