



**HIDDEN FIGURES:**  
**THE UNTOLD EXPERIENCES**  
**OF BLACK GIRLS**  
**IN SCHOOL**

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“There is **no growth** in the Comfort Zone and  
there is **no comfort** in the Growth Zone”



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01

# BLACK GIRL EXPERIENCE

# Black Student Experience in America

Despite the historic decision from *Brown v. Board of Education*, disproportionate treatment persists **69 years later** in our nation's public school systems between minoritized student populations and their counterparts (Zirkel and Cantor, 2004).

This results in an **opportunity gap** — opportunities are distributed to only a subset of students, producing substantial disparities in educational outcomes.

*“the teacher quality gap; the teacher training gap; the challenging curriculum gap; the school funding gap...”*

(Irvine, 2010, p. xii).



# THE IMPACT OF SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

Security protocols and procedures that are commonly utilized in the criminal justice system have been utilized within school classrooms and hallways.



Black children are regarded as **criminals** for activities that should not be deemed criminal in our schools and as a threat to school personnel driven by racial biases and stereotypes.

At the **preschool** level, Black students are **3.6** times more likely than White preschoolers to receive one or more out-of-school suspensions (United States Department of Education, 2016).

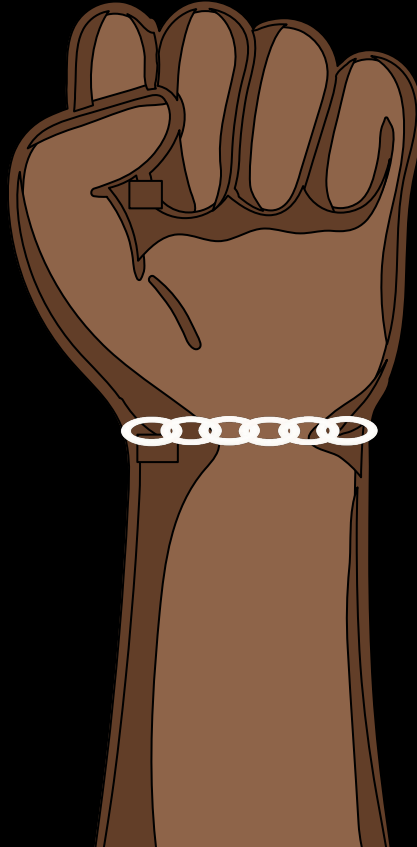


Black students are **3.8** times more likely than White students to be suspended across all grade levels from **kindergarten to their senior year in high school** (United States Department of Education, 2016).

# Criminalization OF BLACK YOUTH



**Criminalization:** *the process by which a group of individuals is assigned a criminal identity and subjected to disciplinary monitoring and practices (Boduszek & Hyland, 2011).*



This **increases** the chance of failure in school and engagement with the criminal justice system. This pathway is deemed as the school-to-confinement pipeline (George, 2015).



**“BEING A BLACK GIRL  
IS NOT A CRIME”**







**NUMEROUS STORIES OF BLACK GIRLS BEING  
DISCIPLINED IN THEIR SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS  
HAVE MADE NATIONAL HEADLINES  
ACROSS THE COUNTRY.**

# *School Perceptions of Black Students*

**School climate** is the quality and character of school experience generally based on the interactions of school staff and students (Cohen et al., 2009).

- Black students may feel less supported at school and perceive the school environment as more threatening and aggressive than White students due to their encounters (Thapa et al., 2013).

**Academic futility** refers to students' perceptions of their own ability to excel in school based on the community they associate with, and educators' perceptions of students like them.

- Schools with lower academic norms and teacher expectations can lead to higher levels of academic futility among students (Brookover & Schneider, 1975; Brookover et al., 1978).





***Structural***



***Political***

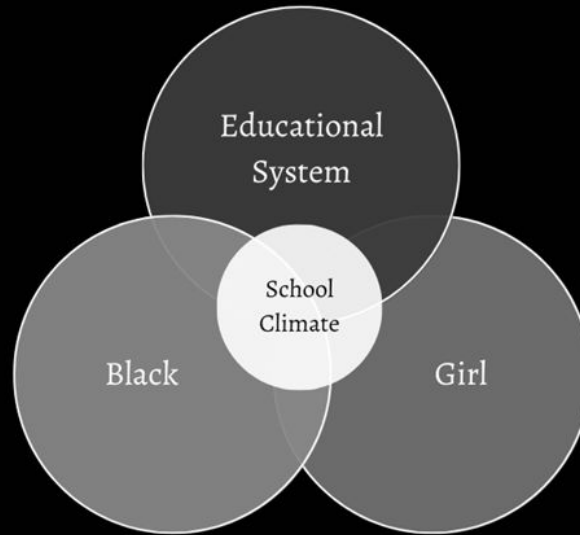


***Representational***



(Crenshaw, 1989)

# *The Intersectionality of Black Girls in Education Model*



The criminalization of Black girls reveals significant assumptions and biases that contribute to Black girls' inequitable outcomes.

- Conformity to White middle-class femininity norms (Basow and Rubin, 1999).

Black girls are held to adult expectations at a younger age when compared to their counterparts.


- **Adultification:** “*perceptions of Black girls as less innocent and more adult-like than White girls...*” (Epstein et al., 2017, p. 1).

These exclusionary responses to behavior drive Black girls out of school, resulting in academic disengagement, greater school pushout rates, and a higher risk of criminal activity (George, 2015).

- **School pushout** *refers to a variety of individual and societal factors that hinder or discourage students from completing their education, with serious and long-term implications* (Dignity in Schools, 2017).



## Academic & Societal Consequences

An illustration of two hands, one on the left and one on the right, holding a rectangular sign. The hands are rendered in a dark brown color with white outlines for the fingers and palms. The sign is a solid black rectangle with a thin, light pink border. The text on the sign is written in a white, serif font, with some words in bold and italics.

*It is vital to analyze how classifications including **race** and **gender** intersect to influence **Black girls'** disproportionate representation in school-based discipline and their overall school experiences.*

(Morris, 2007)





02

## STUDY PURPOSE & RESULTS



PASS THE MIC



# *Study Purpose*

The purpose of the study was to center Black girls' personal experiences and perceptions of their school's climate, sense of futility, and overall school through a sequential explanatory design.

[QUANT → QUAL]

“There is a gap around qualitative inquiry to identify specific aspects to bolster evidence from Black girls about their experiences”



## QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

**RQ1:** What are Black girls' perceptions of school climate?

**RQ 2:** Is there a relationship between Black girls' perceptions of overall school climate and their sense of academic futility?

## QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

**RQ 3:** What are factors that Black girls perceive as barriers to success in school?

**RQ 4:** What do Black girls perceive as factors of agency to attain success in school?



**RESEARCH  
QUESTIONS**

**157 Black girls**

in grades 6 - 12

across **2 states**

in the northeastern region of the  
United States

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The responses were gathered  
primarily by distribution within  
**community organizations**

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**10 Black girls**

were interviewed after  
completing the survey

## Setting & Participants





## Research Procedures

### Agency Recruitment

- Recruited via email blasts to administration/leadership
- 

### Qualtrics Survey

- Contained two measures
- 

### Student Interview

- Subset of Black girls
- Parent & student consent

## Georgia School Climate Survey (GSCS)

Assesses middle and high school (typically grades 6-12) student perceptions of school climate within the eight dimensions. Higher scores represent more positive perceptions of school climate.

- School connectedness
- Character
- Physical environment
- Adult social support
- Peer social support
- Cultural acceptance
- Order and discipline
- Safety

## Sense of Futility Scale (SFS)

Assesses students' perceptions on mastery based on educational goals. Higher futility ratings indicate students perceive they cannot create their own academic success.

Sample questions:

- *“People like me will never do well in school even though we try hard”*
- *“There is no use in working hard at school”*
- *“A good job is not reserved for people like me”*

# Semi-Structured Student Interview



- Interview via secure video conferencing lasting up to two hours
- To better understand the quantitative results, this semi-structured interview protocol encompassed questions that examined:
  - **School Climate:** experiences and attitudes toward various domains including peer and adult relations, school safety, order and discipline, cultural acceptance, physical environment, character, school connectedness, etc./desired improvements in the general school setting
  - **Sense of Futility:** perceived ability and notions about their schools' control over the success of students from particular student populations

RQ 1: What are Black girls' perceptions of school climate?

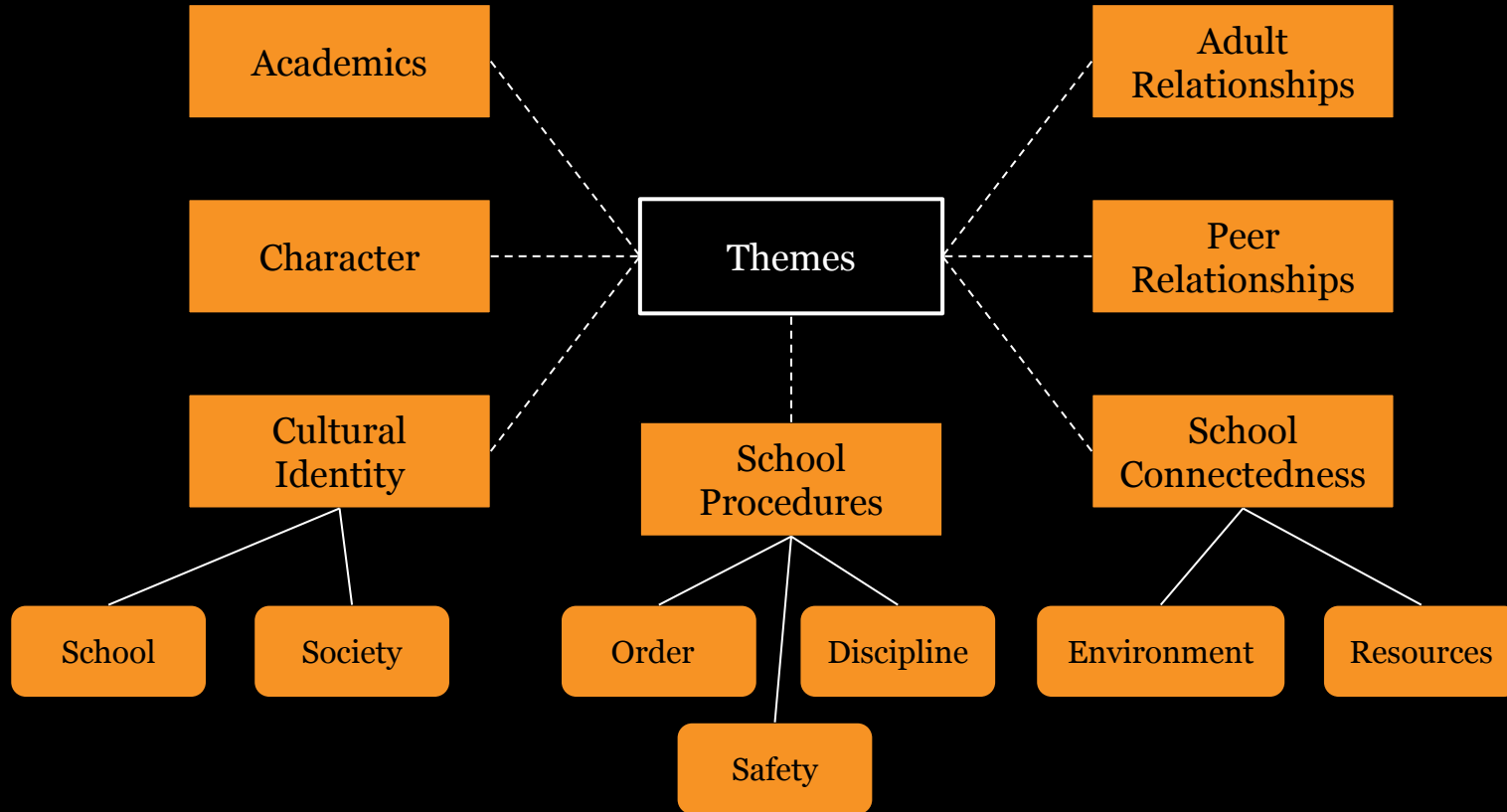
	<u>Mean</u>
<b>School Climate</b>	2.94
<b>Connectedness</b>	2.98
<b>Character</b>	3.72
<b>Physical Environment</b>	2.86
<b>Adult Social Support</b>	2.71
<b>Peer Social Support</b>	3.12
<b>Cultural Acceptance</b>	2.45
<b>Order and Discipline</b>	3.04
<b>Safety</b>	2.40

RQ 2: Is there a relationship between Black girls' perceptions of overall school climate and their sense of academic futility?

The regression model is a statistically significant predictor of overall school climate,  $F(1, 154) = 97.438, p < .001$ .

For every unit increase in sense of futility, there is a .623 decrease in overall school climate.

# RQ3 & RQ4: Thematic Map From Interview Data





# Interview Highlights: *Adult Relationships*

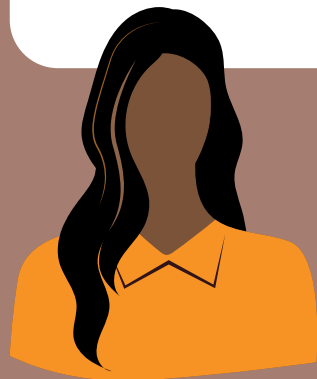
“It was like an argumentative essay on if we should have uniforms or not. She was like, I don't think you can write an essay up to the standards that your teacher wants. I was like look, I have one of the highest grades in this class, but okay”



“Well, one teacher, he would ask us, like, how we feel and how our day was and depending on, like, our answers would be if we got homework...and he really made like, everyone feel welcome and comfortable”

# Interview Highlights: *Academics*

“What I mean by that is like Martin Luther King, like did him a thousand times, all last year, and in middle school, we keep learning about him, I want to learn about someone else or other stuff that happened”



“Because we are honors. When you are in Honors, they expect so much like a lot more than like a regular class. So, you gotta do more than others cause you are in that class for a reason...”

# Interview Highlights: *School Procedures*

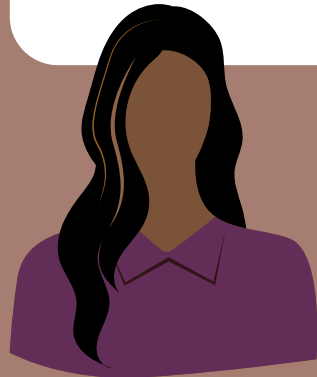
“...they ended up bringing me to the office. Handcuffing me, bringing me to the office and then they called my mom and told her everything”



“I would probably say... I feel safe with protocols that can ensure that nothing will happen to me or my peers”

# Interview Highlights: *Cultural Identity*

“I definitely think that my identity might hinder me just because of again, stereotypes, like, people will just assume based on me without actually getting to know me and knowing like, my goals and what I want to achieve”



“To be honest, I never really, I think I only had one, and she wasn't even my teacher. She was my coach. That was the only black teacher, and they ended up firing her”

# Interview Highlights

## School Connectedness

"We need a better pest operator because we have roaches and mice. And that's nasty"

## Peer Relationships

"They were like, you can't say anything around her. She's a snitch, she's a snitch. After that, I really didn't say anything. I just, like, pretend like it had stopped, you know..."

## Cultural Identity

"Absolutely, White people are always more privileged. And they always have more opportunities and absolutely"



03

# SUPPORTING BLACK GIRLS



# School Climate & Academic Futility



There is a **significant difference in school climate** based on **disciplinary experiences**



When a Black girl is **disciplined**, they report a **more negative perception** of the extent to which **diversity is respected at their school**



There is a significant **relationship between academic futility and school climate**

# SUPPORTING BLACK GIRLS

RELATIONSHIPS	SCHOOL PROCEDURES	CULTURAL ACCEPTANCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Relationships in school can impact how connected they feel to their environment</li><li>• This can impact their engagement in the classroom and influence future goal setting</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Schools that use effective approaches that make them feel safe are important</li><li>• Concerns may arise if Black girls do not feel protected by their school personnel</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Being a Black girl can create numerous set of challenges in school and in society</li><li>• Stereotypes, discrimination, and prejudice affect academic progress</li></ul>

“Definitely being more supportive and more encouraging to young Black girls...”





A school is considered to be racially equitable if it first acknowledges the existence of systemic racism and then strives to eradicate the structures and processes that prevent particular minoritized communities from flourishing and accomplishing their goals.



Adopting racially and culturally conscious practices and interventions



Intersectionality can be a useful tool for understanding Black girl experiences



Both policymakers and school administration should focus on systemic improvement



Critical conversation spaces for Black girls can effectively create unity

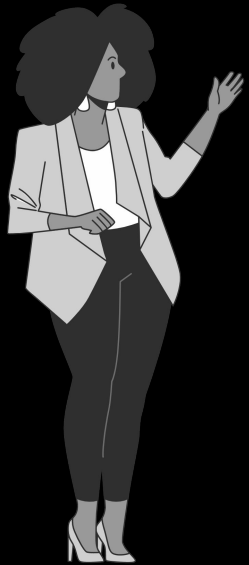
**IMPLICATIONS**

04

# BLACK WOMAN EXPERIENCE



# Navigating Academic Spaces as Black Women



“Always aware of being a minority wherever I go”

“People don’t want to see an afro, they want to see a 24-inch weave”

“I just want to not feel ignored at school”

01

Faculty Negativity

02

Peer Mentorships &  
Relationships

03

Work & Personal  
Support Structures

# SUPPORTING BLACK WOMEN

Increasing the number  
of Black women in  
these spaces



Creating Supportive Spaces

Amplifying voices and  
collaboration



Focusing on Systemic  
Improvement

The image features a solid black background. In the top right corner, there is a large orange shape that tapers to a point. In the bottom left corner, there is a large orange shape that tapers to a point, mirroring the one in the top right. Centered on the black background is the text "Your vulnerability is a gift". The words "Your", "is a", and "gift" are in a white serif font, while the word "vulnerability" is in an orange serif font, matching the decorative elements.

“Your vulnerability is a gift”

*"You will never be good enough"*

*"You are ghetto"*

*"I like your hair better when it is straight"*



*"Why does your hair look like that"*

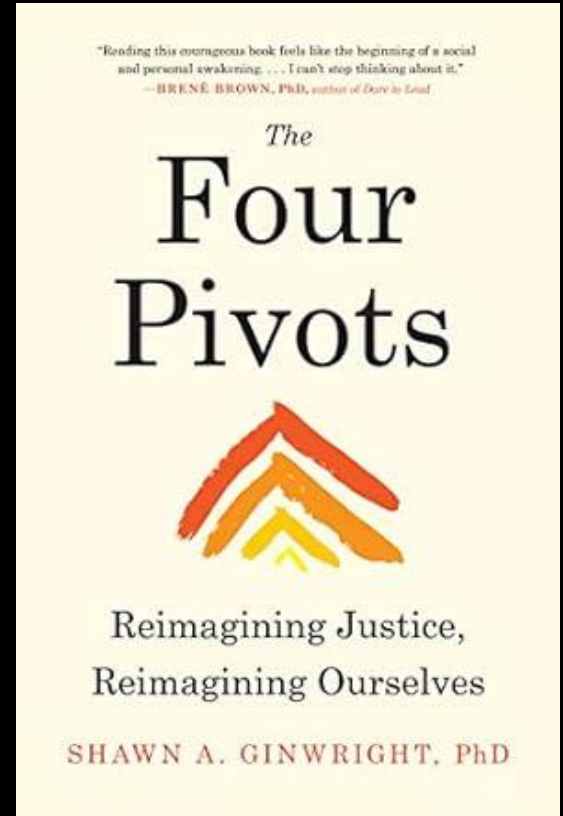
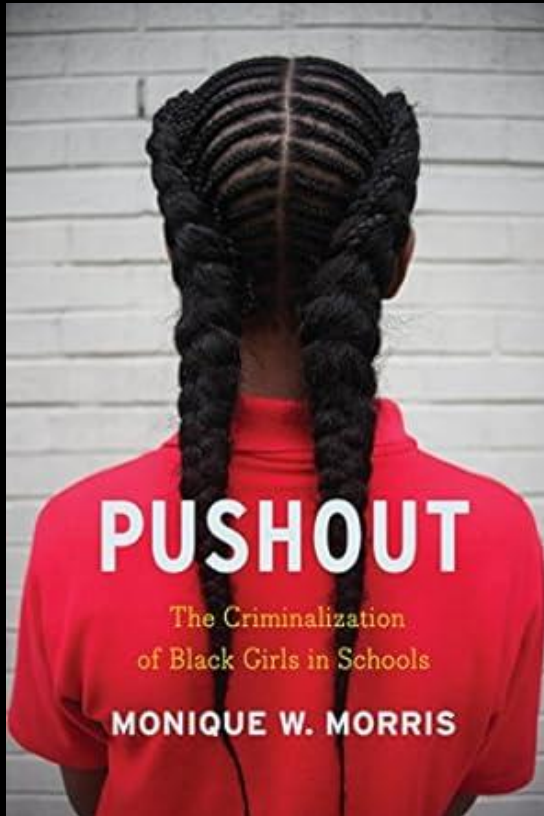
*"You are acting like a slave"*

*"Your work must have been done by someone else"*





# RESOURCES







# THANK YOU!

*Any questions or reflections?*

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