Interrogating the experiences of Race, Racism and Misogynoir for Black Girls in Education

RACE ON THE AGENDA

Jamila Thompson

2025

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Race on the Agenda

CITY BRIDGE FOUNDATION

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Acknowledgements

We would like to extend our deepest gratitude to Jamila for her crucial work in producing such an important and timely piece of research, and for all her hard work during the first year of the ROTA Community Research Partnership.

We are also extremely grateful to all the other members of the first RCRP cohort for fostering such a dynamic and collaborative environment. Their hard work and dedication prove the value of community-led participatory research on issues facing the Black and Global Majority community.

Finally, we want to extend our thanks everyone at the City Bridge Trust and Propel, who have made this work possible, and have always championed our efforts to bring about racial equity and racial justice for our communities.

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Jamila's Thompson Reflection

I chose to explore the experiences of Black girls within the education system because these issues are deeply personal and politically urgent. The realities of race, anti-Black racism, anti-Blackness, and misogynoir are not abstract concepts to me they are lived experiences that continue to shape how Black children navigate schools every day.

Historically, and still today issues of attainment disparities, rates of exclusion, and curriculum reform – within the context of the Black child's experience have always been at the forefront of conversation. These conversations mainly, but not exclusively, focus on the experiences of Black boys, particularly those of Caribbean heritage. However, the "Child Q" incident has opened wider conversations around the experiences of racism, policing, and misogynoir as endured by Black girls in schools.

Throughout this research, I was repeatedly confronted by how pervasive institutional and systemic racism remains. The strip-searching of Child Q and her subjection to abuse and trauma by police officers in a school setting – is not an anomaly. It highlights that education as an institution and schools as physical spaces are sites of harm for Black girls (and Black children generally) and is the consequence of long-standing attitudes toward Black girlhood, rooted in colonial histories and tools of suppression that still shape how institutions operate which shows how Black girls are perceived and treated. Like their male counterparts, Black girls are at risk of excessive and disproportionate punishments.

This systemic failure is further compounded by a curriculum that often erases Black histories, marginalises Black contributions, and upholds Eurocentric narratives.

Schools should be spaces of growth and opportunity, but for many Black children in particular Black girls they are sites of surveillance, control, and punishment.

I want to also highlight adultification and how important it is to address this. The anti-Black racism and misogynoir which Black girls face in schools is rooted in the historical constructions of Blackness and Black femininity – as outlined in the *Milk Honeybees See Us, Hear Us* report. What we must come to terms with as a society – as teachers, educators, practitioners, policy influencers, advocates, and caregivers – is that Black girls are at risk of harm in the same ways that Black boys are. The presence of police in schools, the policing of Black children by teachers, and the lack of systems to safeguard Black children all highlight the lack of care, compassion and grace being extended to Black children.

Black girls are not afforded the same softness that other girls are afforded. Anti-Black racism and misogynoir result in the adultification of Black girls – they are perceived as older, less innocent, and more culpable than their white peers. This leads to harsher disciplinary measures, reduced access to pastoral care, and an overall erosion of the safe, nurturing environment every child deserves.

Adultification bias is not just a theoretical concept – it has real-world consequences. Studies show that Black girls are more likely to be viewed as aggressive, hypersexual, and disruptive, even when displaying the same behaviours as their white peers. This skewed perception leads to disproportionate punishment, over-surveillance and a failure to recognise when Black girls are themselves in need of protection.

Executive Summary

This report represents a critical and integral piece of work that amplified the lived experiences of Black girls in the UK education system and supports evidence-based reform to education, safeguarding and racial justice.

Black girls are incessantly underrepresented in date and overlooked in conversations about racism in education – especially compared to black boys. This report provides a space for their voices, stories and lived experiences to be heard, validated and evidenced.

Through a mix methods approach including surveys and in-depth interviews with Black British girls aged between 11-19 years old across various parts of England. *

The findings expose patterns of racism, misogynoir, adultification and institutional neglect.

Key findings reveal that over 80% of participants experienced or witnessed racism from teachers or peers. Black girls' reports being sexualised, policed for their bodies and hairstyles, and denied the protections typically afforded to young people. *[1]

Peer researcher and Author of this report Jamila Thompson interviewed students from the same school that Child Q attended. Their testimonies revealed that the infamous strip
search indecent was not seen as an isolated event but part of a broader culture of institutional harm "it was not the first time that something like this had happened".

This report calls for urgent reform with robust recommendations, including mandatory anti-racism training, and anti-racist school politics.

It also advocates for empowering student voices through councils and fostering safer, inclusive learning environments for Black and Global Majority girls.

We urge policymakers, educators, safeguarding bodies and all those in positions of influence to not only listen and read but to act on these recommendations. Schools must do more to protect and support black girls.

[1] This research includes terms that may be considered offensive or triggering, such as the "n-word."
These terms are not used to cause harm, but rather to preserve the authenticity and integrity of the participants experiences.
A trigger warning is provided here out of respect for readers who may find such language distressing.

Interrogating the Experiences of Race, Racism, and Misogynoir for Black Girls in Education

Peer Researcher: Jamila Thompson

A range of measures, including the guidance provided by Safeguarding and Child Protection, and, Keeping Children Safe in Education policies, and the Equality Act 2010 suggest that equality, human rights, and child protection laws work together to safeguard all children, including those from Black and Global Majority backgrounds. However, the 2022 revelation of the horrific and unlawful state-sanctioned sexual assault' of Child Q reminded us that Black children are not safe, and Black girls are not safe, even in schools. An investigation concluding that "racism was a likely factor" in the Metropolitan Police's strip search of the schoolgirl in 2020. This incident, along with others such as the tragic murder of 15-year-old Elianne Andam, highlight the need to elevate the narratives and experiences of Black girls. In particular, we must address issues such as adultification, misogynoir, sexual harassment, and racism, all of which are prevalent within the education system. The safety of Black and Global Majority girls requires urgent attention.

Through this research, our Peer Researcher, Jamila Thompson, sought to share the stories of Black girls, and provide them with a safe space to address, articulate, and reflect on their experiences. Jamila's background in the education system, along with her lived experiences as a Black woman and Black girl in education, meant that she was well prepared to approach this project within a community she understands well. With 10 years of experience in education, Jamila has taught, mentored, and supported hundreds of Black girls in London. She has been a qualified teacher for eight years, and has served as the Ethnic Minority Achievement Coordinator and Head of Sociology & Religious Education. These roles have equipped her with the expertise to examine this research from an educational, inclusion, and sociological perspective. Jamila additionally had the invaluable experience of teaching at OYA! (Organisation of Young Africans), a supplementary Saturday school for children of African and Caribbean descent in Northwest London, which allowed her to connect with more Black girls for this research.

Jamila's work revealed that issues of race, racism, and misogynoir continue to manifest in the education sector. Even where the Black girls we spoke to had not personally experienced racism, they were aware of other people's experiences or encounters that they might describe as examples of racism. Many participants indicated that while they had not necessarily experienced racism from their teachers, they believed that some white teachers displayed ignorance regarding the experiences of Black people, culture, and students. All interview participants discussed the intersections of their identities as both Black and female.

One student explained that she found it difficult to speak with white girls about being a Black girl or with Black boys for the same reason, as there was often a lack of understanding stemming from the impacts of racism and patriarchy. Additionally, some of the younger girls were unfamiliar with the term "misogynoir." Participating in the research allowed them to access this language, helping them better articulate their racialised and gendered experiences. A significant issue for some of the older girls was the lack of allyship from Black boys regarding topics affecting Black girls, particularly issues of misogynoir and sexual assault. The visibility of being Black in environments where there were few other Black individuals was also significant for the girls, although for different reasons

Background

Historically, Black populations in England have had a difficult relationship with the English education system and concerns around Black children in schools have been present as far back as the Windrush Generation when England invited her "colonial subjects" to rebuild the "mother land". The treatment of Black Caribbean children in England's schools illustrated the presence of institutional racism. Biased examinations led to Black children, and particularly those of Caribbean heritage, being labelled as educationally 'subnormal' at an alarming rate, in comparison to their white counterparts, and other BGM children. This resulted in Black children attended schools for children with severe Special Educational Needs (SEN) that they did not have. The low expectations of Black boys and girls led to the growth of the supplementary school movement to instil pride, culture, history and confidence in Black children, in order to combat the institutional racism they faced in the schools, the continued efficacies of which we return to later in this report (Andrews, 2024).

Over the last 30 years, Black boys and Black children of from Caribbean backgrounds, have been identified as a vulnerable group because of their high exclusion rates in comparison to their White counterparts. This overrepresentation in is a concern that has been present for decades, and a significant number of studies and interventions have been run to explore its causes, effects, and possible solutions to the issue. However, as the NEU noted in a 2023 report, existing government data and academic statistics have focused on Black

boys, and that “further attention on the specifics of Blacks girls’ experiences in school in the United Kingdom is perhaps overdue”. These research findings suggest that Black girls are indeed experiencing issues of *race*, gender and class in parallel with Black boys. In recent years, there have been growing concerns about increased police presence in schools in areas with larger BGM and working class communities. Initially, much of the talk was around boys from these communities who were, and still are, having increased interactions with the police. However, the incident of Child Q revealed to many that both Black boys, *and* Black girls, are victims of police presence in schools, and that the adultification of Black boys which leads them being sanctioned of fear, is the same adultification which led to a Black, teenage girl being strip searched without the presence of a safe adult, guardian or knowledge of parents. Whilst the adultification of Black girls in schools has been a growing topic in US literature for over a decade now, the Child Q incident has been the real catalyst for more research to be done in the area of adultification and misogynoir in the UK.

As noted in the introduction, adultification to the phenomenon where adults in positions of power and authority fail to ascribe “childhood status” to certain children and young people due to stereotypes about their class and race. These stereotypes and preconceived notions about who qualifies as ‘a child’ result in children from specific racial and class backgrounds being denied the protections of childhood and treated as adults prematurely. While any child can experience adultification, the NEU report highlights a clear bias in the UK towards the adultification of Black boys and girls. This research examines the experiences of Black girls through the lens of intersectionality and misogynoir, as their experiences of adultification reflect the dual impacts of being both gendered and racialised within a society that views them as “other.” This study aims to illuminate the challenges faced by Black girls, provide recommendations for improving their experiences, and contribute to the growing body of work addressing the intersection of race, gender, and class in shaping the lives of young people in the UK.

Methods

The primary research methods that we drew upon in this project were a mixed methods approach to gain both quantifiable data to draw some broad conclusions and qualitative to humanise the individual experiences of the girls who participated. Initially, we wanted to conduct focus groups with a few groups of girls but logistically, it was not possible. In total, we conducted a survey with thirty-eight girls as well as six in-depth interviews with Black girls in various parts of England, aged 11-19. Recruitment was conducted from within Jamila’s existing network of students that she had previously taught, and their peers.

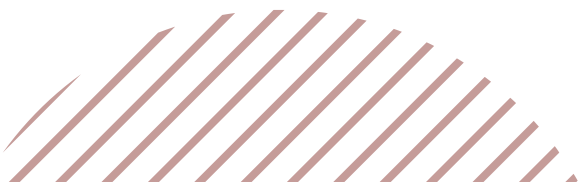
The survey focused on the whether Black girls themselves had experienced racism in schools or witnessed racist behaviour, and if so, by whom towards whom. The survey also gave space girls to write about anyone of their experiences as well as to identify whether their school acted correctly to address the racism or whether the girls had any suggestions on how to improve things. However, these themes were explored in more

depth through the interviews. The survey also captured the age of the participants, the area of England where they lived, and how they identified ethnically.

The quantitative findings from the surveys were analysed both at population level and qualitative survey findings, along with interview findings, were coded inductively, and grouped together to provide several themes for analysis.

Due to the research context, it was important to include Black girls as much as possible in the research process, ensuring they indeed were co-creators of knowledge and that the research represented them well. To do this, an ex-A Level Sociology student Jamila's, Nada Mohammed, was invited to help with some aspects of the methodology including editing and proofreading documents, creating recruitment flyers and posting them on social media, sharing the research more generally with her peers, creating Eventbrite pages for participants to sign up for the focus groups and more. Nada was an integral part of this research, and it would not have been such an easy process without her help and support – thank you Nada.

Nada's contribution highlights the enormous ability, creativity and potential our Black girls have. What some lack is the opportunity to help shape the narratives that pertain to them, and access to those creating this knowledge. We sincerely hope that this research demonstrates the power of such co-creation and encourages others to give more Black girls these opportunities to both support their own communities, and their own successes in the future.



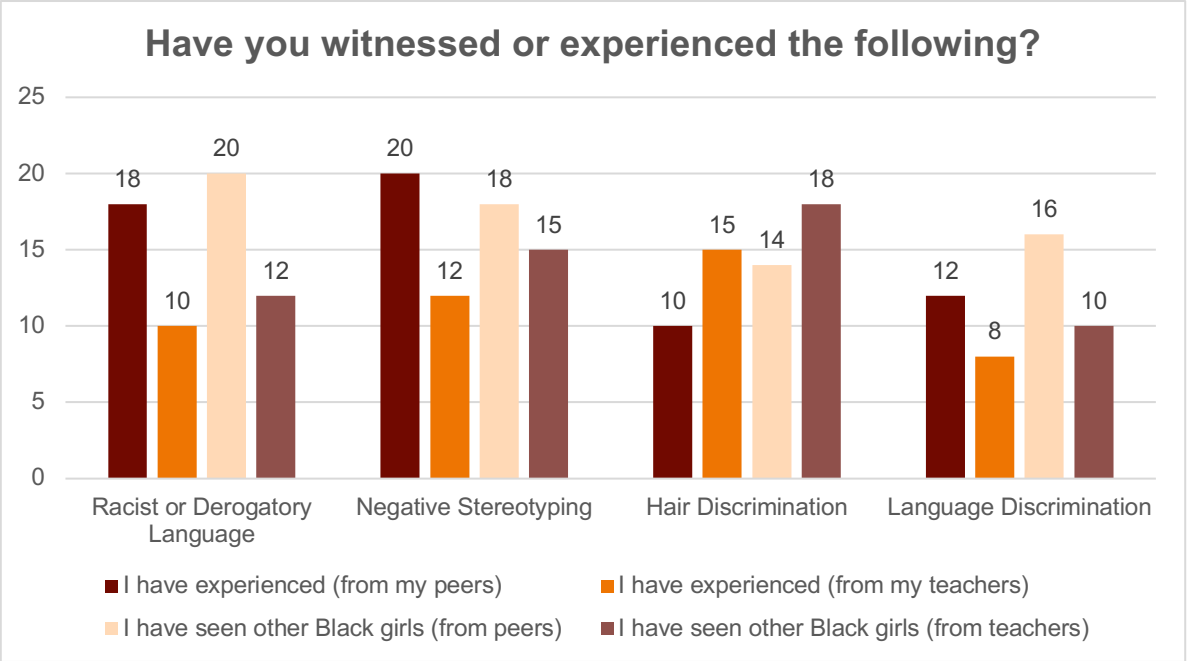
Results

Surveys

The survey was conducted using Google forms and the link was shared across social media. The only criteria for participants were that they had to identify as a girl and identify, or be racialised, as Black for the purpose of the research.

In terms of the demographics of the girls who participated in the survey, in terms of age, most participants identified as 17 (37%) whilst our lowest groups were those aged 15 and 16. Many of the participants were sixth form or college students and so were more inclined to participate in the research as they genuinely had points that they wanted to share. The fact that 15- and 16-year-olds are preparing for GCSEs may be a factor in their low participation. In addition, in terms of ethnicity, majority of participants (76%) identified solely as African and around 16% as Caribbean. It would have been interesting to see more Caribbean responses given the statistics on Black Caribbean children in schools and to potentially make a comparison between the Black African experience and the Black Caribbean experience. In terms of location, nearly three quarters were from London, with 20% living in Northwest or South East England.

When asked if they themselves had experienced racism or misogynoir in education, the vast majority, nearly three quarters, answered yes. 18% answered unsure which may reflect their lack of understanding around the word “misogynoir”. Participants were also asked if they had witnessed other people experiencing racism in education. This time, a larger percentage (84%) answered yes with 13% percent of participants still unsure.



Participants were asked to identify if they had experienced or witnessed the following incidents in school: racism or derogatory language, negative stereotyping, hair discrimination, language discrimination, use of language such as “angry” or “aggressive”, violence, violent threats, being called the wrong name or mistaken for another student, and more severe punishments than other student. Participants were also asked who experienced the incidents and by whom.

From these questions, the key findings were that 84% of girls had either experienced some form of racism from their peers, witnessed racism against Black girls by their peers and/or by teachers. 81% had also experienced some form of racism from teachers. Some other key findings were:

- 55% of girls had experienced racist or derogatory language by their peers and 65 had witnessed other Black girls experience this.
- 60% had experienced negative stereotyping from their peers and 36% experienced by their teachers
- 36% of girls experienced hair discrimination and being called words such as “angry” and aggressive” by their peers.
- Nearly half had been mixed up with another Black person by their peers or a teacher
- Around 60% of girls experienced hair discrimination from teachers and 36% had seen it happen to other Black girls
- More than 10% of girls had experienced or witnessed violence or violent threat by their peers or teachers towards themselves or other Black girls.

Participants were asked to elaborate and explain their answers. Many of the explanations echoed what was heard in the interviews with other girls.

An 11-year-old participant wrote:

“The teacher called a Black girl a monkey and said nigga”

A 16-year-old girl form London wrote:

“I was permanently excluded wrongfully because of my race”

An eighteen-year-old girl form East London shared:

“I have experienced racist and derogatory comments made to me and against my peers all throughout school, I have experienced sexual assault and gotten the proper support after it happened”

On hair discrimination, a 17-year-old from London wrote:

"Negative stereotypes like being told we're too loud and sensitive also we weren't allowed coloured braids like blonde or ginger because they weren't "our" natural hair colours"

A 17-year-old girl form South East England shared her experience of negative interactions between Black students, their teachers and their peers:

"An older student at my school were pressing at her nose, making a 'pig nose' while "laughing at me which felt like she was making fun of my ethnic features. I reported it my teacher, they did not deal with appropriately. There has been times where a teacher has called me aggressive for standing up myself. I do remember times that I have compared to other Black girls that I don't believe we look alike. I seen it happen to other Black people. There was an incident recently when a white girl made some racist comment to Black girl. The Black girl was villainised and made to be seen as the perpetrator in the situation. from as long as I remember, we were never allowed to have coloured braids. So I never bothered to wear it . remember another time in primary school when we were playing The Lion King, I had the role of Rafiki. I had decided to take out my hair and it was in one big Afro puff. My teacher turned around to me and said my hair was really good for the role. These were just some of my racist experiences".

Another sixth former from London wrote about her interaction with a Professor from Sheffield University:

"Overall in my previous school environment, seeing as it's in an incredibly diverse area, my experiences with racism are considerably reduced compared to when I'm outside my area. Nonetheless, I've still witnessed the use of the N word by non-Black pupils and derogatory caricatures made, teachers perpetuating a violence stereotype through the breaking up of groups of Black students. I've also had a personal experience where a PhD professor from the University of Sheffield came into our school as part of long term work to improve diversity initiatives. She had been working with members of the student parliament, and as part of the group, we wore coloured rosettes like the ones people wear on their birthday. Whilst in discussion, she took it upon herself to comment on it and joke that "if the light went out, all I'd see is the badge". For context, I was the only Black girl in the room at that moment".

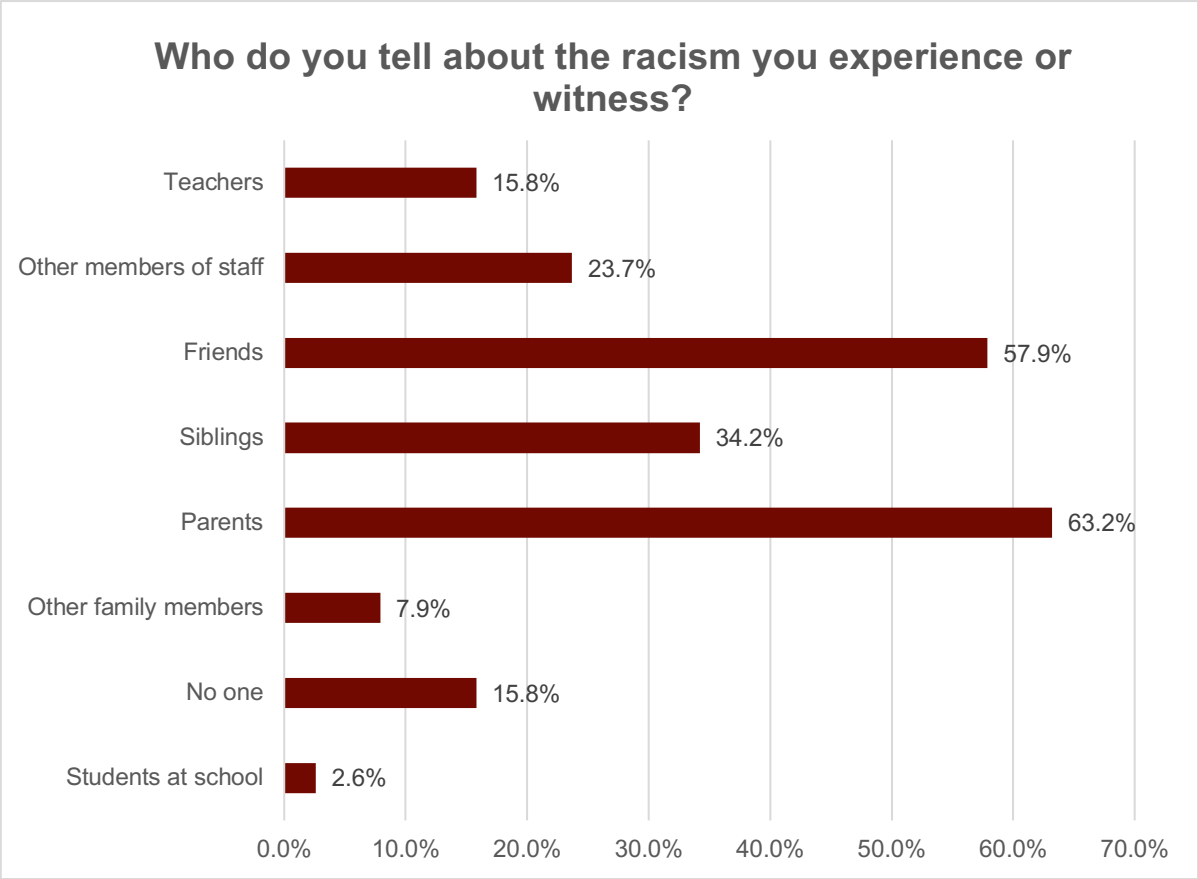
A nineteen-year-old girl from South East England shared her experiences of being called a derogatory term by a member of staff:

"A dinner lady called me a bitch despite the fact I was told by a teacher that I'm allowed to skip the queue due to having a disability. The school did nothing to safeguard me from this staff and they remained at the school with no repercussions taken".

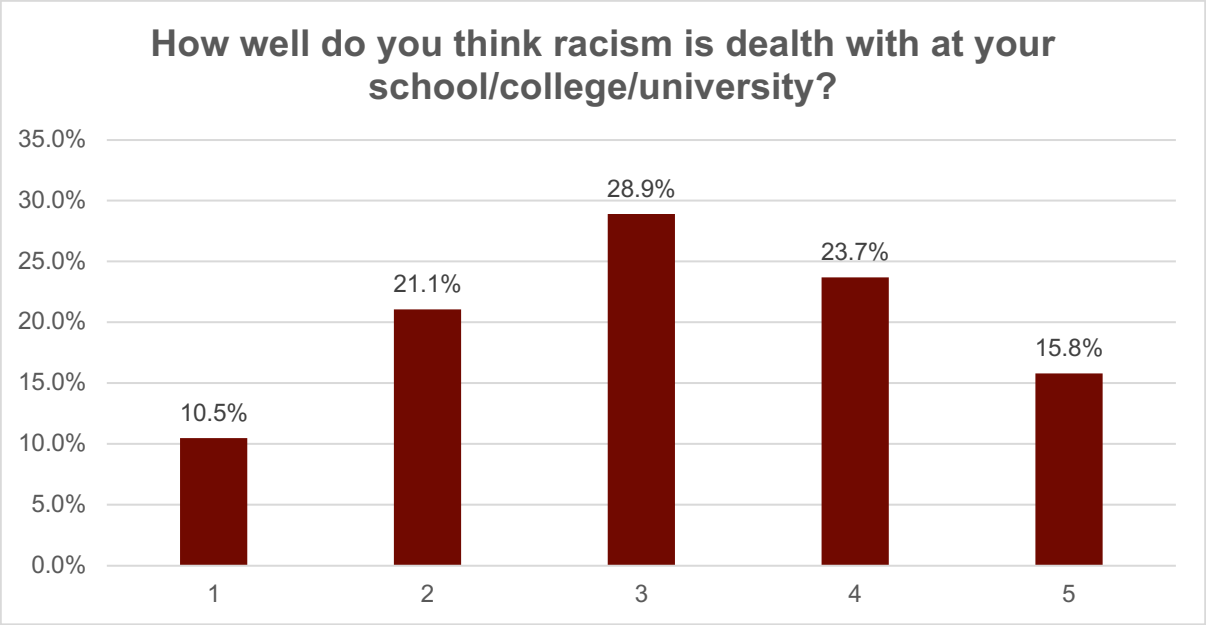
Another student shared on language policing:

"There was a girl in my English class, who mostly spoke in pidgin English, and she got told off by the English teacher for doing so."

When asked who they told about their experiences of racism, most girls identified their parents, friends, and siblings as the main people they shared their experiences with. Sixty-three percent of girls told their parents about the racism they faced, roughly 60% told their friends and 34% told their siblings. A small number of girls (15%) answered "no one".



When asked how well they thought their education settings managed racism, most girls were in the middle (29%), 21% thought their setting managed it well and 24% thought their setting managed it badly. More than 10% of girls thought their school managed racism very well, although 15% said their setting managed racism very badly. Participants were asked to elaborate on their answers, with some stating that individual teachers often tried to help but did not have a voice in the school. Many others noted that racism, or rather the racist action in question, is often seen as a "joke" by teacher and so, they do not always deal with it correctly.



Finally, participants also felt that more could be done to eradicate racism in schools and to ensure that where there is racism, there are appropriate punishments. Some of the recommendations for improving experiences racism in schools were:

- Recruiting “diverse staff”
- Establishing “accountability for actions”
- Schools should implement zero tolerance racism policies
- More education on racism and microaggressions
- Matters of racism should be taken seriously and action should be taken to address complaints
- “More teacher training on handling the issue” and “training schools how to address poor behaviour without the employment of negative, racist language.”
- “More Black teachers are needed, particularly Black female teachers. I believe representation really matters in incidents like these, and lived-in, first-hand experiences are required. But to do that schools as institution need to be more accustoming to young Black women who want to pursue a career in education”
- More history, education and “understanding of how the Black ethnic minority has emerged from a prominent moment in history and how we’ve created and identified our own community of likeness”

Focus Groups and Interviews

Focus group were originally intended to be the main focus of this research, enabling the girls to co-create the data as well as shared their lived experiences with their peers in a safe space. Unfortunately, recruitment and timing issues meant that we did not manage to speak with as many participants as we had hoped, although we interview four girls individuals, and two participants together. The conversations were rich, revealing, and very much led by the young people who took part. The sessions revealed patterns of anti-Black school policies and practices, hair discrimination, higher expectations of Black girls than Black boys and feelings of lack of solidarity amongst Black girls and their white female and Black male counterparts. There were also discussions on sexualisation and sexual violence, and the incident concerning Child Q.

Anti-Black school policies and hair discrimination

Five out of six Black girls expressed complaints about anti-Black school policies, particularly around hair discrimination. On student noted that she had been asked to change the colour of her braided hair extensions to a "natural hair" colour by a teacher. She noted that when Black girls have hair extensions that are not dark brown or Black, teachers are "quick to ask them to take it out" in comparison, "white girls are allowed to dye their hair any colour in the rainbow but that's okay". Establishing uniform policies which state that students are only allowed 'natural hair colours', and subsequently penalising Black students when their hair colour choice is not Black or Brown is anti-Black as it assumes that all Black people's hair is monolithic, and can only be dark. Allowing white students to then have Black, Brown, Blonde or Red hair reinforces this as whilst these are all natural hair colours, assuming that Black children cannot also have these hair colours naturally is problematic and ignorant.

Another participant explained that "girls in my school were not allowed to sit their exams because they were wearing a bonnet" because it was "unprofessional". The participant further explained that this was unfair because generally Black girls' hair takes more time and effort to do, deemed by many to be a waste of valuable time on exam days, leading some to simply wear the bonnet instead. In addition, the participant argued that the idea that a bonnet is 'unprofessional' "does not make sense" because "most people know how to dress in a professional setting. We are not going to wear a bonnet to work in an office. But we are at school, so just let us be kids". This was an interesting perspective, as it suggested that Black girls, and maybe children in general, know how to code switch and thus where Black girls may wear bonnets, or young people may wear tracksuit bottoms and hoodies, these young people are aware that this attire would not work in another setting.

The uniform policies discussed by participants seemed to reflect a degree of anti-Blackness, highlighting the tendency of educational institutions to police what children can and cannot wear beyond what is reasonably necessary. Targeting the natural hair and hairstyles of Black girls, and problematising their cultural hair practices, can have a detrimental impact on their mental health and sense of self. Such actions reinforce

the notion that being "Black" equates to being "unprofessional," untidy, or inadequate.

Sexualisation and Sexual Violence

The sexualisation and sexual assault of Black girls was another significant issue discussed by participants. One girl, who attended the same school as Child Q explained that, whilst the Child Q incident was very sad, “it was not the first time that something like this had happened”. They went on to discuss how students in the school, predominantly girls, staged a protest the day after the incident “where lots of people went round talking about their experiences of sexual violence in schools”. The action revealed that sexual violence was more prevalent than the students thought and that many of them had similar experiences.

Another participant mentioned that comments were often made about Black girls’ bodies when they were wearing school uniform because of the way in which the uniform “fits on their bodies”. The participant mentioned teachers making comments about Black girls who were “bigger” or “curvier”, particularly in sixth form when students can wear their own clothes. The participant noted that “skinnier girls could wear the same thing but Black girls because we have a bigger bum or breasts, we are getting in trouble… they should not even be looking”. These comments on the policing of Black girls’ bodies, particularly those with curvier figures, is concerning, as it reinforces this idea of Black girls being sexualised or being seen as provocative because of how their clothes fit their bodies. Another, participant shared a similar experience and asked “what do they want me to do? Like this is my body”.

There was a clear sense of frustration by some Black girls about how their bodies were viewed and policed by others, and the fact that the onus was on them to do something about it. In the case with Child Q and the participant from her school, there was also a sense of isolation as they experienced lack of solidarity from their peers in these situations (discussed more below). It is also important to note the impact sexualisation and sexual violence can have on the self-esteem and mental health of Black girls. Having your body policed and having to police your own body to stay “safe”, illustrates that Black girls are not safe in schools and need more support.

“The White girls don’t get it, and the Black boys don’t get it either” – Inadequate Support and Solidarity from Peers

An important revelation from all participants, to varying degrees, was the lack of support and solidarity Black girls felt from their peers.

The participant from the same school as Child Q noted that “when we did the protest, the boys decided to play football… because the protest was happening at the end of lunch so they knew teachers would be busy with us and not looking for them”. There was a strong sense of disappointment at the fact that boys, particularly Black boys, did not see they need to advocate for Black girls who were experiencing, and sharing experiences of, sexual violence. Another participant noted that she did not feel her brother even understood what she goes through as Black girl because “he is boy” and

"they don't really care about these things [racism and sexism]".

Another participant noted that she couldn't speak to white girls, and she could not speak to Black boys about her experiences because their "whiteness" meant that the "white girls cannot relate to my experience of being Black and the boys have patriarchy". Here, students were highlighting the intersectional nature of their experience of being both Black and female. The same student also mentioned that being "queer" was also another barrier as she did not have many queer or queer Black people around her either.

Another participant noted that she was happy to be part of the research project as "there is nowhere else to speak about this stuff", and "people get offended when you start speaking about racism". This illustrated the importance of providing Black girls with a safe space to exist and to share their lived experiences without fear of being policed or causing "offence". Again, this level of isolation, lack of solidarity and advocacy for Black girls by their peers reinforces the need for issues of race and racism to be understood within the context of mental health and potentially causing low self-esteem. Moreover, the findings illustrate the discourse of Black girls, as well as other marginalised and minoritised groups, feeling both seen and unseen, visible and invisible in education settings. Black girls are seen through a stereotypical lens which renders them "angry", "aggressive", having an "attitude" or being perceived in sexualised ways. Simultaneously, Black girls are invisible because of the lack advocacy and acknowledgement of their experiences of race, racism and misogynoir.

Higher Expectations of Black girls vs. Black girls having higher expectations of themselves

Interestingly, two discourses emerged around the theme of adultification during the focus groups and interviews. One concerned teachers having higher expectations of Black girls than Black boys in class. One participant noted that teachers expected the boys to misbehave in class, but when the girls did it was "more of a big deal". The same participant also noted that boys seemed aware of these lower expectations, and therefore played into that in class by displaying low level disruption – i.e. talking in class. Black girls were expected to be mature, or at least, *more* mature than the Black boys. Here, we can understand this high expectations of Black girls' maturity as one aspect of their "adultification" as Black girls as not given the same space as others to simply be children and instead, "Black girls are not getting the benefits of being viewed as innocent". Another participant mentioned that Black girls get less help from teachers and are expected to just "get on with it ourselves". A US study by Georgetown Law researchers found that Black girls as young as 5 years old were 'seen as less innocent, and needing less support, than white girls of the same age' which led 'teachers and other authority figures to treat Black girls as older than they actually are and more harshly than white female students, with the disparity being particularly wide for 10- to 14-year-olds'. Moreover in the UK, some of the impacts of the adultification of Black girls have been identified as increased disciplinary action, reduced support, pressure to conform and identity development (believing they need

to act like adults). Therefore, the findings of this research reinforce the existing links between experiences of Black girls in the UK and the US and the ways in which issues of race and racism transcend geography because the socio-historical context in which race has and continues to exist.

In contrast, a student from an all-girls grammar school in Birmingham explained that the nature of her school fostered high expectations among all pupils, and as one of the few Black girls in her year group, she held particularly high expectations for herself, aspiring to be the top student among her peers. She reflected that her experience in a predominantly white, all-girls grammar school differed from that of participants who attended predominantly Black or Global Majority schools, noting that the focus in her environment was more on academic attainment and less on "race." She shared that her mother had raised her to recognise racism as an issue but not to dwell on it, which she believed may have caused her to unknowingly be a victim of racism without realising it. Additionally, she observed that while her year group was relatively "passive" on issues of race, racism, and discrimination, her sister's year group was much more "vocal." She recounted an incident in which her sister, after speaking out about racism, was given "anger management classes," which she found problematic as it involved labelling the "victim" as "angry" rather than addressing the root cause of the issue - racism.

The findings are particularly interesting as they highlight a dual aspect of the adultification of Black girls. On one hand, it is problematic and has negative implications. On the other, the responses of the Black girls suggest a self-imposed adultification, where they strive to be mature and aware of the negative perceptions held by others, in an effort to combat the adverse effects these perceptions could have on their sense of self.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The research highlights the need for greater support and recognition of Black girls' experiences in schools. While Black boys have rightly been a focus for some time, this research, alongside the incident involving Child Q, underscores the urgency of addressing Black girls' experiences of racism in schools with care and priority

Symbolic progress is not enough. Real transformation requires centring the experiences of the most marginalised – and for too long Black girls have been left out of the conversation. If we are truly committed to equity, justice, and the well-being of all children, then we must confront the specific violences that Black girls face – and create educational environments that see them, hear them, and care for them.

As such, we would like to make the following policy and practice recommendations:

1. **Anti-Racism Training**: Mandatory anti-racism training must be included in all teacher training programmes across the UK. This training should adopt an intersectional approach to understand the varied experiences of different Black and Global Majority (BGM) communities and must be informed by contemporary research and academic literature.

2. **Anti-Racism Continuing Professional Development (CPD)**: All teachers should undertake mandatory annual anti-racism CPD. This training should be delivered by practitioners specialising in anti-racism, particularly anti-Black racism and misogynoir, rather than general Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) experts. Like the initial training, it must utilise an intersectional approach and be informed by up-to-date research. This should be considered for Department for Education.

3. **Mental Health and Wellbeing**: Recognise the impact of racism on the mental health of BGM children and provide culturally sensitive mental health resources for young people and their families. Teachers should also receive training and resources to better support students' mental health and wellbeing.

4. **Diverse Teaching Staff**: Schools must work towards ensuring their teaching staff reflect the communities they serve. This includes recruiting more Black female teachers and other Global Majority educators.

5. **Decolonising the Curriculum**: The national and exam curriculums should be decolonised so that BGM students can see themselves represented in textbooks, history, and learning. This would address the ways in which the curriculum perpetuates histories of racism.

6. **Updating Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) Education**: PSHE curriculums should be updated to provide students with the language and concepts to articulate their lived experiences, such as "misogynoir" and "intersectionality." Schools should also ensure that PSHE or "drop-down" days include opportunities to discuss race, racism, adultification, and misogynoir.

7. **Celebrating Culture and Diversity Year-Round**: Schools should acknowledge culture and diversity throughout the year, not just during Black History Month. This should include teaching about topics such as Black women's natural hair, Black music and cuisine, and languages like patois and pidgin. Where possible, schools should collaborate with external organisations specialising in this work to avoid tokenistic efforts.

8. **Reviewing Existing Policies**: The Department for Education must review and refine policies that may be perceived as anti-Black. Creating an anti-racist council comprising students, teachers, and parents can ensure that BGM students have a voice in shaping policies related to culture and identity, such as hairstyle, hijab, and language policies.

9. **Addressing Sexual Violence and Harassment**: Schools should assess the prevalence and nature of sexual violence through surveys and engage with students to implement appropriate support systems, such as workshops and targeted support groups.

10. **Engaging with Communities and Experts**: Schools should consult with community groups and experts when implementing new curriculums or policies. Organisations like The Black Curriculum and Everyday Racism could provide valuable input for curriculum development and CPD training.

11. **Language in Training**: Remove the term “unconscious bias” from training courses and address the “existing bias” that impacts BGM students in education.

12. **Dedicated Anti-Racism Roles**: Every school in the UK should appoint a teacher or staff member with a Teaching and Learning Responsibility (TLR) for anti-racism, akin to roles supporting pupil premium students.

13. **Encouraging Practitioner Research**: The government should support universities to offer research opportunities for Early Career Teachers and experienced educators to explore specific educational issues, such as the experiences of Black girls in schools. Practitioner-researchers could use their findings to inform school policies and practices to combat racism, sexism, and other issues.

14. **Updating Teaching Standards**: The teaching standards, which guide teacher training and lesson observations, should be updated to include specific expectations around anti-racism and inclusion. This would ensure teachers are accountable for fostering anti-racist practices in classrooms and throughout schools