# ROOTS OF A BLACK GIRL

Preserving the Educational Futures of Black Girls and Femmes in Ontario

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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## Land Acknowledgment

The Power To Girls Foundation acknowledges the land on which we meet and work as the traditional territory of many nations - including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnaabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples. It is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. We also acknowledge that Toronto is covered by Treaty 13 with the Mississaugas of the Credit.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since September 2022, Power To Girls Foundation's Research Team has been working on its educational research study, "Roots of a Black Girl". The study explores the educational experiences of Black girls/femmes, between the ages of 12-17, within Ontario's education system. By the study end in March 2024, we hoped to address the systemic barriers to improve the educational futures of Black girls/femmes. This study is funded by Women and Gender Equality Canada, a Ministry of the Government of Canada in the pursuit to advance equality concerning women of all cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. The project received Research Ethics Board Approval by the Community Research Ethics Office (CREO).

As Roots of A Black Girl is an Ontario-wide study, the research design is multi-methodical. It comprised (i) Phase I to perform a Needs Assessment and (ii) Phase II to test potential programmatic interventions arising from Phase I Findings. Phase I comprised Student Surveys and Afro-Centric Sharing Circles. Phase II assessed the satisfaction of suggested programs for Black girls/femmes and their education through a Feedback Form.

During Phase I, the team consulted Southern Ontario with Urban, Suburban, Rural and Mixed region types. **239** self-identifying Black girls/femmes within Toronto, Peel, Durham, Halton, Waterloo, Ottawa, and Windsor-Essex participated in the Student Survey. During Phase I, 14 participants from within the Survey pool participated in the Afro-Centric Sharing Circles. During Phase II, **6** Black girls participated in a capsule of lunchtime/after-school programs (i.e. Self-image, Discrimination, Black history/culture, etc.) informed by Phase I's Student Survey. Program participants completed a brief Feedback Form to capture their overall satisfaction.

Concerning Survey topics Demographics, Feelings About School, School Support, Cultural Diversity, and Being Black at School, this Final Report highlights, reflects, and discusses Recommendations for common themes and experiences, across urban, suburban, and rural region types for Black girls and femmes in Ontario.

## Key Words
*Black girl, Black femme, education, intersectionality, race, gender*

> **Education** leads to **enlightenment.**
>
> **Enlightenment** opens the way to **empathy.**
>
> **Empathy** foreshadows **reform.**"

*– Michelle Aboagye*

# DEFINITIONS

## Adultification
Adultification defines the "racial bias" where young Black girls and women are treated by adults as if they are more mature than they are (Olupona, 2023). Rather than treating actions or behaviours as "normal" for child development, they are often penalized and treated as opportunities for unfair and disproportionate discipline (2023).

## Anti-Black Racism
Prejudice, attitudes, beliefs, stereotyping, and discrimination that is directed at people of African descent. It is rooted in the unique history, experience, and legacy of enslavement. Anti-Black racism is deeply entrenched in Canadian institutions, policies, and practices, to the extent that it is either functionally normalized or rendered invisible to the larger White society. Anti-Black racism manifests in the current social, economic, and political marginalization of African Canadians, which includes unequal opportunities, lower socio-economic status, higher unemployment, significant poverty rates, and over-representation in the criminal justice system (Government of Ontario, 2022).

## Femme
A gender identity in which someone may have a feminine appearance but may not identify as "female". It is often but not always associated with a 2SLGBTQ+ or queer sexual identity/sexuality (Rhea Ashley Hoskin, 2021).

## Homophobia
"Negative attitudes, feelings, or irrational aversion to, fear or hatred of gay, lesbian, or bisexual people and communities, or of behaviours stereotyped as "homosexual." It is used to signify a hostile psychological state leading to discrimination, harassment or violence against gay, lesbian, or people" (The 519, 2020).

## Intersectionality
Intersectionality was a term first coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), a theory used to "conceptualize, situate, and emphasize the power that factors into the lived experience of Black women based on the marginality of their identities" (McPherson, 2022). The compounding factors of their racial and gendered identity shape the lives of Black girls and the discrimination they experience (Collins & Blige, 2020).

## Misogynoir
According to Moya Bailey, misogynoir is a term created in 2008 that was defined as "the anti-Black and racist misogyny experienced by Black women and girls, especially in North American visual and digital culture. It describes the overlapping racialized and sexist violence experienced by Black women as a result of their oppression at the intersection of race and gender (Bailey, 2021).

## Self-Identity
"The act of defining one's own gender or other aspect of the self. Gender is not a biological given or an immutable fact; any gender label is therefore only accurate to the extent to which a person subscribes to it. It is the right of every person to self-identify their own gender" (YouthRex, 2022).

## Systemic Discrimination
Systemic discrimination can be described as patterns of behaviour, policies or practices that are part of the structures of an organization. These elements can create or perpetuate disadvantages for racialized persons (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2024).

# INTRODUCTION

## The Analytical Erasure of Black Canadian Female and Femme Students

The educational realities of self-identifying Black female and femme students in Ontario are frequently overlooked and dismissed, with both scholarly research and educational institutions failing to give due consideration to the factors that shape their experiences. Unfortunately, much of the research in this field lumps all Black students together, neglecting the nuances of gender and race (Crenshaw 1991). Moreover, discussions on discriminatory treatment tend to focus solely on the marginalization of Black male students within the educational context (Rhonda 2020, Litchmore 2022).

Without an intersectional analysis (Crenshaw 1991) inclusive of gendered and racial nuance, the experiences of Black female and femme students are overshadowed by those of Black male students, which become the dominant narrative of Black adolescent experiences in education. This imbalance is harmful for several reasons. For one, using Black male students as the main pool, from which the bulk of research data on the Black student experience is gleaned, obscures the unique and valuable perspectives and experiences of their female and femme peers. With this, the realities of Black male students become the lens through which all Black students' experiences are analyzed and eclipse the experiences of Black females and femmes. This is consequential for the educational and political landscape as policies, recommendations, and approaches derived from these studies to tackle the issue of racial discrimination within Ontario's education system are skewed toward Black male students and their mistreatment (George 2020).

This skewed analysis leads to the detriment of their female and femme counterparts. Such anti-discrimination strategies, while well-meaning, do not consider how Black female and femme students' experiences differ from their Black male peers. This ultimately neglects to address the obstacles that Black female and femme students uniquely face. As a result, their experiences go unheard, and their struggles go unnoticed.

**Roots of a Black Girl is a first-of-its-kind study** that sought a nuanced perspective on the educational realities of Black female and femme students in Ontario. Previous Canadian research on this subject typically involved only 3 to 30 participants (Litchmore 2022; Linton and Mclean 2017; Mcpherson 2020; Neegangwedgin 2013). Within this literature, there is a preference toward qualitative methodology, mainly through case studies wherein data collection is sourced from single or group interviews and personal reflections. Our project mirrors this by including Student Surveys and Afrocentric Sharing Circles (Oba 2018). With **245 participants**, Roots of a Black Girl captured an educational overview of Black females and femmes in Ontario. In achieving this mission, we aspired to enhance the scarce academic literature available on the experiences of Black female and femme students in Canada.

Our Key Findings suggest that although numerous participants receive support from their families, **they feel constrained by the lack of school resources available reflecting their lived experiences**. As a result, they often feel that their narratives are minimized throughout their educational journeys.
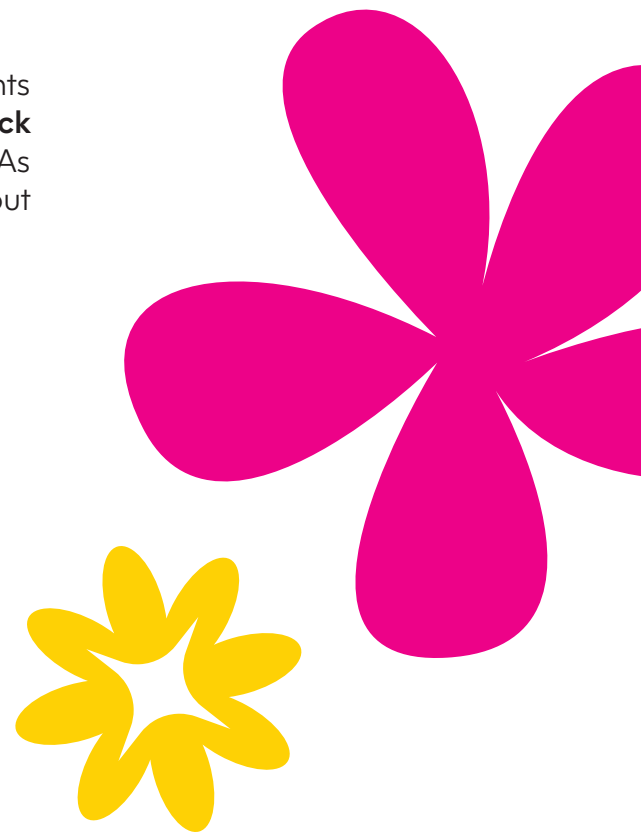
# CONTEXT

### The Culture of "Black Pain"

Historically, forms of sociological research conducted by non-Black people have exploited "Black Pain" (Adwiku, 2020), wherein it has often been used as a mechanism for "encouraging advocacy for just causes and igniting hope" (2020). Unfortunately, pain and trauma remain a major part of the Black experience in North America (Adwiku, 2020). Aside from the desensitization that develops through a constant purview of "Black Pain", it often perpetuates the negative stereotype that the experiences of Black people are solely measured by the severity of their trauma (Adwiku, 2020). The goal of Power to Girls, a Black-owned non-profit organization supporting the personal development of Black and marginalized girls in Toronto and Ghana, aims to promote research conducted by and for the Black community through a culturally safe and non-exploitative lens toward community awareness, affirmation, and self-advocacy.

### The Impact of Racial Discrimination on the Educational Experiences of Black Canadian Female and Femme Students

As there is little Canadian research on the effects of racial discrimination on Black girls and femmes, particularly within education, our sources comprise mainly of studies from the United States that examined race and gender-based outcomes. In addition, scholarly sources and articles from the United Kingdom and Canada support our Reference list.

### Diminished Self-Esteem and Academic Performance

Within Canada, research has shown that Black girls routinely face racial and colourist discrimination due to how educators and other students perceive them. Racial discrimination is worsened by the degree of youth's proximity to Blackness (i.e. Dark Skinned vs. Light Skinned). According to Kisha McPherson, educator's perception of Black girls has been traditionally enshrined by negative Black stereotypes steeped in race and gender-based discrimination (2020). McPherson concludes that such barriers experienced by Black girls demand "immediate and careful consideration (2020).

In her article titled, "Constructing My Cultural Identity: A Reflection on the Contradictions, Dilemmas, and Reality", Erica Neegan explores her experiences of racial discrimination via a recollection of differential treatment she experienced in Canada and her home country, Jamaica (2008). As a result of her skin tone and hair texture, she recalls how lighter-skinned students with looser hair were considered academically superior while darker-skinned students with textured hair were viewed as academically inferior. During her time in high school in Canada, she references how the "dominant group" (White students) routinely made jest of the physical features of students of African descent. Her article examines how, due to these various treatments, Black female students internalize the low expectations and stereotypes projected onto them by educators and other students, which weaken their sense of belonging and connection to the school community (Neegan, 2008). As a result, they start to feel as though they are incapable of academic success and adjust their level of aspiration and achievement accordingly.

As McPherson asserts, the voices of Black girls on anti-Black racism in schools are directly linked to the central argument: "education systems in Ontario must first tackle the school environments and pedagogical practices before suggesting that the disproportionately low achievement of Black students in Ontario is primarily a reflection of the ability and culture of Black students themselves (2022).

In his article entitled, "A Double Life: Black Queer Youth Coming of Age in Divided Cities," McCready discusses the "compounded discrimination" Black 2SLGBTQ+ Youth in Toronto face for their sexual and gender orientation and/or presentation, in addition to racial discrimination (McCready 2015). Thus, Black youth and Black femmes continue to experience systemic social inequalities within education. This lack of systemic support is further affirmed by CBC News' article discussing the "[l]ack of resources hampering 2SLGBTQ+-inclusive education in classrooms" (n.a. 2016). This can lead to educational disengagement (Daw, 2022). In this regard, Dr. Catherine Taylor conducted Canadian research that found that although the vast majority of Canadian teachers intend to make 2SLGBTQ+-inclusive education more accessible in the classroom, the lack of leadership and resources hinder this progress within Canadian curricula (Taylor et. al 2015).
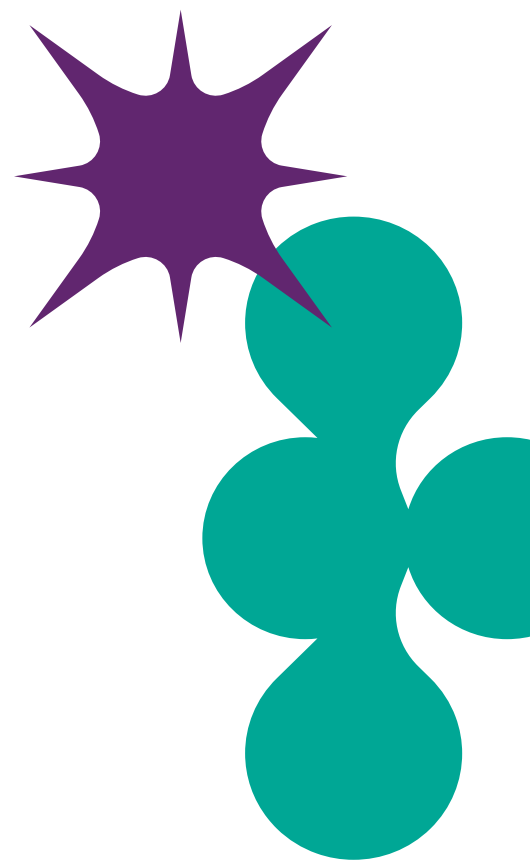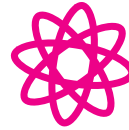
Within equity-based discourse, it is acknowledged that some teachers are uncomfortable discussing 2SLGBTQ+ issues, indicating that more training is needed in this area - especially for teachers who may not know how to recognize or respond to homophobia or the needs of femme students of colour (Otchere 2017). In Fall, 2023 and early 2024, tensions have risen across Ontario School Boards and Parent/Guardians on gender diversity (DeClerq, 2024; Malott, 2024). Although the "Every Teacher Project on [2SLGBTQ+]-Inclusive Education in Canada's K-12 Schools Final Report" lacks a racial analysis, it is a comprehensive tool focused on research-based recommendations towards 2SLGBTQ+ -Inclusive Education in Ontario (Campbell, C. & Taylor, C. 2017).

## Limitations in Occupational Expectations and Academic Aspirations

Research findings by Heidi Safia Mirza explore the experiences of African-Caribbean women in the United Kingdom and uncover the significant impact academic institutions have on hindering the vocational goals of Black female students (1993). The intersection of their race and gender creates unique challenges, which may funnel them into pursuing stereotypical roles, like hairdressing or nursing. Such stereotypes were further validated by subtle and explicit instances of racial discrimination that implied their incapacity to pursue more ambitious careers (Mirza 1993; Ward 2020).
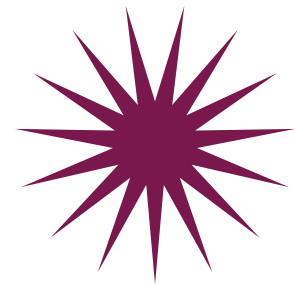
Similarly in Toronto, a report led by York University professor Carl James followed consultations with 324 parents, students, educators, and administrators from the Greater Toronto Area (Draaisma, 2017). The report found that 53% of Black students were in academic programs compared to 81% of White students and other POC students (Draaisma, 2017). Conversely, 39% of Black students were enrolled in Applied programs, compared to 18% of other POC students and 16% of White students. The report concludes that academic streaming, a policy in which students are grouped based on academic and learning abilities, was initially set to end in 1999, however, Ontario school data shows that Black students continue to be encouraged to pursue Applied courses more often than any other student group (People for Education 2020; Clanfield et. al 2014).
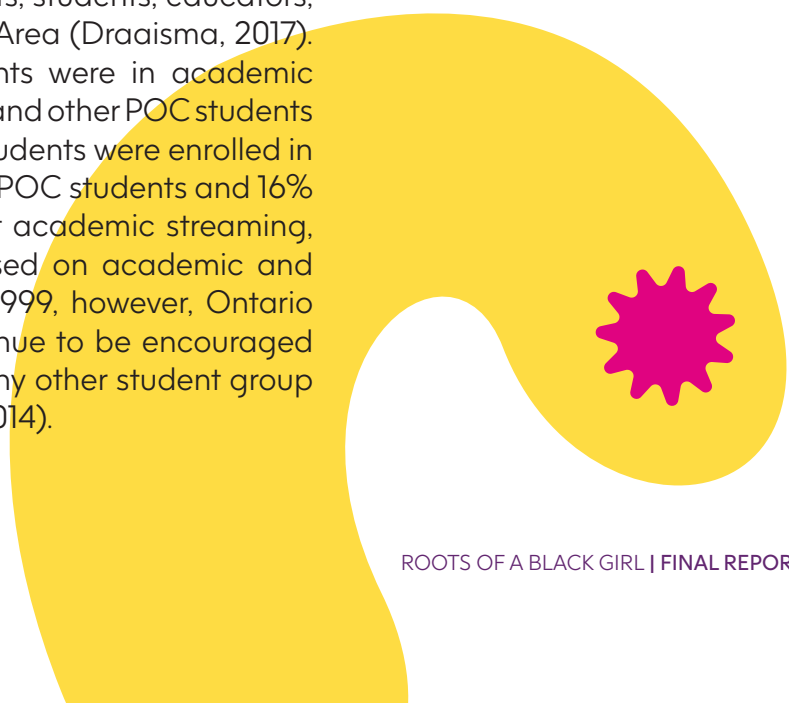
However, Ontario began phasing out Grade 9 academic streaming in September 2022. Despite this, critics like Elesha May argue that the damage has already been done (2020).

## Is De-Streaming the Solution?

Glenn Waugh, an opinion author for Social Policy in Ontario defends the "lack of understanding of how streaming actually works" and how courses are "delivered" across high schools in Ontario (2020). They assert that the decision must always be made in consultation with schools and guidance counsellors - with the final decision remaining with families (Waugh, 2020).

Concerning two Black female students who have been unfairly streamed into "applied" (May, 2020), Waugh affirmed that such cases should undergo investigation and that the negative biases be "eliminated" (2020). This is in addition to directing questions to teachers and schools involved in the streaming decision (Waugh, 2020). Waugh maintains that this assertion does not detract from the impact of systemic racism, which academically limits young BIPOC students, but illustrates that Grade 9 streaming is not the root cause (2020). The disproportionate over representation of BIPOC youth in the "applied" stream is a symptom of anti-Black racism and prejudiced attitudes by educational admin staff rather than students or academic streaming themselves (Waugh, 2020).

## Black 2SLGBTQ+ Youth

In their joint report on U.S. Black Queer Youth entitled, "Erasure and Resilience: The Experiences of 2SLGBTQ+ Students of Colour", the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) and the National Black Justice Collective (NBJC) discuss the impact of femme marginalization on academic aspiration (Truong et. al 2020). Their study illustrates that Black 2SLGBTQ+ who were surrounded by 11 or more supportive staff were (1) less likely to miss school due to safety concerns, (2) had increased feelings of connectedness to their school community (e.g., those who were surrounded by 11 or more supportive staff reported higher feelings of connectedness to their school community at 72.8% vs. 37.8% with 0 supportive staff), and (3) had higher levels of self-esteem (e.g. those with 11 or more supportive staff reporting higher self-esteem at 54.8% vs. 41.3% with 0 supportive staff) (Truong et. al 2020). Such observations also inform their finding that (4) Black 2SLGBTQ+ students with 11 or more supportive staff had greater educational aspirations at 95.7%, planning to pursue post-secondary education vs. 92.5% with 0 supportive staff (Truong et. al 2020).
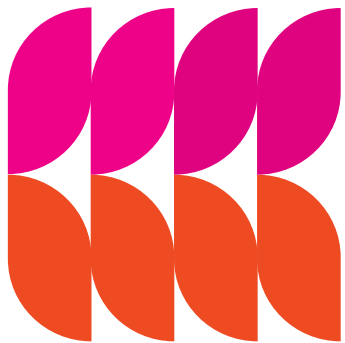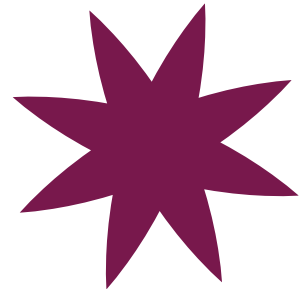
"**Education** as the practice of **freedom** affirms healthy **self-esteem** in students as it promotes their capacity to be aware and **live consciously.**"

*– bell hooks*

## Higher Rate of Penalization Through Disciplinary Measures for Subjective Infractions

Apart from racial discrimination having harmful effects on the vocational aspirations of Black female and femme-identifying students, it also adversely impacts their daily learning experiences.

U.S. research conducted by the Georgetown Law Center on Poverty and Inequality reveals that Black female students experience higher rates of penalization through disciplinary measures for subjective infractions (Epstein et al. 2017). They are punished two to three times more at a greater rate compared to their White female peers (Epstein et al. 2017). Notably, this disparity is greater than the one observed between Black and White male students for the same infractions in the same school district.

Some researchers attribute this differential treatment to the "adultification" (Carter Andrews et. al. 2019; Crenshaw et. al, 2015) of Black female and femme students. Black students in Ontario make up 10.2% of the student population, yet comprise 22.5% of suspensions. (OHRC, 2020). Educators and school officials may "adultify" Black girls, perceiving them as older and less innocent than they are (Carter Andrews et. al. 2019). In comparison to peers of other races, adultification is not observed (Carter Andrews et. al. 2019). In their article, "The Essence of Innocence" Goff et. al. (2014) found that the perception of innocence of Black children aged 10-13 was equivalent to non-Black children aged 14-17, and the innocence of Black children aged 14-17 was assessed as that of non- Black young adults aged 18-21. This phenomenon highlights why educational officials may view minor infractions of Black female students as more purposefully harmful compared to their counterparts of other races.

Additionally, for Black femme youth in the U.S., experiences of racial discrimination have amounted to disproportionate rates of school discipline and lower graduation rates (Truong et. al 2020). As referenced in "Erasure and Resilience", Truong et. al. found that nearly half of Black 2SLGBTQ+ students (44.7%) reported being disciplined at school (2020). Moreover, this figure is consistent with Carl James' Toronto-based research, in which 42% of all Black students were found to have been suspended at least once by the time they finished high school (Draaisma, 2017).

Truong et. al. also emphasize that such disciplinary action may have academic consequences, amounting to greater time out of school and an even greater likelihood in the juvenile justice system (2020). "With the unique and intersectional challenges (race, gender, sexual orientation; Crenshaw 1991) that Black 2SLGBTQ+ students face (e.g., racism, transphobia, homophobia) it follows that such disciplinary actions are likely tied to these compounding factors.

As emphasized by Kiara Daw, Ontario educational research indicates that penalization through suspensions and expulsions play a detrimental role in Black students' academic outcomes (2022). Daw utilizes Critical Race Theory (Bell, 1980; Dei, 1995) to contextualize and analyze the Black student experience and "educational disengagement" (2022). Through her three interviews with Black students experiencing unfair penalization, Daw learned that it impacted (i) their desire to be in school, (ii) their relationships with teachers and principals, and (iii) displayed an inability to find ways to cope with racial discrimination when undergoing exclusionary discipline (Daw, 2022).

> **Your silence will not protect you. But for every real word spoken, for every attempt I had ever made to speak those truths for which I am still seeking, I had made contact with other women while we examined the words to fit a world in which we all believed, bridging our differences."**
>
> *– Audre Lorde*

## Adverse Effects on Graduation Rates

As Black female/femme students tend to be disproportionately disciplined compared to their peers, they are also six times more likely to be suspended than their White female counterparts. Interestingly, this stands in stark contrast to Black boys, who are three times more likely to be suspended in contrast with their White peers (Crenshaw, Ocen and Nanda 2015). These findings suggest that race may have a more significant effect on the perception of Black femininity than on masculinity (Bailey, 2008).

As previously mentioned, Black 2SLGBTQ+ youth also face higher rates of exclusionary discipline, including suspension, detention, and expulsion which can affect their academic aspirations and desire to attend post-secondary school (Truong et. al 2020). Thus, this research implies a greater likelihood of students getting entangled with the law, (i.e. arrested on days they are suspended from school) l, increasing their chances of entering the juvenile justice system (Truong et. al 2020). Furthermore, suspensions are also directly correlated with higher dropout rates, which may put Black female and 2SLGBTQ+ students at educational risk (Christine, Nelson and Jolivette 2004; Truong et. al. 2020).

To combat adverse graduation rates for Black youth, Ontario school boards launched the Black Graduation Coach program in 2019 (Hristova, 2020; Dubinski, 2024). Since its launch, Black Graduation Coaches have served as mentors and advisors to Black youth, who could strongly benefit from specialized guidance and support as a minority group in schools.
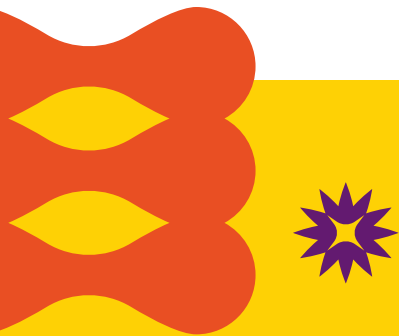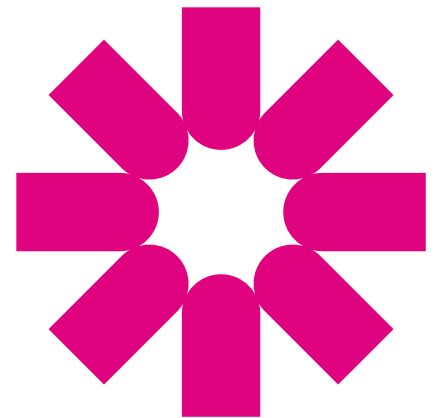
# METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

## Reflexivity Statement

To begin the discussion on the Methodological Approach for the Roots of A Black Girl project, core team members Michelle Aboagye and Angela Koshoni briefly describe their positionalities as self-identifying, Black women researchers:

**"** As a first-generation, Ghanaian-Canadian born and raised in Toronto, "everyone" was around me. However, identity-based premises I affirmed during my undergraduate years at the University of Toronto (Hon. BA Women and Gender Studies and Equity Studies) would continue to be challenged at local and international levels, demonstrating that not everyone was "seen". By observing contentious debates surrounding the right to life, liberty and justice for Black people, it affirmed to me that lived experience and policy did not always intersect. My MA in Criminology and Sociolegal Studies (UofT) emphasized this through a variety of lenses.

As the Principal Investigator, I leverage my acquired knowledge and expertise to curate a safe, positive, and supportive environment for participants to share their educational experiences towards better educational futures. As an experienced youth advocate, I remain passionate about bringing more equity and fairness to our most vulnerable youth, especially Black girls and femmes."

*– Michelle Aboagye*
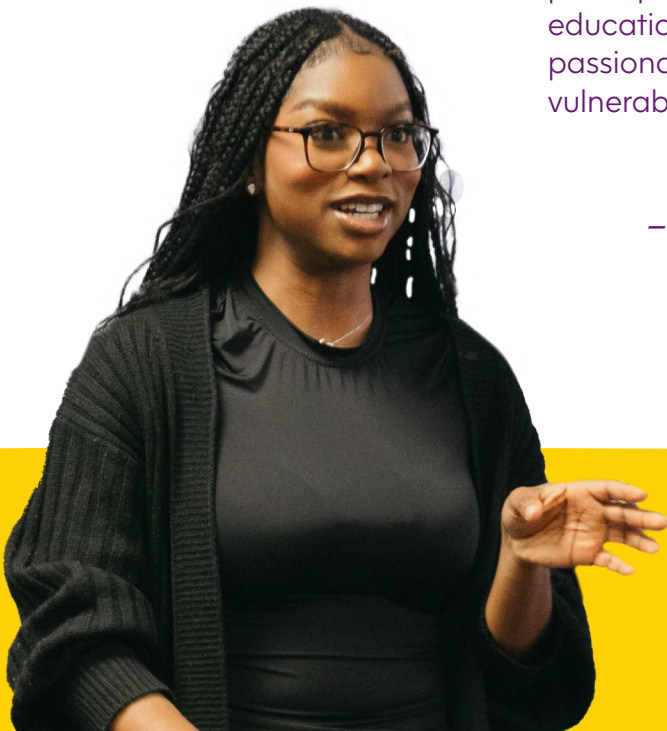
"This research profoundly resonates with me as a young, visibly Black woman and Nigerian immigrant in Canada. After attending the University of Toronto (Hon. BA, Criminology, Law, Society and Sociology), I've had first-hand experience with the Canadian educational system. To this work, I bring my identity and lived experiences as an International Student. Thus, the significance of this research and its inclusion of Black girls and femmes within the African Diaspora inspired me to take it on. Its Findings have real implications for myself and those around me. From the inception of this project, it has been my responsibility to conduct the research activities impartially to avoid imposing my personal biases and experiences on the data. As this research is Participant-Centered (Oba, 2019), it is also my responsibility to present the data as intended - from the participant's perspective. Throughout this project, I exercise and utilize reflexivity in this research by being an active listener, purposefully immersing myself in participant interaction and story-telling. This heightened level of presence and self-awareness helps to prevent personal biases from influencing the data analysis process."

– Angela Koshoni

## Participant Centered

The RBG study is framed by Afrocentric (Dei 1996) and Critical Race Theory (Bell, 1980). This positions our participants, Black girls and femmes, as "knowledge creators," honouring the "cultural capital" they have to offer as Black youth (Oba, 2019). Thus, the principality of participant-centred research within the RBG study registers that every research decision must be intentional, respectful, and meaningful to best engage the participants.

The RBG study poses the following queries to reflect participant centrality:

*(1)* **What are the qualitative educational experiences of Black girls/femmes in Ontario?**

*(2)* **What are the obstacles and challenges experienced by Black girls/femmes in the educational sector?**

*(3)* **What programmatic interventions arise from their experiences? What testable educational programs could these interventions translate into, to enhance the education of Black girls/femmes? (Phase II)**

*(4)* **What educational recommendations and directives arise from the experiences and narratives of Black girls/femmes across Ontario?**

As exhibited in the Reflexivity Statements above, front-facing research members, Michelle Aboagye and Angela Koshoni, examine personal privilege as every individual is a cultural actor with unique biases and levels of power. Remaining aware of our personal biases and privileges is important as we engage and interact with participants on sensitive topics.
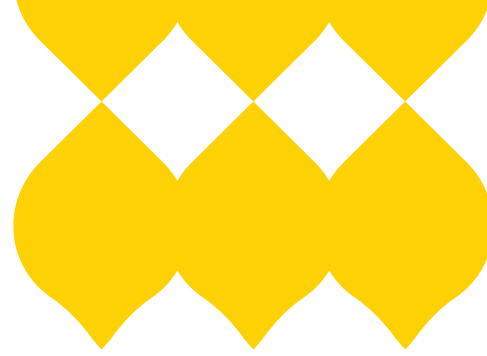
## Study Design and Theoretical Framework

With the use of *(1)* Student Surveys and *(2)* Afro-Centric Sharing Circles/interviews to formulate a comprehensive viewpoint of this demographic, the study favoured a mixed-method design and qualitative analysis. Qualitative analyses utilize a more descriptive approach in depicting the stories of participants.

The mixed-method research design allowed us to derive the narrative-driven content contained in the quantitative data of the surveys. Quantitative data tends to be more academic and prioritizes numerical presentation. As one of the goals of the research design was to present the data with full acknowledgment of each participant's lived experience, the study is highly premised on "Intersectionality" theory to fully illustrate the nuances of such experiences at the intersection of race and gender (Crenshaw 1991). The Student Survey invites and evaluates participant reflection on their home life, intrinsic motivation, extrinsic personal views on the support system(s), and to what extent race may have influenced their overall school experience.

As Allen describes, "qualitative research methodologies have become almost obligatory for feminist research" (2011). Thus, the selected method(s) should be "collaborative, inductive, and iterative (Allen, 2011). For the "Roots of A Black Girl" project, the selected method, inductive reasoning, is collaborative and allows the target demographic to shape how the research is structured. An inductive generalization is "to seek out common patterns among diverse cases" (Burawoy 1998). Therefore, the data collected will develop a working hypothesis/theory that is informed by the data rather than deductive reasoning which proves a pre-existing hypothesis/theory (Neuman 2004).

We also chose to perceive "Implicit Bias" as a behavioural phenomenon in this study. Implicit Bias encapsulates "the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner" (Staats et al. 2015). From a behavioural phenomenon perspective, there is an emphasis on the potential malleability of Implicit Bias; viewing it as changeable bias. This potential malleability is key to our study as it paves avenues toward plausible recommendations to offset the occurrence of racial discrimination toward Black, female students (Staats et. al. 2015).
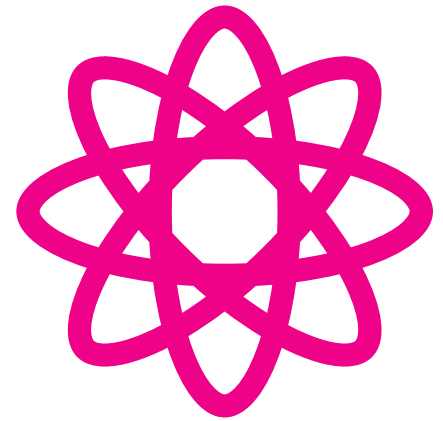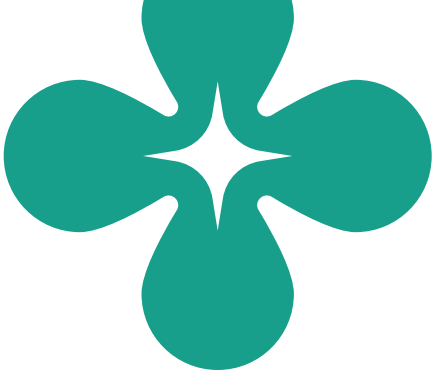
This is conceptually connected to the "Prejudice Habit Model", a theoretical framework which perceives bias as an unconscious mental habit that can be broken (Devine et al. 2017). The Model also offers strategies aimed at reducing its occurrence in everyday interactions (Devine et al 2017). These frameworks are strategic in the implementation of the Student Surveys and Sharing Circles. As emphasized by Devine et al. (2017) **Prejudice Habit-Breaking Intervention** is the only anti-bias training that has been experimentally shown to result in long- term changes in unconscious bias and was specifically developed to induce long- lasting changes in behaviour.

## Sample

The "Roots of a Black Girl" study utilized purposive and snowball sampling to reach its target demographic of self-identifying Black girls and femmes aged 12 to 17 in Ontario (Neuman, 2004). Between September 2022 and February 2024, we contacted numerous School Board and external organizations representative of different regions in Ontario to achieve an Ontario-wide illustration of the educational system by Black girls and femmes. To ensure that the study covered the vast regional landscape of Ontario, participants were invited from urban, rural, and suburban/mixed areas.

The Roots of A Black Girl project surveyed **7 regions** across Ontario: **Toronto**, **Peel**, **Durham**, **Halton**, **Waterloo**, **Windsor-Essex**, and **Ottawa**. Thus, each sample offers a unique narrative relative to their community's geographical differences and nuance. Our data aims to capture the core lived experiences, sentiments, desires, and attitudes toward education - translated into independent and compounding themes.

To ensure further confidentiality and consent, participants were allowed to skip any question they preferred not to answer. In other words, the data represents those responses that participants voluntarily provided. An overwhelming majority of participants, 99% of students, completed the Student Survey in its entirety.

The study sampled from Toronto, Peel, and Ottawa for urban areas; Waterloo and Halton for suburban areas; and Durham and Windsor-Essex for more rural and/or mixed areas. Within these regions, we contacted various educational institutions that permitted us to share the research opportunity with self-identifying Black

girls and femmes, aged 12-17. Following several rounds of external invitations, introduction meetings with Principals, and introductory chats with interested participants about the project, students who sought and secured Parent/Guardian consent were invited to participate in Phase I's Student Survey and Afro-Centric Sharing Circles. This sample consists of **239** Black girls and femmes attending a school in Ontario.

Student Survey responses were also collected by promoting the opportunity on Power to Girls social media channels (**@powertogirlsca**) and extending the invitation to various non-profit, youth organizations.

Informed by Phase I, Phase II relied on analyzing Phase I as a Needs Assessment. As a result, Phase II comprised programmatic interventions: activities/workshops created in direct response to various themes/educational gaps observed. Participants for Phase II were invited from attendees within Power to Girls general lunchtime/after-school programming in Toronto. As these students were not invited to participate in Phase I but were already attending weekly programs/workshops hosted by P2G Program Facilitators, they could objectively assess their satisfaction of the new programs (p. 69) presented and tested by them as part of Phase II. This sample consists of **6** Black girls from the Power to Girls' Toronto after-school program participant pool.

## Procedure and Recruitment

The Research Team sought Research Ethics Board (REB) Approval from the Community Research Ethics Office in Waterloo before seeking official Approval from participating School Boards. The process began in June 2022 and Research Ethics Board Approval was secured by the Community Research Ethics Office on September 2nd, 2022. As part of that Approval, the Roots of A Black Girl project affirmed not only the aforementioned research questions reflecting participant centrality (**p. 19**) but also its Benefits.
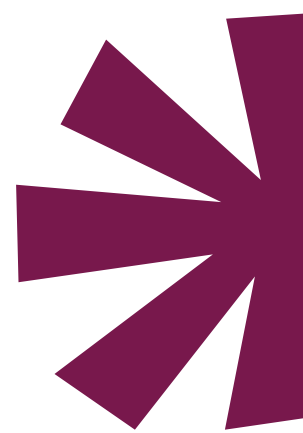
Benefits identified in External Research Applications to School Boards for the "Roots 16 of A Black Girl" Project were inclusive of but not limited to:

- demonstration that Black students are welcome and accepted - especially in the Project's ability to address systemic racism and develop a healthier student community

- encouragement of positive dynamics and partnerships between Black and non- Black peers, parents, staff, etc.

- build and foster healthy confidence in budding relationships between Black and non-Black peers and mitigate racial tensions/suspicions (if any)

- builds community trust and transparency amongst students, staff, parents, stakeholders, etc.

- its ability to inspire the importance of addressing issues of Blackness and racism in non-Black students, especially during key formative years for youth

- youth develop or strengthen their racial lens and learn what it means to be allies/advocates in their society or other multicultural communities

- supports systemic changes overall, which in turn, exemplify the power of narrative/story-telling for long-term change or impact

Nonetheless, the External Research Application process for participating School Boards posed significant challenges - particularly concerning the complexity of the application process, the variance in the permitted research scope from Board to Board, and the indefinite waiting period(s) for a final decision by Research Committees - especially within the limits of the project's 2-year time span.
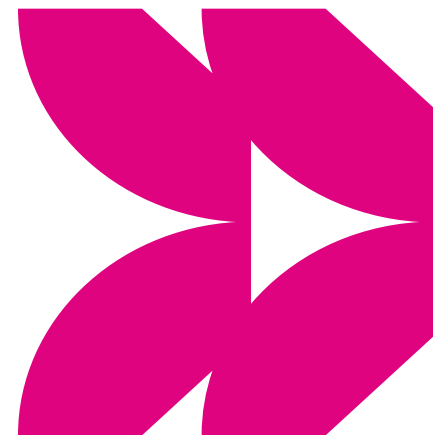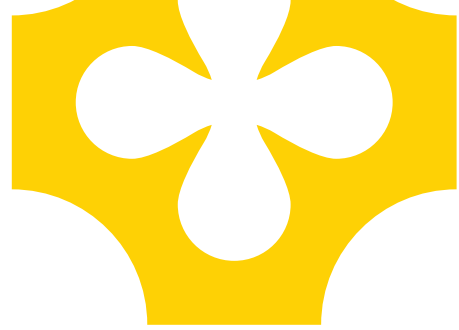
Approvals typically did not appear until after a Conditional Approval was granted - the Approval being secured after requested conditions and changes were met. At times, the rationale for such requested changes was unclear. One Board fully rejected the study without notice and without offering a letter declaring its status. It was only after following up several times that we were informed of the final decision. This same Board took more than 9 months (February 2023 - October 2023) to return any status update after the initial submission date, failing to respond to several follow-up requests by our team during the waiting period. Typically, the final decision for an External Research Application was made within 2-3 months, inclusive of change or modification requests.

The rejection rationale provided by this Board critiqued the questions presented in the Afro-Centric Sharing Circle Interview Guide as "vague" and relied on this critique as one of several critiques to rationalize rejection. In the rejection rationale, this Board also claimed that the Survey Consent Form did not outline the Survey topics or Sharing Circle questions to be discussed - arguing that our team was aiming to solicit participation without informed consent for these questions.

However, the Parent/Guardian Consent package was inclusive of both - a brief description of the topics in the Student Survey (Feelings about School, Family, School Support, Being Black at School, Black Girlhood, etc.) and the complete Afro- Centric Sharing Circle Interview Guide (**p. 50**). Furthermore, the 2-page Consent Form at the end of the package outlines fourteen "I/We" statements indicative of what Parents/Guardians and participating students are consenting and agreeing to by providing their signatures. The first "I/We" statement states, "I/We have read the "**Roots of a Black Girl"- Student Survey Information Letter** and **Afro-Centric Sharing Circle Information Letter**. Yes/No".

Thus, it does not follow that participants would not have made an informed decision before completing the Survey and Sharing Circle. However, the rejection rationale by this Board maintained that the Survey Consent Form did not outline the Survey topics or Sharing Circle questions to be discussed. The Board did not welcome any opportunity for our team to contest or collaborate on a solution. The lack thereof also applies to other items listed in the rejection rationale concerning the use of demographic questions, recruitment support by teachers of participants, and the verification of parent/guardian consent.
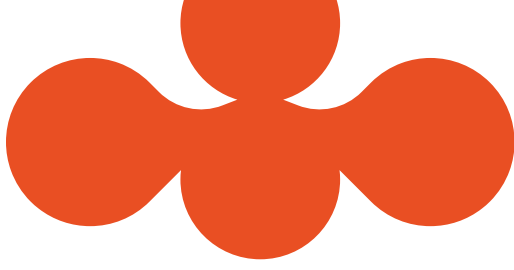
The Board attributed the 9-month decision- making process to "internal restructuring" - however, the reason did not seem sufficient and it appeared that there was a lack of follow-through and professionalism toward our application.

As described in the "Anti-Black Racism in Education Roundtables: What We Heard Report" prepared by the Ontario Human Rights Commission (2023), the need for legislative and regulatory changes within Ontario's School Board system was acknowledged. They described the education system's "current bureaucratic processes" to be "disempowering and lengthy, hindering effective resolution" (2023).

This sort of systemic behaviour can appear as "systemic anti-black racism" due to the discriminatory impact created by systemic barriers, procedures, and policies affecting the advancement of Black people - especially considering the lack of research solely focused on Black girls and femmes in Ontario.

Following the rejection, our team continued inviting community organizations servicing youth in the area. We were happy to be connected to 2 organizations through this Board. However, recruitment from this region as a whole proved to be the most difficult. It appeared there was a lack of infrastructure and support to sustain interest in research for young Black girls and femmes.

## School Visits

Across Southern Ontario, numerous in-person visits were made to schools for Survey Session administration. The selected survey platform was Google Forms. This was a deliberate decision where the research team balanced student engagement, student familiarity, and research costs. Other platforms made the survey appear more appealing which ultimately would encourage higher student engagement. However, after consulting with the P2G Youth Ambassadors, it was found that students have become more familiar with the Google Forms platform after online schooling during the pandemic. This was beneficial to the team for we were able to save on research expenses given that there is no cost to run the survey on Google Forms. The platform was also accessible on any device.
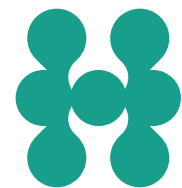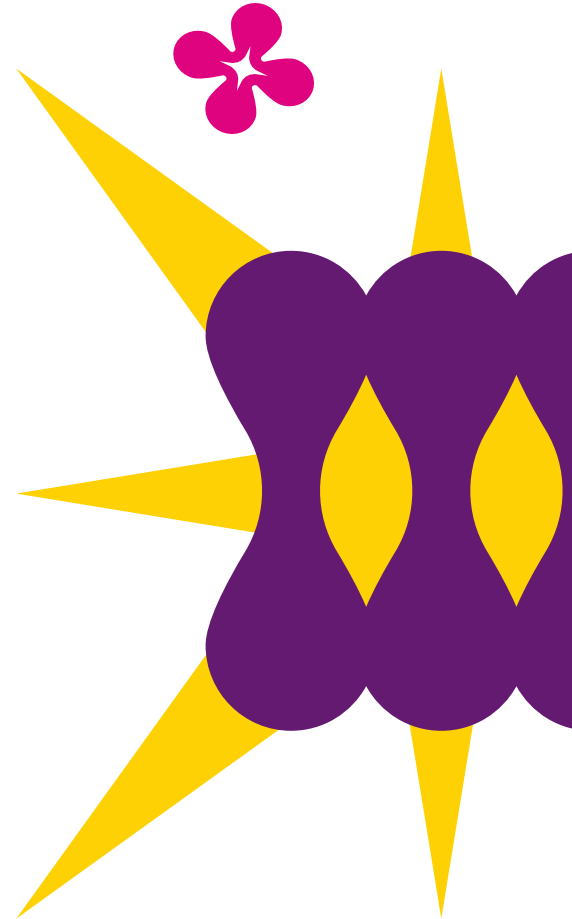
The Survey took about 20 to 30 minutes to complete. If permitted by their respective School Boards, participants were compensated with a $10 Amazon Gift Card as a Thank You for their time. Those not permitted to be monetarily incentivized were provided with food and refreshments during the Survey Session. At the end of the Survey, students were prompted to express whether or not they wished to be considered for an Afro-Centric Sharing Circle at a later date.

**"The empowerment of Black women constitutes the empowerment of our entire communities."**

*– Kimberlé Crenshaw*

# PHASE I

# The Survey
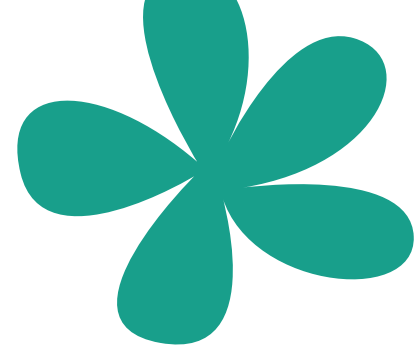
# PHASE I: The Survey

## Demographics
This section ensured that we captured the target demographic of the research and tracked differences in experience.

## Family
This section examined the role of family in the school experience. Given a wide demographic, questions also captured social class. They also examined how family may be important in structuring intrinsic motivation or whether family values affect how participants view their education.

## Feelings About School
This section examined the internal perception of school. How do participants feel about school in general? How are attitudes toward school or self-motivation a factor in school performance?

## Support System
This section examined the school experience. How did participants recognize educational indicators of support in the school environment?

## Being Black at School
This section examined the overall Black girl/femme experience. How did participants perceive differential treatment in terms of race?

## Black Girlhood
This section examined the overall Black girl/femme experience. How did the participants perceive differential treatment in terms of race AND gender?
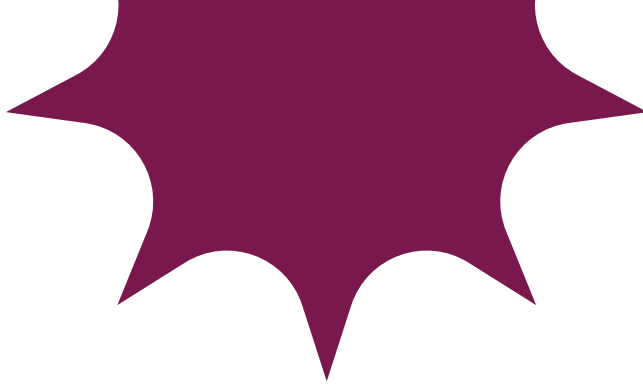
## DEMOGRAPHICS

This section ensures that we capture the target demographic of the research and a variety of lived experiences.

1. **I identify as a:**
   ☐ Black girl
   ☐ Black femme
   ☐ Biracial/Mixed girl

2. **Are you an immigrant?**
   ☐ I was born outside of Canada
   ☐ I was born in Canada

3. **What is the immigration status of your parents?**
   ☐ Both of my parents/guardians are immigrants
   ☐ Both of my parents were born here
   ☐ One of my parents is an immigrant and the other was born here
   ☐ I only have one parent/guardian and they are an immigrant
   ☐ I only have one parent/guardian and they were born here

4. **What is your household language?**

5. **How old are you?**

6. **Do you live in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA)? (Yes / No)**

   a) **If you answered No, what city do you live in?**

7. **What is the name of your School Board?**

8. **Do you have a disability? (Yes / No)**

   a) **If you have a disability, please tell us more:**
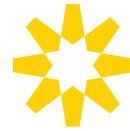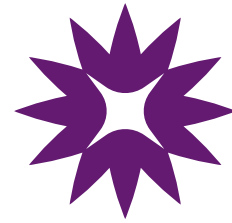
## FAMILY

This section examines the role of family in the school experience. Given a wide demographic, questions also capture social class. They also examine how family may be important in structuring intrinsic motivation or whether family values affect how participants view their education.

*1.* **Do you live with members of your family (mom, dad, siblings, aunts/uncles, etc)? (Yes/No)**

*a)* **If you live with your family, how many people do you live with?**
    1      2      3      4      5      6+

*b)* **How many of them are your parent(s) or guardian(s)?**

_____

*c)* **How many of them are your siblings?**

_____

*d)* **How many are other relatives (aunts/uncles/grandparents, etc)?**

_____

*2.* **Are you an only child? (Yes / No)**

*a)* **If you have a sibling, what is the highest level of education completed by one of your sibling(s)?**
    Elementary
    High School
    College/University
    My sibling did not attend school

*3.* **What is the highest level of education completed by one of your parents/guardians?**
    Elementary
    High School
    College/University
    My parent/guardian did not attend school
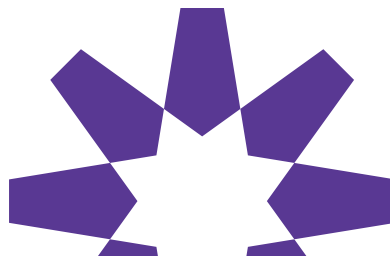
4. **What is the job status of one of your parent(s)/guardian(s)?**
   My parent/guardian works part-time
   My parent/guardian works full-time
   My parent/guardian is retired
   My parent/guardian has a job, but they are not working right now
   (extended time-off, injury)
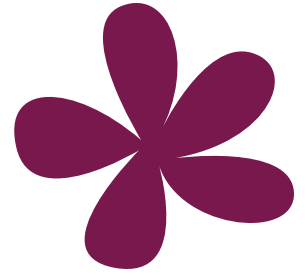
5. **Do you work/study in a bedroom? (Yes / No)**

   a) **If you answered Yes, do you share this bedroom with someone else? (Yes / No)**

   b) **If you share a bedroom, please tell us how/where you study:**

6. **How easy is it for your family to buy the things you need (food, clothing, basic needs, etc)?**
   Easy
   Average
   Hard

7. **How often do you talk about school with your family (i.e. your grades, school clubs sports, teachers, etc)?**
   Very Often
   Often
   Sometimes when I get home or when I had a big test
   I don't really talk about school with my family

8. **Do you talk to your parents about what you want to be when you grow up (job/career, college, university)?**
   I always talk about what I want to do after I finish high school
   I often talk about what I want to do after I finish high school
   I sometimes talk about what I want to do after I finish high school
   I do not talk about what I want to do after I finish high school
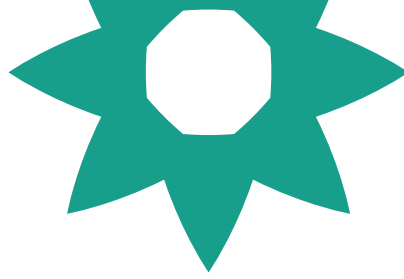
## FEELINGS ABOUT SCHOOL

This section examines the internal perception of school. In general, how do participants feel about school? How are attitudes toward school or self-motivation a factor in school performance?

1. **How important is school to you?**
   ☐ School is very important to me
   ☐ School is important to me
   ☐ School is a little bit important to me
   ☐ School is not important to me at all

2. **How much do you like going to school every day?**
   ☐ I always like going to school every day
   ☐ I like going to school most days
   ☐ I like going to school some days
   ☐ I don't really like going to school

3. **How much time do you usually spend studying after school?**
   ☐ I usually study for more than 4 hours after school
   ☐ I usually study for 3 - 4 hours after school
   ☐ I usually study for 1 - 2 hours after school
   ☐ I usually study for less than 1 hour after school

4. **What grade do you receive the most? (only we will know this information)**
   ☐ 80+ (As)
   ☐ 70+ (Bs)
   ☐ 60+ (Cs)
   ☐ 50+ (Ds)
   ☐ Below D

5. **How much time do you spend on after-school activities every week (school clubs, sports, social events, playing with friends from school)?**
   ☐ I spend a lot of my time on after-school activities
   ☐ I spend some of my time on after-school activities
   ☐ I do not spend time on after-school activities
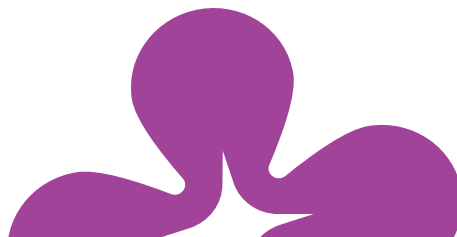
6. **How often do you raise your hand OR speak in class?**
   ☐ I always raise my hand / speak in class
   ☐ I raise my hand / speak in class most of the time
   ☐ Sometimes I raise my hand / speak in class
   ☐ I do not raise my hand / speak in class

7. **How do you feel when your teacher tells you that you did a good job?**
   ☐ I am very happy when my teacher tells me I did a good job
   ☐ I am happy when my teacher tells me I did a good job
   ☐ I am not that happy when my teacher tells me I did a good job
   ☐ I do not really care about what my teacher thinks of my work

8. **Do you feel stressed or overwhelmed because of school work?**
   ☐ I always feel overwhelmed by my school work
   ☐ Most of the time, I feel overwhelmed by my school work
   ☐ Sometimes, I feel overwhelmed by my school work
   ☐ I do not feel overwhelmed by my school work
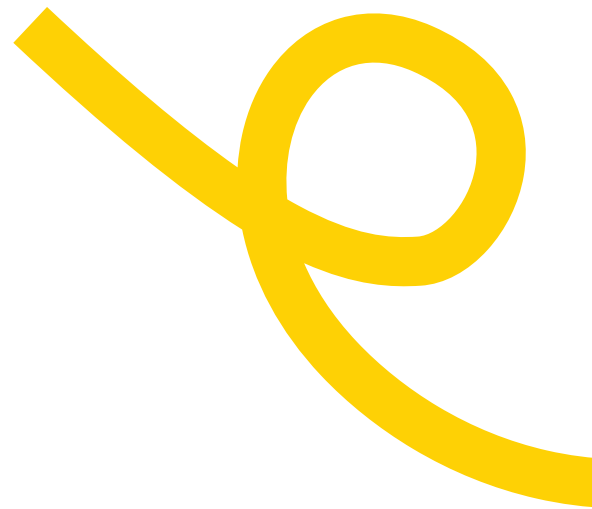
## SUPPORT SYSTEM

This section examines the school experience. Do participants recognize educational indicators of support in the school environment?

1.  **Do you feel safe and supported by staff members / teachers at your school (you are not afraid to speak up for yourself and not afraid to be judged by staff/teachers)?**
    ☐ I feel safe and supported
    ☐ I do not feel safe and supported
    ☐ I'm not sure if I feel safe and supported

2.  **Do you feel welcomed and accepted by teachers and staff members?**
    ☐ I feel welcomed and accepted by all school staff
    ☐ I feel welcomed and accepted by most school staff
    ☐ I feel welcomed and accepted by some school staff
    ☐ I do not feel welcomed and accepted by school staff

3.  **Do you have a good relationship with the teacher(s) of your class(es)?**
    ☐ I have a good relationship with my teacher(s)
    ☐ I do not have a good relationship with my teacher(s)
    ☐ I'm not sure if I have a good relationship with my teacher(s)

4.  **How are your relationships with your teachers?**
    _____

5.  **How culturally diverse are the staff members at your school?**
    *DEFINITION: "Cultural diversity" is the positive acceptance and value of different cultural backgrounds (race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, language, gender, age, and disability)*
    ☐ The staff members are culturally diverse (White, Black, Brown, Asian, etc)
    ☐ The staff members are somewhat / a little culturally diverse (some non-White staff)
    ☐ The staff members are not culturally diverse (mostly White, all White)

6.  **Do you have a teacher you can go to for help? (Yes / No)**

    a)  **If you have a teacher you can go to for help, how does this teacher help you?**
    _____

    b)  **If you don't have a teacher you can go to for help, why not?**
    _____
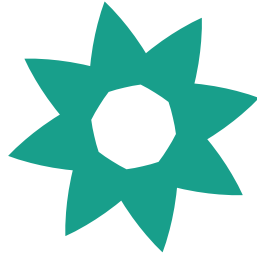
**c)** **How comfortable are you with the teacher?**
☐ I am very comfortable with them
☐ I am a little comfortable with them
☐ I am not comfortable with them

**7.** **How much do your teachers encourage you to participate in class?**
☐ My teachers often encourage me to participate in class
☐ Sometimes, my teachers encourage me to participate in class
☐ My teachers do not encourage me to participate in class

**8.** **How culturally diverse is your school curriculum (learning about non-White cultures in class)?**
☐ We learn about many non-White cultures at my school (Black, Asian, Indian,
☐ Indigenous persons)
☐ We learn about non-White cultures once in a while at my school
☐ We only learn about European/White cultures at my school

**9.** **Does your school have ways to support you (i.e. mental health, counselling, guidance counsellors, scholarships, etc)? (Yes / No)**

**10.** **How easy is it to find supportive resources?**
☐ Very Easy
☐ Easy
☐ Hard
☐ Very Hard

**11.** **How often do you use supportive resources at your school?**
☐ I use them many times
☐ I use them sometimes
☐ I don't really use them
☐ I don't use them at all

**12.** **Which supportive resources do you use at school (tutoring, guidance counselling, mental health programs, scholarships, after-school programs, etc.)?**

*a)* **If you do NOT use them, why not?**

_____

**13.** **Does your school ask what you think before making big changes to the school?**
☐ My school always asks what I think before making big changes
☐ My school often asks what I think before making big change
☐ My school sometimes asks what I think before making big changes
☐ My school does not ask what I think before making big changes

**14.** **Do you believe elementary / high school has prepared you for the future?**
☐ I feel very prepared for the future
☐ I feel prepared for the future
☐ I feel a little prepared for the future
☐ I do not feel prepared for the future

## BEING BLACK AT SCHOOL

This section examines the overall Black girl/femme experience. Do the participants perceive differential treatment in terms of race?

1. **Would you like to learn more about your culture at school? (Yes / No)**

2. **Would you say your race has affected your educational experience?**
   ☐ My race has affected my educational experience
   ☐ My race has somewhat affected my educational experience
   ☐ My race has not affected my educational experience

3. **Please tell us more about why or why not you believe your race has affected your school experience. Feel free to share a story or speak generally of your experience.**

## BLACK GIRLHOOD

This section examines the overall Black girl/femme experience. Do the participants perceive differential treatment in terms of race AND gender?

*What is Black Girlhood? "Black Girlhood" is about the diverse experiences of Black girls/ femmes within the world. It is about the unique lives and experiences of Black girls/femmes (Nishaun, 2020)*

1. **In general, what is your experience being a Black girl/femme/femme at your age? Please feel free to speak your mind/be as honest as you would like. (I love it..., I wish that..., etc)**

**Afro-Centric Sharing Circle/Interview**
We will reach out to your Parent/Guardian to make Interview arrangements.

2. **Would you like to be interviewed about your experience?**
   **You will be compensated for your time. (Yes / No)**

# PHASE I: Key Findings, Multiple Choice
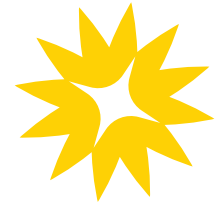
## DEMOGRAPHICS

*\* All percentages recorded are for all responses given. 0% responses are not recorded.*

| *\* PERCENT OF STUDENT RESPONDENTS WHO:* | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| DEMOGRAPHICS: | TORONTO | OTTAWA | PEEL | HALTON | WATERLOO | WINDSOR-ESSEX | DURHAM |
| Identify as a girl | 100 % | 100 % | N/A % | N/A % | N/A % | N/A % | N/A % |
| Identify as a Black girl | N/A % | 100 % | 91.67 % | 75 % | 97 % | 77.78 % | 94.12 % |
| Identify as Black (African / Caribbean) | 93.23 % | N/A % | N/A % | N/A % | N/A % | N/A % | N/A % |
| Identify as a Biracial/Mixed girl | 6.77 % | N/A % | N/A % | 17.86 % | N/A % | 11.11 % | 5.88 % |
| Identify as a Biracial / Mixed femme or LGBTQ person | N/A % | N/A % | N/A % | 3.57 % | N/A % | N/A % | N/A % |
| Identify as a Black femme or LGBTQ person | N/A % | N/A % | 8.30 % | 3.57 % | 3.30 % | 11.11 % | N/A % |
| Were born in Canada | 85.43 % | 25 % | 75 % | 75 % | 70 % | 33.33 % | 58.82 % |
| Speak English at home | 98 % | 25 % | 95.83 % | 96.29 % | 40 % | 66.67 % | 87.50 % |
| Have a disability | 9 % | N/A % | 8.30 % | 10.71 % | 6.70 % | N/A % | N/A % |
| Report at least one parent / guardian born outside of Canada | 63.16 % | 100 % | 87.50 % | 71.43 % | 63.40 % | 100 % | 94.11 % |
| Report at least one parent / guardian has completed college / university | 70.58 % | 100 % | 82.60 % | 85.71 % | 86.70 % | 100 % | 88.24 % |

## Highlights

*Each numerical value in the "Highlights" section(s) are an average percentage. The percentage includes ALL surveyed regions listed on the previous page.*

The majority of participants, **90% identify as a Black girl**. **6.5% identify as a Biracial/Mixed girl**. On average, **4.3% identify as a Black femme** (2SLGBTQ+). **5% reported having a disability** (i.e. learning, physical, etc).
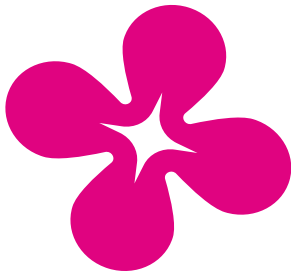
**60% of participants were born in Canada**.

**83% reported at least one Parent/Guardian being born outside of Canada** and **88% reported at least one Parent/Guardian who completed college/university**.

With a majority of Parents/Guardians having attended post-secondary education, **the importance of education is a value instilled in participants**.

Based on Afro-Centric Sharing Circle results (p. --), it is clear that **parental immigration status played a role in the mindset of some participants toward education**.

## FEELINGS ABOUT SCHOOL

*All percentages recorded are for all responses given. 0% responses are not recorded.*

| * PERCENT OF STUDENT RESPONDENTS WHO: | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **FEELINGS ABOUT SCHOOL:** | TORONTO | OTTAWA | PEEL | HALTON | WATERLOO | WINDSOR -ESSEX | DURHAM |
| Say school is important to them | 98.40 % | 100 % | 100 % | 100 % | 96.50 % | 100 % | 94.12 % |
| Like going to school | 92.86 % | 100 % | 83.33 % | 75 % | 73.30 % | 100 % | 76.47 % |
| Raise their hand / speak in class | 88.80 % | 100 % | 79.17 % | 85.71 % | 86.70 % | 100 % | 88.24 % |
| Study for at least 1 hour after school | 83.74 % | 100 % | 70.83 % | 70.37 % | 56.70 % | 88.89 % | 22.53 % |
| Feel overwhelmed by their school work | 92.86 % | 100 % | 95.83 % | 96.43 % | 100 % | 88.89 % | 94.12 % |
| Feel happy when their teacher tells them they did a good job | 96.03 % | 100 % | 100 % | 96.43 % | 96.70 % | 88.89 % | 100 % |
| Spend time on after-school activities | 72.80 % | 75 % | 70.83 % | 82.14 % | 70 % | 88.89 % | 58.82 % |
| Talk about school with their family when they get home | 93.65 % | 100 % | 91.67 % | 96.43 % | 86.70 % | 100 % | 88.24 % |
| Talk about what they want to do when they finish high school | 89 % | 100 % | 95.83 % | 92.86 % | 90 % | 100 % | 76.47 % |

## Highlights

With **an average of 98%, nearly all participants reported that school is important to them**.

On average, **86% of participants reported liking going to school**. Thus, although 98% of participants acknowledged that school was important, **their enjoyment of school itself is not as strong**. This indicates that **changes can be made within the school environment to increase levels of enjoyment when *at* school**.

Across all regions, factors such as participation in class, studying for at least 1 hour after school, and spending time on after-school activities were all highly rated by students. With **71% of participants studying for at least 1 hour after school and 74% of participants spending time on after-school activities**, participants, on average, **make significant investments towards their educational experience outside of class**.

**97% of participants reported feeling happy when their teacher tells them they did a good job**. This indicates that the majority of **participants are responsive to positive reinforcement** by their teachers.

On average, **95% of participants expressed feeling overwhelmed with school work**. Despite a majority reporting to have studied for at least 1 hour after school and having participated in after-school activities, **95% of participants still feel stressed with their workload**.

On average, **92% of participants reported talking about life after high school with their parents / guardians**. This indicates that students share their thoughts about education during open conversations at home. At home, their educational aspirations are supported and in development.

## SUPPORT AT SCHOOL

*All percentages recorded are for all responses given. 0% responses are not recorded.*

### *PERCENT OF STUDENT RESPONDENTS WHO:*

| SUPPORT AT SCHOOL: | TORONTO | OTTAWA | PEEL | HALTON | WATERLOO | WINDSOR-ESSEX | DURHAM |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Feel safe and supported by staff/teachers | 54.03 % | 50 % | 58.33 % | 50 % | 36.70 % | 55.56 % | 50 % |
| Feel welcomed and accepted by school staff | 90.24 % | 25 % | 66.67 % | 60.71 % | 90 % | 100 % | 25 % |
| Have a good relationship with their teachers | 80.49 % | 50 % | 75 % | 71.43 % | 70 % | 88.89 % | 50 % |
| Have a teacher they can go to for help | 81.60 % | 100 % | 87.50 % | 75 % | 73.30 % | 77.78 % | 100 % |
| Say their teachers encourage them to participate in class | 91.94 % | 75 % | 100 % | 100 % | 90 % | 100 % | 75 % |
| Say their school has ways to support them | 85.25 % | 100 % | 95.83 % | 71.43 % | 83.30 % | 77.78 % | 100 % |
| Say they can easily find supportive resources | 91.80 % | 100 % | 78.26 % | 67.79 % | 73.30 % | 75 % | 100 % |
| Use the supportive resources | 56.56 % | 100 % | 33.33 % | 35.71 % | 16.60 % | 44.44 % | 100 % |
| Say their school does NOT ask what they think before making big changes | 49.59 % | 75 % | 58.33 % | 21.43 % | 40 % | 33.33 % | 75 % |
| Feel that the school is preparing them for the future | 84.43 % | 75 % | 75 % | 82.14 % | 70 % | 88.89 % | 75 % |

## Highlights

With an average of **74%**, participants highly rated **feeling welcomed and accepted by staff**. This is supported by the **vast majority of respondents reporting good relationships with their teachers at 73%**.

**92% of participants reported experiencing positive encouragement from teachers to participate in class**.

On average, **52% of participants reported feeling safe and supported by school staff**. This is concerning given that many participants enjoy school and say that are happy when teachers tell them they've done a good job, (97%) reported high levels of feeling welcomed and accepted (74%), and reported high levels of positive encouragement from teachers to participate in class (92%).

There is still work to be done amongst educators on **how they can better support Black girls/femmes in their education**. **What creates feelings of safety and what does support look like?** Participants are providing a general overview of their school. Although participants may pinpoint one supportive teacher, their overall impression of educators may detract from feelings of safety and support.

Although **85% of participants say their school has ways to support them** and **83% say they can easily find supportive resources**, only **49% reported using supportive resources**.

On average, **50% of participants reported that their school does NOT ask what they think before making big changes**. We consider:

*Would students feel more secure and supported if their schools allowed them to have a greater voice when making changes at their school?*

## CULTURAL DIVERSITY

*\* All percentages recorded are for all responses given. 0% responses are not recorded.*

| *\* PERCENT OF STUDENT RESPONDENTS WHO:* | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **CULTURAL DIVERSITY:** | **TORONTO** | **OTTAWA** | **PEEL** | **HALTON** | **WATERLOO** | **WINDSOR -ESSEX** | **DURHAM** |
| Describe staff members as culturally diverse (non-White / POC) | 64.51 % | 25 % | 87.50 % | 60.71 % | 13.30 % | 55.56 % | 47.05 % |
| Say they learn about non-White cultures at school | 84.55 % | 100 % | 95.83 % | 92.59 % | 93.30 % | 66.67 % | 88.24 % |
| Say curriculum is very diverse (Black, Asian, Brown, Indigenous, etc) | 48 % | 25 % | 67 % | 52 % | 23 % | 33 % | 29 % |
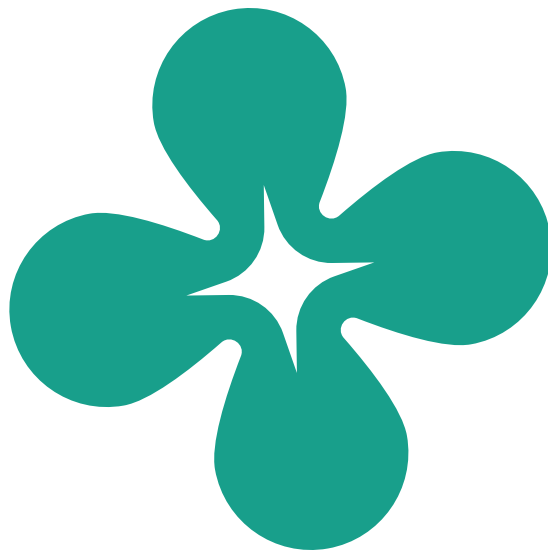
## Highlights

On average, **51% of participants described staff members as culturally diverse** (non- White/People Of Colour), with **Peel region reporting this at the highest rate of 88%**. Alternatively, **Waterloo participants reported the lowest rate of 13.3%**.

**With an average of 89%, participants across all regions reported learning about non-White cultures at school**.

On average, **40% of participants reported their school curriculum to be very diverse** (learning about Black, Asian, Brown, Indigenous cultures, etc), with **Peel region, once again, reporting this at the highest rate of 67%**.

Concerning hiring practices differ from region to region, we consider:

*Should other school boards and regions look to Peel region to observe how they sustain and maintain staff diversity?*

## BEING BLACK AT SCHOOL

*All percentages recorded are for all responses given. 0% responses are not recorded.*

| *PERCENT OF STUDENT RESPONDENTS WHO:* | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| BEING BLACK AT SCHOOL: | TORONTO | OTTAWA | PEEL | HALTON | WATERLOO | WINDSOR -ESSEX | DURHAM |
| Say they would like to learn more about Black cultures at school | 96.55 % | 100 % | 100 % | 100 % | 86.70 % | 100 % | 88.24 % |
| Say their race has affected their educational experience | 69.49 % | 100 % | 70.83 % | 60.71 % | 86.70 % | 100 % | 52.94 % |

## Highlights

**On average, 96% of participants reported a desire to learn more about Black cultures at school**.

**On average, 77% of participants say their race has affected their educational experience** - with Ottawa, Windsor-Essex, and Waterloo respondents reporting higher than average at **100%**, **100%**, and **87%** respectively. Lower than average, **Peel**, **Toronto**, **Halton** and **Durham** at **71%**, **69%**, **61%**, and **53%** respectively. We consider:

> *Given this reality, what resources must be implemented to reduce the impact of race on the educational experiences of Black girls and femmes by non-Black members of the community?*
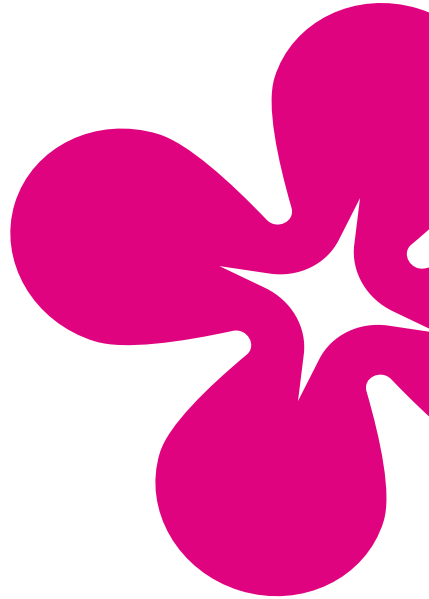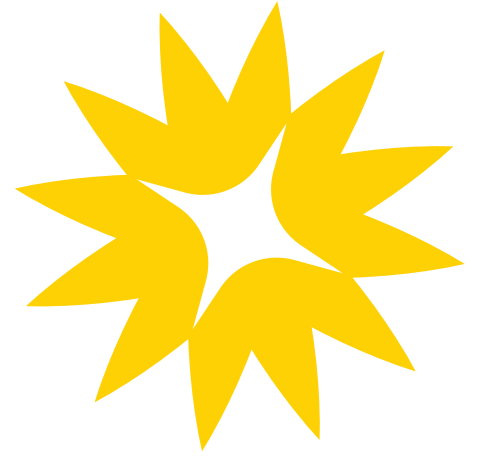
## Figure 1: Key Findings from Student Survey

This visual displays Key Findings from the Student Survey, categorized by how the participant self-identifies (Black girl/femme, Mixed/Biracial girl/femme, 2SLGBTQ+)
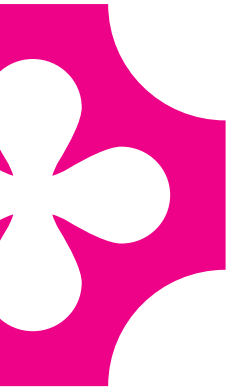
### Black Girls and Femmes

- Adultification
- Viewed as having to work harder than other students
- Being unfairly punished for infractions
- Their intelligence undermined
- Desire to learn more about Black culture

### Mixed/Biracial Girls and Femmes

- Feelings of not fitting in with Black or White students
  - Especially true with "White passing" students

### 2SLGBTQ+ Girls and Femmes

- Feelings of exclusion and isolation from peers
- Homophobic adults
- LGBTQ material that focuses on the Black queer experience
- Separation between Queerness and Blackness

# PHASE I: Key Findings, Short Answers

## SUPPORT AT SCHOOL

*Positive (+)*     *Negative (-)*

### Toronto

This teacher helps me through **having talks, hosting black student groups where we can have a safe space to talk and helping me learn that advocating for myself isn't a bad thing at all**.

I will **only feel seen/ safe with 1 of 4 of the teachers at my school**. **She is very kind, supports black community, caring and supportive**.

I feel that the reason as to why I don't have strong relationships with my teachers is because they aren't like me, black, short hair, and they also don't relate to things that I relate to. I also **feel that because they are so different from me I don't feel comfortable truly opening up to them**. I always respect my teachers and make sure I'm the best I can be.

(talking about supports/resources) I do not use them because **there aren't clear ways to get them**. Sometimes one might wanna use them but find out that they **aren't available at that particular time**.

### Peel

I don't really think I like my homeroom teacher because **I feel like she picks on me sometimes**. Some examples of my teacher picking on me are **her picking everyone else but me when I am raising my hands**. Another example of her picking on me is **she put my desk alone in the back for almost a month** because I was whistling in class while everyone else was sitting with friends.

I have one teacher in this school who I can go to any time during the day to see, it doesn't matter if it's school-related or not. He **makes me feel very safe** and **is one of the reasons why I don't mind coming to school**. He's always **giving me different opportunities that can help me in the future** and I really appreciate that.

(talking about supports/resources) Don't feel a need to, **doesn't seem like it'd be helpful to specifically me**, or I feel a need a bit of support but **I don't know with specifically what/how, or how to reach out comfortably for that support**.

### Ottawa

**Our relationships are for the most part quite good**. I **tend to get along with teachers that organize equity clubs the most**, or **teachers that have student success resources**, (…) there are also certain teachers that seem unwilling to help you, in ways that are not academically related. Overall, **there are certain teachers that show that they truly care about your success, not only as a student but as a person**, however not all teachers are like this.

**My teachers are respectful and caring(most of them) I don't always feel the most welcomed when i need answers to some questions, or when I'm struggling to get assignments done due to some mental health issues**. Some teachers **don't really seem to aid me in helping me figure out the best plan to succeed the class**.

I'm often stressed and have a million things going on in my life at the same, so I **sometimes talk to my guidance counsellor and she helps me regain some confidence and "hope" about things. She listens to me and help me find some answers to my problems**. I'm actually very lucky to have her.

I use programs such as **Rajo, a girls group for black youth specifically**. I also do use **guidance to help me figure out with path to take after post secondary**.

We are lucky enough have **black support groups** in our school, they often provide **specific mental health counselling for us** to use.

## Halton

That teacher **helps me a lot because I'm from a different** country the schooling system is different so that makes it harder for me to understand.

(talking about available supports) **Guidance counselling** and **mental health programs**.

**They talk to me about what happened, talk to admin and talk to my parents**.

## Waterloo

My relationship with my teachers are **usually pretty healthy**, **I feel comfortable around most of them**, though **there are teachers that do make me feel much more insecure and judged than others**, but **overall I have a good relationship with most of my teachers as long as communicate whenever I need help or need more time on assignments**.

Sometimes **I feel like my teachers don't really care about me**. Not in such a serious way, but I **don't get praised like other students in my class when I get my work done and feel proud**. Some teachers (especially math) make me feel really stupid.

There are only a few teachers that I feel safe with, (…) the ones who **make the effort to talk about social justice issues** within class and are generally more progressive. **They're always open to talk, even outside of class**. Otherwise, most of my teachers **don't address most cultural holidays or issues, so it's harder to feel safe within their class**.

Usually **they will give me options of solutions, resources or course of action that I can pursue to help solve my issue**. Although, **I only feel comfortable talking to them when it comes to academic support or help improving my learning environment**. **I don't feel comfortable discussing personal or family issues with this staff member.**

The teachers I can turn too for help **often make themselves super approachable and safe**. **They come to the Black Student Union meetings** and they are **always there to respectfully listen and provide help or feedback where they can**. **They never over step**. **They are willing to also do the hard work like behind the scenes** of events so that we can have fun too.

We have tutoring and guidance counselling, as well as a youth social worker. I haven't used the tutoring services, because I don't feel the need too; however, **I have reached out to my guidance counsellors for mental health support**. It's a little harder because **they're white, so they won't really understand my experiences**. **I also felt like they didn't take me seriously because my attendance and grades were okay**. I have connected the youth social worker at our school too. They've helped, but they're also white.

## Durham

My experiences with the teachers I had or are having at the moment are **rather nice, they haven't made me feel unwelcome in the slightest**.

We had to go to the school board HR to deal with one of them constantly making my life a living hell and **picking on me partially because of my colour**. This teacher loves to enforce social media presences like Andrew Tate, Candice Owens and Ben Shapiro. We got into a huge argument over Candice Owens because if we're "both black why is anything she says wrong if what I say is right".

She is the Indigenous Student Advisor at my school and the only one there who even **somewhat understands what I go through even tho I'm not Indigenous and she's not Black. She supports me and is there for me no matter what**.

## Windsor-Essex

Even though my teacher helps me with school work he also helps me with out of school problems as well, like **if kids were calling me inappropriate names he is always there to help me** and I thank him for that.

I feel like there is no need for me to use them since everything I have is at home. I have tutoring which I can get from home. **Things that come with mental health are different because I usually keep to myself** when it comes to my feelings so talking to someone, even my parents, isn't something I would do first.

In my school we have **little to no resources that I know about** and I dont use them I often find myself asking my teacher for help.
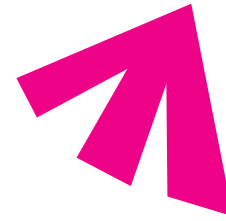
## CULTURAL DIVERSITY

*Positive (+)*    *Negative (-)*

### Toronto

...whereas **they barely did anything for black history month, they didn't do anything for indigenous peoples, and didn't even make an announcement for Asian heritage month. Instead they have posters on the office door saying "Black history month" "Asian heritage month" and "Indigenous month" it's honestly just sad**

It is **highly culturally diverse**. We learn both White and Black related subjects.

We **learn about black people** and what they had to go through

### Peel

I think personally because I took **courses that centered around Black culture**, I had the opportunity to learn more about it in school, but I think **in general maybe we could talk about it a bit more**.

(expressing interest in learning more about cultures) And I mean **all the black cultures across the diaspora** (African, Caribbean, black American, Afro-Latina...)

### Ottawa

I **would of course love to learn more about black culture at the school**.

### Halton

Although we do learn about some black culture, **I feel as if we could do more**, such as **doing more black history work other than in black history month**.

**I feel that it would be good for our school to talk even more about black culture**.

### Waterloo

I think the most common experience is always **during black history months, where instead of black people being celebrated, we are instead just picked out. And it can be uncomfortable. Luckily I have never felt that**. Although I am very conscious of how little interactions I have with black people in my daily life. Ex. Sports, clubs, friends, classrooms.

### Durham

**My school offers Indigenous Studies** (separate from g11 english indigenous) and **recently they offered Black studies**.

I'm in a history class this year (...) **only talk and learn about Europeans**. There are not a lot of Black girls at my school like 20-30 out of 400+.

**Not culturally diverse in most of my subjects**. For example, the teachers **do not include the contribution of Blacks in Canada's history**; only Europeans are featured in any learning about the creation of Canada.

### Windsor-Essex

*\* No response provided.*

## BEING BLACK AT SCHOOL

*Positive (+)*   *Negative (-)*

### Toronto

…**There are teachers at my school who are also racist, sometimes calling black students other black students names**, or when there is a problem where a group of people from different ethnic groups are all sitting and passing a toy ball around **only the black person got called out**, there has also been **racial slurs** going around, and very **discriminative actions**. This has affected my school experience because **even though I am strong academically, sometimes the social wellbeing of school takes the fun out of it**.

In most cases, **I am scared of raising my hand to talk in class** because the **other race are majority, most teachers give attention to the other race** and may have less or no time for me **because I am black**.

Sometimes when certain **teachers see that im getting such high grades, they are surprised** because they didn't expect a black person to be getting such high grades, **some of my friends were put in the applied program straight from middle school because of their race** they were smart but the teachers didnt care.

Sometimes **when I want to get into clubs and they don't choose me but white people**, their actions make me realize that it is because of my skin colour and race. **I have also been made fun of because of my dark skin** like people always whisper who is the blackest in the class and always look at me so it makes it obvious that they are talking about me.

Amongst peers, I was different, yet I still felt as if I was given the same school experience since I have no one else's experience to base mine off of. My **experience being a Black girl is constantly being reminded you're not like others, making me subsequently inferior to everyone else**. **All while being told by my community that we aren't**. It's confusing yet simple at the same time.

My school is strictly black people so **most of the time I feel accepted and wanted for who I am**, and **not having to change anything about myself to feel accepted is truly one of the best feelings as a black girl going to a strictly black school**. Although I say this, at times I do sometimes feel that my race influences my educational experience because **i've been called many racist things such as "blackie, bald-headed, ghetto, loud, a monkey"**, (…) mostly happened when I was younger, the times I was insecure and wanted to be another race and people who weren't like me, but as I grew older I learned to love my ethnicity and culture…

My classmates. **My teachers are nice and make me as well as other students feel welcomed** but **there's certain students in class that are also BLACK, make fun of fellow black students, as well as myself**. **Things like your skin is too black or don't go in the sun, all of that. It makes me sad** but I also have to say their bad influence affected me too but I learned to stop and change because that wasn't me.

I feel like **I do get treated a bit differently as a black plus-sized student**. For example when we have dress down day, I feel that I get looked at more because I'm a bit bigger. I also feel like the **teachers tend to overlook me or pay more attention to see if I need (unwanted) help** more than the other students.

I have access to the kind of education I want. I do well in school and everything is fine, there's no segregation whatsoever. Between the black and the white. So I haven't faced any challenging experience.

My race is always a disadvantage at school. The reason why is because I am a black woman. I am supposed to be ghetto, ratchet, loud and annoying but I am not exactly that, so I am at an disadvantage.

## Peel

...I, as a Black queer woman am asking them to add an accommodation in regards to my Individualized Education Program (IEP). I keep getting tossed away or brushed off. This does not include the countless times that race and socio-economic status overlapped and a member of staff implied in the middle of the chat that it was my fault for still having disordered eating urges and being depressed, even though I have been in therapy for almost 2 years, but I also have not been able to access specialized support due to either income or eligibility requirements...

I love being a black girl but I wish there were resources for black students at my school, especially scholarships, but also other things similar to support groups (...) moments when we can be all together as black people and just...talk.

I love it but when I was younger I would have negative thoughts about being a black girl and I would wonder why it's so different for us. but now that im older I understand very well.

I love being a black female I think black is beautiful and growing up I never thought that. I used to wanna be a white girl so bad and I'm happy that I have grown out of that phase and learned to love myself.

I love being a young black girl but sometimes because I am a younger black girl people expect me a lot of me and want me to go far in life and then I have other people who are expecting me to get pregnant young and drop out of school.

in all honesty as a Black, bisexual woman in this generation it has not been that easy. people have made homophobic comments to me about my sexuality that were not the nicest things and over time, I have learned to just tune those comments out because at the end of the day, I know myself

My experience is that there is always a preconceived notion as to what I can and can't do and often I can only talk about it with my black friends rather than other POC. I wish that wasn't the case but currently it what it is and I live my life focusing on what I am capable not what others think I am.

I feel as though I'm working on loving and embracing my Blackness more. I feel as though when I was growing up I struggled a lot with the vision of myself, which led me to disliking things like my body type or hair type. However I think I have really been able to take a more positive view and love myself more.

Being a black girl at my age, it's weird considering the fact that I'm a young black teen that has many opportunities ahead of me and the doors have been blown wide open for me but, it still feels like there's this wall that we cannot seem to climb over, and it keeps getting bigger. As a girl of colour, there are tons of barriers that I have been, and will face in my life but I have been taught to face it headstrong and not falter whenever experiences like that head my way. So being a black girl like I said it's weird, but empowering at the same time.
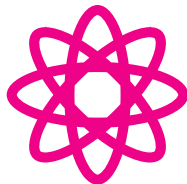
## Ottawa

I remember on one occasion we were having our grade three literacy exam. They had **separated the grade three classes based on color during the exam**. (...) The school had **always supplied the colored students especially the black kids with broken or used materials** (pencils, paper etc.) One teacher, who identified as a black woman, would come into our class room and help us with our questions(providing some answers) when I asked why she specifically was doing this; **she said that some other white/non black teachers were helping the students in the other room (who were white) and basically favouring them**.

(...) **Even if I haven't experienced any racism here in Canada**, **I kind of feel dirty around white people because I'm black**. This is a very taboo subject for me. **I feel like white people look at me differently like I'm dirty. Once a bus driver in Canada told me to get off and proceeded to tell me that I stink**, when I was only asking her a question (...)

**Teachers would underestimate my capabilities** or just pick on me cause I'm black. They would **ask me very weird questions that made me very uncomfortable**. Students, too, would ask me very weird questions. Things like "**are you in a gang?**" or "**do you do drugs**?" which made me very uncomfortable. Some students would also **casually use the N-word with me**, which also made me feel uncomfortable.

(...) **my (non-Black) friends were good to me**, and i was **able to connect easily with others**. Even though this was the case, **I felt distant from all of them because we were not the same**. **It was difficult to relate with them**, even if they were nice people. I would say **my issues lied with staff**. Because we live in Canada, they would often **dismiss the idea that racism would exist here**.

**I love being a black girl because currently, I feel such a strong connection to my roots and culture**, because right now, **I'm surrounded with people like me** (African or Caribbean). **I love being able to meet people like me**, and hear about others experiences and cultures. Right now, I'm in a **black youth forum**. It involves black students from all across my school board. (...) **This is something that really made me appreciate my blackness**, and im **really glad that resources like this exist**. (...) It was not until i had access to resources like the black youth forum, and surrounding myself with other black students that i was able to appreciate my blackness.

**I personally love being a black girl**, the **experience can be difficult sometimes**. However, the **community that is built from being black and having that shared experience**.

## Halton

I feel like sometimes teachers only care about me because i'm one of the only black people. I **often feel like i'm just a diversity token**.

I personally think its **pretty good being a black girl** because **no one has ever been racist towards me or said anything about my skin tone**, **my hair**, or anything like that and I would say that people treat me fairly and in a way that I'm ok with.

**I love being black around my family and close friends out of school** but when it comes to school, **if we are doing a black activity it makes me very uncomfortable** and I **dont feel very proud of my identity at school**.

I think that **being a black queer person is hard** because of my mental problems and being seen as rash and always having outbursts and some **people think that it's because of my race and gender**.

I find it difficult because I feel like people don't think I'm black enough to be considered black (bi-racial), but black enough to be called a monkey or the n-word.

I feel like overall, just at this age, others tend to be very judgmental and I'm sure there are other things that will be commented about me but the thing I hear the most are about my race. but things I do love are being at that age when I start to have my own free will and I can choose to embrace my culture more than before with things like braiding my hair.

I wish that I could be more open sometimes with others around me as well have a bigger voice to make change to my community/school.

## Waterloo

I don't remember many times I have very obviously experienced a negative experience because of my race. (...) When I was younger, I also thought my curly hair was a disease, because so many of my friends and family that I knew were white and had straight or wavy hair. I only fully understood that my hair wasn't caused by a disease because my mom took me to a world fair in Mississauga. I saw a diverse group of people there and saw a black woman singing on stage with an afro. I hope to learn a lot more about my mothers culture and traditions as well as go and travel around Africa to discover other African cultures.

I love being a black girl. Where I used to live, it was very much multicultural, and all my teachers were empowered multicultural women who inspired me and still do to this day. I've had some bad moments but they don't at all affect me anymore. Although, I wish that people were more aware of their words, especially to little kids because it can really mess some people up.

Days where I feel so proud to be me, and other days where I want to completely wipe off the color on my skin. I would definitely say the biggest struggle I have had is wanting to look like my female white peers. I hated that my hair looked different, that my skin was dark, that lips and nose were bigger. I grew up feeling so incredibly ugly compared to white people growing up. As black and female you are taught that being pretty is your core value as a person. It felt like everything and everyone was telling me that no one would want me whether that be friendship or romantic relationships, and my future career over a white girl, and for a long time I was deeply insecure. It was only when I began making friends with other black girls, focusing on black female history, media and family members and prioritizing seeing the beauty in my culture that some of that insecurity started to melt, but I'm still struggling to accept myself as worthy every day.

As a black lesbian, I don't have support at home as my parents are traditional African parents who are homophobic and I also feel like I don't belong with some white, queer people. I've heard people say "queer struggles are equal to black struggles" and that is a big no for me. I feel sort of divided as I have these 2 identities that don't normally correlate with one another. I do have support from school for 2SLGBTQ++ but not as much for black support as 99% of the school teachers are white and have no clue and don't know or understand black struggles so they struggle to assist me and other students struggling with racism and micro aggressions and other situations.
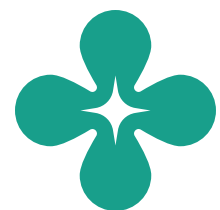
It's a lot **harder to walk through life as a black Muslim girl**. I **grew up wanting to be that white girl**, I wouldn't say that now but I grew up in all of elementary school with the thought process because there was no representation. Growing up in elementary school I **used to get called names just because I had an Afro**. This **played a huge role to this day as all these negative comments have made it way harder to love myself**. In a way, **I hate being black as black people just have it harder** but **I also love being black**. **I love my culture and the traditions we share with each other**.

## Durham

Whether it's **ignorant or rude comments about my hair**, **my hyperpigmentation** or **just calling me out and trying to start fight with me over racism**. I've also had **many students call me the N-word or scream it in my face**. **It makes it hard to feel so different and go to school and worry about what's gonna happen next just because I look different**. (...) Once in 8th grade **I was assigned to the lowest reading group despite my extraordinary reading skills for that age**. (...) All of these things that happen at my school, even the ones that were a few years ago, still scare me and **I'm worried that the way I'm treated may sometimes jeopardize my further education and future**. Even **if my future remains okay, my mental health isn't**. **I missed 52 days of school this year just avoiding my English teacher for fear that he would argue with me and make me cry again because he likes to single me out based on my race**.

The way people see me. Sometimes, girls would come up to me saying I looked mean or scary. **I can't help but think is it because im black**?

I have been **teased and asked offensive questions about my hair often over the years**. Students tend to **ask me often if they can have the "N-word" pass**. **They continuously make [jokes] about the lunch I bring to school**. **One student in particular call me and other people monkeys**.

**I love my culture and I love who I am** even though it was a 15 year struggle getting to that point, however, I **genuinely hate the struggle so much** and I **hate constantly feeling so alone**. I'm excited to move onto university down south because I **hope that I won't be so alone and that I will find people who look like me and have lived lives like me**, too.

## Windsor-Essex

I feel that **being a black girl makes me feel powerful** but **yet at a disadvantage**. I **love how my skin makes me feel different and unique but as well brings me down**, **feeling like I have to work ten times harder for the spot I want to be in** because "**black girls don't try hard**" to **show them I know what I'm doing and not to focus on my skin**, I'm more then just that. **I wish that school would listen and hear us when we say something instead of brushing it under the rug** (I know with time things will change but its **hard to wait for that change given that it affects many black girls every day not just me**).

My experience **being a black girl at my age has gone quite well than what I usually went through**. (...) I feel the previous city I lived in always based thing of the colour of my skin but ever **since I moved back to Windsor things have changed in a better way**. Yes, **I will still go through negative things every once in a while** but **not as much as before**.

I feel like **my race has affected my school experience in some ways** just because of how I'm mixed (biracial). Often times, **people will treat me better than other black people because I'm half Asian half black**. Most of the time, I don't feel comfortable with it just because I don't like treating people unfairly and **seeing other people**, **like my friends, treated unfairly doesn't sit right with me**.

I feel that **everything is surrounded by my skin color**. **The way teachers and students talk to me about it**. I often find that **many kids make jokes about my skin by calling me unwanted names and racist jokes to me**.

I **wish there are more people that understand because I am black**, **it doesn't mean I have no emotions or I can handle anything**.
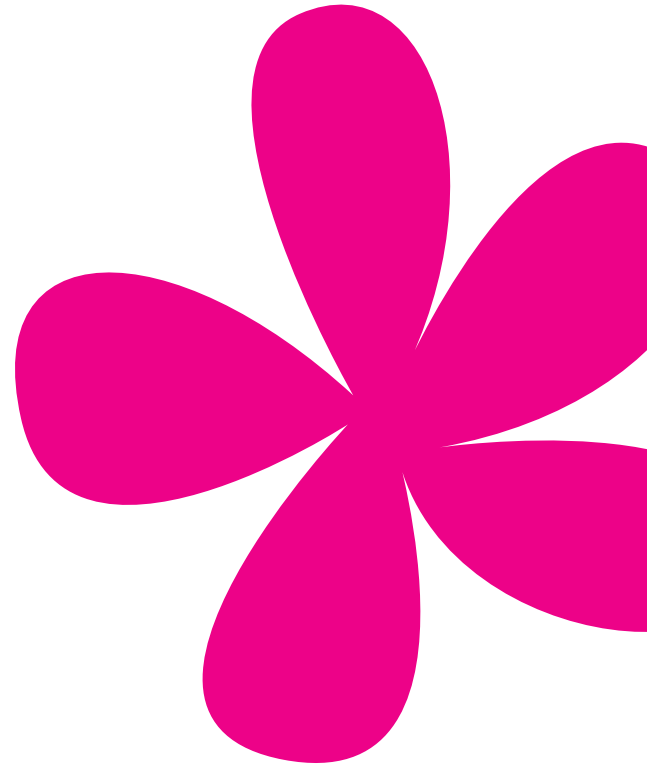
# Discussion: Student Survey

To begin, the "Demographics" illustrate that a majority of participants, **93%**, identify as Black girls, while **10.4%** identify as Biracial/Mixed girls. **7.5%** of participants identify as femme or femme/non-binary people. When navigating through this report, this participant pool make-up is important to keep in mind when considering how these uniquely lived perspectives inform how participants approached questions in the Student Survey (Short Answer) and the Afro-Centric Sharing Circles, which relied on the exploration of such vantage points.

The "Feelings About School" section illustrates the general sentiments and attitudes participants have towards school and their educational journeys. It is clear that, at **99%**, an overwhelming majority of students consider school to be important to them - highlighting a strong commitment towards their educational success. Thus, external validation by teachers in the form of telling students they did a good job, results in feelings of joy and positivity. A vast majority of participants, **97%**, reported feeling happy when their teacher told them they did a good job. Although positive factors towards school measured high (liking going to school, class participation, studying for at least 2 hours after school), **95%** of participants, expressed feelings of being overwhelmed by their school work.

Given these numbers, it would suggest that participants may wish to consult supportive resources at school (mental health, guidance counselling, scholarships, etc.,) to reduce feelings of overwhelm. However, "Support at School" findings suggest that available resources may not resonate strongly with students, with an average of only **49%** using the supportive resources. However, an average of **36%** reported seeking academic support from selected teachers they trust.

Overall, the commitment Black girls and femmes have towards their educational pathways remains strong, as an average of **92%** of all participants talk about life after high school with their Parents/Guardians. At home, it is evident that there remains a key investment in the educational futures of participants, as expressed by Parents/Guardians.

The "Support at School" section highlights that, on average, **52%** of participants feel safe and supported by school staff, with Waterloo below average at **37%**. This is in contrast to the vast majority of participants reporting good relationships with their in-class teachers at **73%**. However, it may be an indication that feelings of support and safety are deeply connected to feelings of trust and vulnerability, a more intimate level of interaction that may surpass the baseline of what is known as a "good" relationship with teachers.

Despite overall positive relationships with in-class teachers, **50%** of participants reported that their school does not ask them what they think before making big changes - with the Halton region having the lowest dissatisfaction rate at **21%**.

In regards to the presence of "Cultural Diversity" within teachers and staff, participants reported varying levels. Peel participants reported that staff members are culturally diverse at the highest rate of **88%**. Alternatively, Waterloo participants reported at the lowest rate of **13.3%**. However, the curriculum suggests a level of cognizance towards cultural diversity, with **89%** of participants learning about non-White cultures at school.

Lastly, "Being Black at School" illustrates a snapshot of the lived experiences of participants. Although **89%** of participants reported learning about non-White cultures at school, an average of **96%** of participants shared a desire to learn more about Black cultures at school, especially to support ongoing anti-racism rhetoric across the world.

Additionally, **77%** of participants reported that their race has affected their educational experience - with Halton respondents reporting below average at **61%**. Durham reported below average at **53%**. This indicates that regional differences may converge on participants to create differing realities. It is worth exploring circumstantial evidence and anecdotal information that can provide further insight into the experiences of Black girls and Black femme (2SLGBTQ+) students in the Halton region. The opposite may be said concerning uncovering the experiences of Black girls and 2SLGBTQ+ populations in Waterloo region and Durham region.
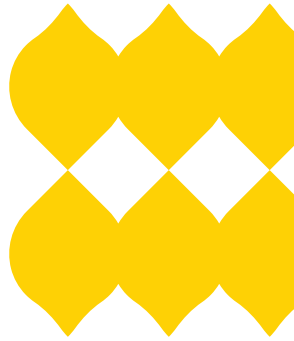
# PHASE I: Afro-Centric Sharing Circles
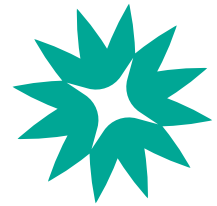
## Afro-Centric Sharing Circle Guide

*\* Guided conversation circle - this means the actual questions for the group interview could be different dependent on the flow of conversation.*

What is the best thing about your school?

If you could change one thing about your school, what would it be? How would you describe the cultural diversity at your school?

What has been your personal experience on this campus in the context of race, as either a member of the racial majority or minority? [examples]

Would you say the experience of students of Black girls/students at your school is the same or different than the experience of European American students? [examples]

Would you say the experience of students of Black girls/students at your school is the same or different than the experience of Black boys at your school? [examples]

What advantages or strengths can you draw upon from out of your racial or ethnic heritage?

If people of other races at your school could know one thing about you as a student, what would that be?

If you could say one thing to students of other races about what they could do to make you feel more accepted/included as a Black girl, what would it be?

If you could say one thing to students of your own race about what they could do to make you feel more accepted/included as a Black girl, what would it be?

If you could say one thing to teachers and staff of your own race about what they could do to improve the multicultural climate on campus, what would it be?

If you could say one thing to teachers and staff of other races about what they could do to improve the multicultural climate on campus, what would it be?

What is one thing you believe your school could do to make things better?

Other comments (in general) or on certain things that can be improved to make things better at your school for Black girls?
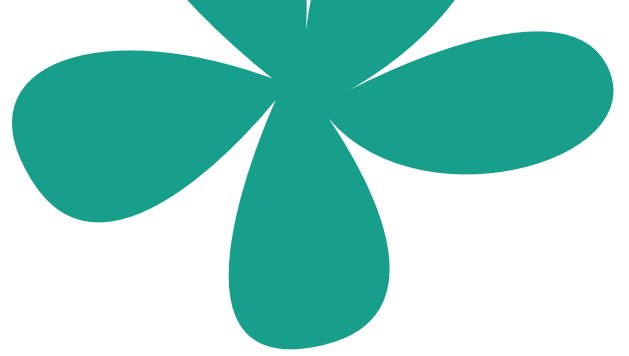
## Figure 2: Key Findings from Sharing Circles

The Roots of A Black Girl project conducted Afro-Centric Sharing Circles with Waterloo, Halton, and Ottawa.

### Waterloo

- "Misogynoir" towards Black girls from Black boys
- Black boys granting N-pass, allowing black girls to be bullied
- Black boys being taken more seriously when reporting racist incidents compared to Black girls
- Disjointed Black community
- Teachers make a strong effort to build a positive community
- High school motivation (Black people working 10x harder than others)

### Halton

- Racial slurs towards Black girls (N-word) from non-Black students
- Cannot be overly reactive or angry (to N-word) or you get in trouble
- Teachers do not feel obligated to correct N-word (if it occurs during class - *deal with it later*)
- Projecting Black stereotypes (being called "White-washed", "ghetto")
- Teachers singling out Black students during class to "fact check" when doing a Black History lesson

### Ottawa

- "Misogynoir" towards Black girls from Black boys
- Black boys being taken more seriously (in general)
- White students given more attention by their teacher
- Black students not consulted about representing the school in video ads
- Having to prove yourself against stereotypes
- Unfair discipline
- Teacher reading N-word during class
- Teachers assuming Black girls aren't smart

# Thematic Analysis

## Thematic Coding, Inductive Coding

The "Roots of A Black Girl" project employed a "thematic coding", a form of "inductive coding", for qualitative and quantitative data analysis (Medelyan, 2024). Inductive coding is informed by the raw data, drawing codes through meanings as they arise from the data. Thematic coding uncovers themes in text by "analyzing the meaning of words and sentence structure" (Medelyan, 2024).

## Demographics

As mentioned earlier, the "Roots of A Black Girl" project utilized purposive and snowball sampling to reach its target demographic of self-identifying Black girls and femmes aged 12 to 17 in Ontario (p. 29). To ensure that the study covered the vast and varied regional landscape of Ontario, participants were invited from urban, rural, and suburban/mixed areas (Rural Ontario Institute, 2023).

The Roots of A Black Girl project surveyed **7 regions across Ontario**: **Toronto**, **Peel**, **Durham**, **Halton**, **Waterloo**, **Windsor-Essex**, and **Ottawa**. Thus, each sample offers a unique narrative relative to their community-based, geographical differences and nuance. According to the 2021 Canadian Census, Ontario's total Black population is 5.5% (Statistics Canada, 2022). On par with this figure are (i) **Waterloo's** Black population of **5.5%** and (ii) **Windsor-Essex's** of **5.8%** (Statistics Canada, 2022). Lower than this figure is Halton's Black population of **3.5%** (Statistics Canada, 2022). Numbers shift when approaching Southern Ontario's "Greater Toronto Area" (GTA), comprising **Toronto**, **Peel**, and **Durham**. Their Black populations closely compare at **9.6%**, **9.5%**, and **9.6%**, respectively (Statistics Canada, 2022). Lastly, Ottawa's Black population of **7.8%** is on the higher end in comparison to all - with Halton region being the lowest at (**3.5%**), and Toronto and Durham equally the highest (**9.6%**). Overall, it is apparent that Black populations are the minority across Ontario (Statistics Canada, 2022). Thus, the drastically differing levels of representation of Black people follow suit across systems and organizations - including student demographics.

## White and Non-Black Peers

As per the Student Survey, the "Being Black at School" section explores how participants perceive the impact of their race on their educational experiences. Recalling the figures outlined in the results table for "Being Black at School" (p.40), on average, **77% of participants say their race has affected their educational experience** - with **Ottawa**, **Windsor-Essex**, and **Waterloo** respondents reporting higher than average at **100%**, **100%**, and **87%**, respectively. Lower than average, **Peel**, **Toronto**, **Halton** and **Durham** reported **71%**, **69%**, **61%**, and **53%**, respectively.

As aforementioned, Erica Neegan describes the differing experiences between her home country, Jamaica, and Canada (2008). During her time in high school in Canada, she recalls how the "dominant group", White students, routinely joked about her African features, weakening her sense of belonging and connection to the school community (Neegan, 2008). Furthermore, lighter-skinned students with looser hair were considered academically superior while darker-skinned students with textured hair were considered academically inferior. Thus, her transition from a predominantly Black school to a predominantly White school negatively impacted her educational experience, wherein her feelings of social isolation were exacerbated (Neegan, 2008).

Across all participants, an average of **77% stated that their race has affected their educational experiences,** with the **remaining average of 23%** stating that their race has not affected their educational experience. However, **Halton and Durham participants who stated that their race has not affected their educational experience reported higher-than-average numbers of 39% and 47%**, respectively. This occurs despite Halton having a significantly lower Black population than Durham region (**3.5%** < **9.6%**). Key mentions from respondents who reported that their race has not affected their experience included (i) having previously attended a Black school, (ii) attending a school with a highly diverse population, (iii) being treated equally as others, (vi) attending a school inclusive to everyone regardless of race or gender, (v) not experiencing bullying/racial slurs, (vi) having many friends/feeling a strong sense of community or Black community, (vii) having great relationships with their teachers, and (viii) catered opportunities for Black students.

Contrarily, participants from **Windsor-Essex** and **Ottawa** reported that race has affected their educational experience at **100%** each, with **Waterloo** participants reporting this at **87%**. Once again, **Toronto** and **Peel** share similar figures for this at **69.4%** and **71%**, respectively. Key mentions from respondents who believed their race has affected their experience included (i) negative Black stereotypes against Black girls and women (i.e. loud, dangerous, lazy, unintelligent, adultified)(Garton, 2022; Goff et. al, 2014), (ii) White beauty standards (i.e. skin tone shame, hair insecurity, uninvited hair touching), (iii) low self-esteem (vi) bullying and racial slurs (N-word, granting non-Black peers "the N-pass", teased for being biracial), (v) unfair treatment by students and/or White staff compared to non-Black students (unfair discipline, less in-class attention), (vi) feelings of isolation (White students distancing themselves from Black students), (vii) academic-streaming, and (viii) code-switching (Cassell, 2021.

Given the higher Black populations that **Toronto**, **Peel**, **Durham** (approx. GTA), and **Ottawa** have (**9.6%**, **9.5%**, **9.6%**, **7.8%**), we consider: How do participants from regions with higher Black populations perceive racism - whether similarly or differently - in comparison to regions with significantly lower Black populations (i.e. **Halton**, **3.5%**)? We consider:

> *Must future research develop specific, deeper, qualitative questions or methods to probe discrepancies such as the one between Halton and Durham?*
>
> *What, if any, are the supports in place for participants who have reported that race has affected their educational experience? Are they active or dormant?*
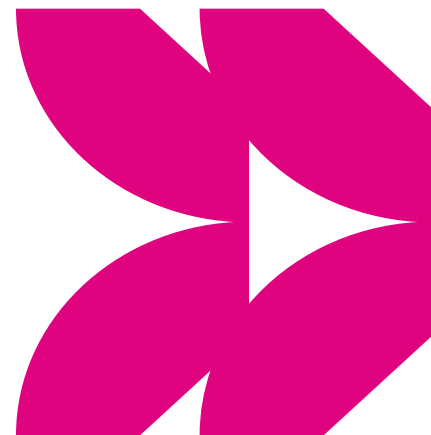
## Black Peers

The tone of relationships between Black girls/femmes and Black boys served to illustrate elements of "misogynoir", a term coined by Moya Bailey to describe the anti- Black, racist misogyny that Black women experience - particularly in North American visual and digital culture such as TV, movies, cartoons, Instagram, Twitter, etc.(2008). As Bailey articulates, "misogynoir is not simply the racism that Black women encounter, nor is it the misogyny Black women negotiate. Misogynoir describes the "uniquely co-constitutive racialized and sexist violence that befalls Black women as a result of their simultaneous and interlocking oppression at the intersection of racial and gender marginalization" (Bailey, 2008).

**Waterloo and Ottawa's Afro-Centric Sharing Circles** emphasized a significant disconnect between Black girls and Black boys at school. In stark contrast to Black girls, the overall perception of Black boys by the staff and student body is largely positive - especially basketball players or athletes. Associating with them grants popularity and a sense of "cool" that associating with Black girls does not. Participants observed behavioural tendencies, such as granting non-Black peers the N-pass (use of the N-word in jest) and mistreating Black girls by making negative comments on physical appearance, hairstyle, etc.

Participants noted that Black boys failed to protect their female counterparts when they were bullied in front of them, avoiding involvement for fear of appearing romantically interested in them. This "bystander" behaviour is reflective of deep shame. It demonstrates Bailey's assertion that misogynoir describes the compounding race and gender-based violence that Black women encounter as a result of racial and gender marginalization (2008). In addition, participants noted that when filing complaints regarding racist behaviour by a White teacher, action was only taken when a Black boy filed a complaint for the same behaviour. Participants concluded that Black boys are "taken more seriously and more respected" than they are.

These vulnerabilities render Black girls and women reliant on each other for a sense of community and protection. Several participants mentioned enjoying being surrounded by each other (i.e. Black support groups), as it fosters a sense of community and helps to increase a sense of connection, belonging, and empathy through shared experience.

Notably, it was commonly observed by participants that there is a lack of unity within the Black community at large - in comparison to non-Black communities. Unfortunately, these social elements plant seeds for hyper-independence, exposing Black girls to a cultural pattern of rejection by Black males. This perpetuates an ongoing cycle of disjointedness among members of the Black community.
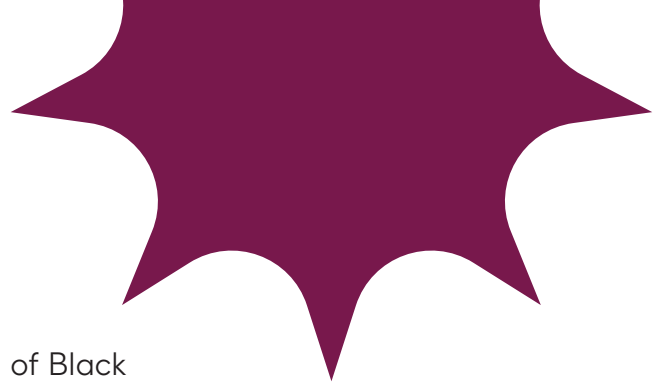
## Racial Slur

**Observed across all 7 regions**, participants often expressed that racial slurs made by non-Black peers were commonplace during incidents in and outside of school (Panico, 2024; Raza, 2022), particularly the use of the N-word and other derogatory racial labels (Blackie, monkey etc.). Participants reported incidents involving White students, Black boys, and other POC students, with Black boys often granting the "N- pass" to friends, White and non-POC students (Maluske, 2023). This encouragement of racist behaviour was frequently branded as just "racist jokes", with POC students using their own POC status as a marker of innocence. Participants observed that although POC students would make use of the N-pass more often than White students, they would face fewer consequences than White students.

Furthermore, participants reported being called racial slurs during class where the teacher was present. Visceral reactions during class were unwelcome, forcing participants to minimize their anger and frustration. Participants asserted that if they had viscerally expressed themselves, teachers would say they were in the wrong and discipline them more severely than the instigator of the racial slur. Other incidents involved teachers wishing to proceed with class and deal with the racial incident later or outside of class (McPherson, 2022).

A similar incident is demonstrated in Kisha McPherson's article, "The Teacher Said Nothing", where she reports a similar experience with a participant from her study focused on Black girls' education in the GTA. (2022). Jada, the participant, was in the middle of class, and a student walked up to her seat and casually blurted out the "N- word" as if to call her by name. The teacher's underwhelming reaction stood out to Jada: the teacher asked Jada if she was okay and told the instigating student to "take a seat". Jada said, 'That's it? Take a seat." Jada excused herself from class to take a walk. This underwhelming reaction indicates a lack of understanding of the
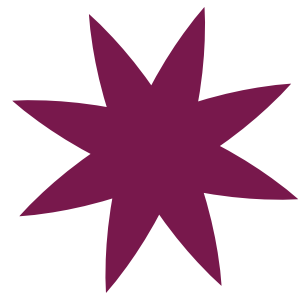
gravity of such racial slurs and their impact on the psyche of Black girls and femmes, especially on school grounds (McPherson, 2022).

Participants also recalled feelings of discomfort when White teachers would make use of the N-word in passing during curriculum or literature-based references in class (i.e. To Kill A Mockingbird). In March of 2023, a Windsor School Board addressed improper use of the N-word, barring all non-Black students, friends of Black students granted the N-pass, and teachers referencing literary material from using the racial slur (Maluske, 2023).

On a critical note, we consider:

*How should school boards take into account the Black students "who are re-claiming the N-word to use within their peer groups in a non- derogatory form" despite its historical nuances in a slavery or colonial context? (Maluske, 2023)*
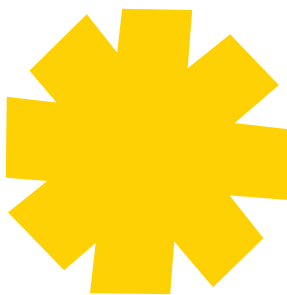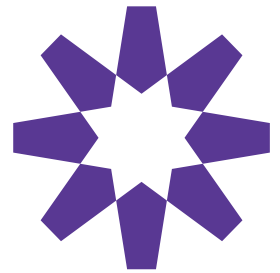
## School Support

As mentioned earlier, **73%** of all participants reported having good relationships with their teachers (p.45). Overall, when asked in what ways students received support at school, (i) advice from a teacher, (ii) academic support, and (iii) mental health support, were among the key mentions. On average, **70%** of participants seek personal advice from a teacher they trust on a myriad of topics, relating to personal, emotional, or career and decision-making aspects in their lives. It was noted that students felt highly comfortable with teachers they trust, noting the ability to engage in open dialogue "about anything". When it came to academic support, **36%** of all participants reported seeking it from selected teachers they trust. Other key mentions included (vi) teachers advocating on students' behalf when they are bullied, (v) teachers providing resources and/or referring students to opportunities towards success, and (vi) teachers inspiring confidence and self-motivation in students, an important element towards educational perseverance (Daw, 2022). Participants emphasized adoration for teachers' ability to "be relatable" to students and their ability to understand their lived experiences as it fosters a deep connection and sense of belonging between students and teachers.

Continued exploration of School Supports and resources available beyond a trusted teacher include (i) guidance counselling for career support, **36%** (ii) academic support programs such as tutoring programs or homework clubs, **26%**, and (iii) mental health support, **22%**. Other notable mentions include accessing (vi) after-school programs such as Black support groups, especially in participant pools where a sense of community is sought.

For those who reported that they don't have a teacher they trust to seek help from, key mentions were (i) not feeling closely connected to their teachers, (ii) an inability to have open dialogue and/or have the teacher empathize with a lived experience, (iii) feeling uncomfortable, (vi) perceived favouritism towards other students, (vii) discriminatory, racist behaviour by White administrative staff (CBC News, 2020), and (viii) a perceived sense of overwhelm by White teachers already offering advice and emotional support to several other students.

> The function of education is to teach one to **think intensively** and to **think critically**. **Intelligence plus character** - that is the goal of true education.
>
> *– Michelle Aboagye*
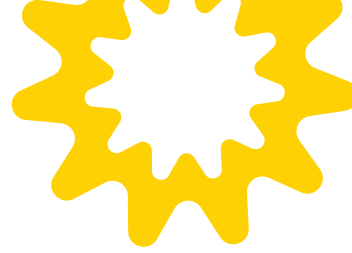
## School Curriculum

As mentioned earlier, an average of **40% of participants reported their school curriculum to be very diverse** (learning about Black, Asian, Brown, Indigenous cultures, etc. (p.38). However, **96% of all participants reported a desire to learn more about Black cultures at school**.

Recently, it was announced on February 8th, 2024, during Black History Month that Ontario would be introducing mandatory Black History learning for Grades 7, 8, and 10 (Ontario News, 2024). The history course would uncover the exceptional contributions and histories of Black Canadians who supported Canada's foundational development (Ontario News, 2024).

Beginning in September 2025, Grades 7, 8, and 10 will include the mandated course to celebrate Black history as Canadian history, through emphasizing the several Black communities that settled, developed and contributed to the development of Canada - primarily the significant contributions made by Black people to Canada's early beginnings as a young country. Moreover, the course will also explore the obstacles and challenges faced in the pursuit of a new, "democratic, inclusive, and prosperous" settlement in Canada (CBC News, 2024).

The Ministry of Education states that they remain committed to consulting historians, educators, and local Black communities to solidify new learning modules. "Black history is Canadian history," asserted Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education (CBC News, 2024).
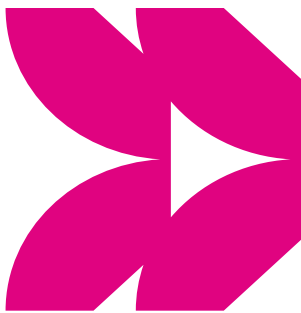
"By mandating learning on the contributions Black individuals made to our country's founding and success, the next generation of Canadians will better appreciate the sacrifice, patriotic commitment and long-lasting contributions Black Canadians have made to Canada. As the economy and technology continue to change, we will continue to modernize curriculum, with an emphasis on STEM education, so students have the skills and confidence to graduate into good-paying jobs, emphasizes Stephen Lecce (CBC News, 2024).

Additionally, Ontario announced the end of academic streaming in Grade 9 alongside a ban on suspensions for young students after acknowledgment of systemic discrimination. As systemic discrimination is ingrained within the educational system (CBC News, 2020), eliminating such elements prevents opportunities for Black students from being negatively stereotyped and educationally disengaged (Daw, 2022).

Thus, it is indicative that with this curriculum change, Black Canadians will feel more represented and understood - boosting educational engagement (Daw, 2022), positive feelings about school, and an equally positive attitude toward their future. The curriculum change also encourages thought-provoking discussion, urging reflections and meditation on the Black, Canadian population and its legacy (Ontario News, 2024)

## Black Girlhood

"Black Girlhood" is an analytical framework and purview that assesses how Black girls engage their livelihoods and journeys in pursuit of happiness despite numerous racial and gender-based obstacles (Carter Andrews, et. al., 2019; Epstein et. al, 2015; George, 2020; Crenshaw. et. al, 2015) It denotes a level of freedom and liberation, through which Black girls seek life's opportunities, possibilities, and fulfillments (McPherson, 2020).

On average, **66%** of participants reported that they love Being a Black girl or femme, with Durham participants reporting a higher average of **82%**, Windsor- Essex reporting **78%**, and Ottawa reporting **75%**. Key mentions for those feeling a strong side of pride in their Black Girlhood were (i) feeling a sense of empowerment, especially when surrounded by other members of the Black community (Neeganagwedgin, E. 2013), (ii) feeling proud of Black history/culture and (iii) Black hair. Within a community, Black girls create a deep sense of a shared experience wherein they position themselves to affirm one another (2014).

The remaining **44%** of participants who do not love Being a Black girl discussed (i) feeling uncomfortable, (ii) feeling isolated, (iii) wishing more Black girls attended their school, (iv) not being seen as Black enough (if biracial), (v) wanting respect from White and non

Black peers, (vi) uninvited hair touching, (vii) lack of empathy from others, (viii) code-switching, (ix) being bullied for not fitting the White beauty standard, (x) having to work 10x harder than non-Black students, (xi) and wanting a bigger student voice to create impact and change at school.

On average, **6%** of Black femmes reported the challenge of being a Black femme and queer at their age - citing (i) mental health challenges, (ii) negative stereotypes against Black women (iii) homophobic parents, (iv) social isolation from the White, queer community, (v) and receiving more 2SLGBTQ+ support rather than Black support.

Durham participants specifically mentioned their pride in Black Girlhood being connected to having access to a **Black Graduation Coach** (Dubinski, 2024). Participants have expressed that having access has increased confidence in one's future and solidified academic aspirations. With the objective being to increase Black Graduation rates, Durham program participants also experience increased levels of self-motivation with the Graduation Coach serving as a form of accountability.

# PHASE II

# The Programs

# PHASE II: The Programs

## TARGET GROUPS

**Recall:** *Figure 1 - Student Survey Key Findings*

As a result of the findings from Phase I, the target demographics for the programs are:

**(i)** **Black girls & femmes**
**(ii)** **Mixed/Biracial girls & femmes**
**(iii)** **2SLGBTQ+ girls & femmes**

### Black Girls and Femmes

- Adultification
- Viewed as having to work harder than other students
- Being unfairly punished for infractions
- Their intelligence undermined
- Desire to learn more about Black culture

### Mixed/Biracial Girls and Femmes

- Feelings of not fitting in with Black or White students
  - Especially true with "White passing" students

### 2SLGBTQ+ Girls and Femmes

- Feelings of exclusion and isolation from peers
- Homophobic adults
- LGBTQ material that focuses on the Black queer experience
- Separation between Queerness and Blackness

> "There is **no such thing** as a **single-issue struggle** because we **do not live** single-issue lives."
>
> – *Audre Lorde*

## Black Girls and Femmes

Understanding oneself as being both Black and a woman is crucial for the formation of identity. This is especially true for Black girls as they navigate their adolescent years and the realities of racist and sexist stereotypes begin to form. Spaces for Black girls that center their voices are lacking (Andrews et al., 2019). In essence, having a hegemonic space encourages sisterhood and self-expression to uplift their voices from within their community and beyond.

## Mixed/Biracial Girls and Femmes

It is important for mixed and biracial girls, regardless of whether or not they are 'white-passing' (Mohtady, 2023) to explore and understand the intersectionality of being both mixed and a woman. Mixed and biracial girls may grapple with complex identity questions due to their diverse heritage. Thus, there remains a need for a space where they can navigate issues of privilege, identity erasure, and belonging within diverse communities. By acknowledging and embracing their intersecting identities, mixed and biracial girls can develop a stronger sense of self-awareness and empowerment - ultimately fostering more inclusive and supportive environments for themselves and others.

## 2SLGBTQ+ Girls & Femmes

Recognizing the interconnectedness of being both Back and femme is essential for advancing intersectional justice. Understanding the complexities of intersecting identities can help Black, 2SLGBTQ+ girls develop resilience and coping strategies to navigate discrimination, prejudice, and marginalization (McCready, 2017). Additionally, learning about the experiences and struggles shared by others who belong to similar intersecting identities can foster a sense of community, providing individuals with much-needed support and validation.
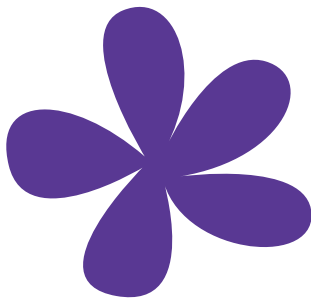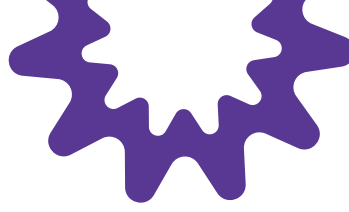
## THEMES AND TOPICS

### Self Image...

Western standards often perpetuate narrow and Eurocentric ideals, leading to feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem among Black girls (Andrews et al., 2019). Learning about self-image will empower them to challenge these standards and embrace their unique beauty and heritage. Moreover, developing a positive self-image is essential for mental and emotional well-being (Goff et al., 2014). By understanding self-image, Black girls can recognize and resist harmful stereotypes that may impact how they perceive themselves and how others perceive them.

### Relationship Dynamics...

explores four types of relationships: family relationships, romantic relationships, friendships, and acquaintances. As noted by McPherson (2020), Black girls often have to navigate complex cultural and societal influences that can impact their relationships. By understanding relationship dynamics, participants can effectively establish and uphold healthy boundaries in various relationships. This would include discussing consent, confidently asserting their needs, and learning effective communication and conflict- resolution skills. These skills are invaluable in navigating misunderstandings, managing disagreements, and ultimately nurturing healthy relationships.

### Self-care...

centers discussions around self-esteem and body image, addressing crucial topics supported by research on Black girls' mental health (George, 2020). Such research indicates that Black girls experience higher rates of anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and trauma-related stress (George, 2020). Understanding and practicing self-care empowers Black girls to prioritize their well-being and needs. Introducing self-care practices equips them with the resilience and coping mechanisms necessary to navigate systemic challenges, confront racism, and manage everyday stressors. This approach addresses immediate mental health concerns and fosters long-term empowerment and well- being within Black girls and Black communities at-large.

### Discrimination...

is a harsh reality that many Black girls face in various aspects of their lives, including education (Neeganagwedgin, 2013). Open discussions about discrimination can help Black girls recognize and navigate systemic barriers and biases that may affect their opportunities and well- being. Thus, equipping them with the tools to confront and challenge injustice will empower them to pursue their dreams and thrive in a world that too often seeks to marginalize and oppress them.

### Homophobia...

is a pervasive form of discrimination and prejudice that impacts the lives of 2SLGBTQ+ individuals, including Black girls and femmes who identify as femme, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender. Discussing homophobia can help black girls and femmes recognize and navigate the challenges and discrimination they may face due to their sexual orientation or gender identity (McCready, 2017). Having a space where individuals can openly talk about their experiences will promote visibility and those within the community to live authentically.

## Black History and Culture and/or Black 2SLGBTQ+ history...

Learning about Black people's achievements, struggles, and resilience throughout history provides Black girls and femmes with role models and inspiration to overcome obstacles in pursuit of their dreams (Dei, 1996). Teaching Black girls about Black history and culture is essential for empowering them to embrace their heritage, celebrate their identity, and contribute positively to their communities. Additionally, learning about the struggles, triumphs, and resilience of Black 2SLGBTQ+ people provides role models and inspiration for Black girls and femmes who may be exploring their own sexual orientation or gender identity. This awareness can help combat homophobia, transphobia, and discrimination by challenging stereotypes and promoting awareness of the unique challenges faced by 2SLGBTQ+ individuals of colour (McCready, 2015).
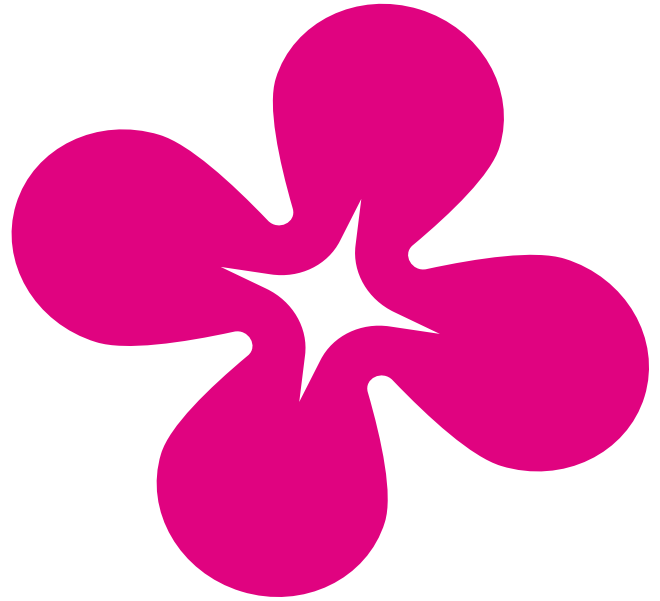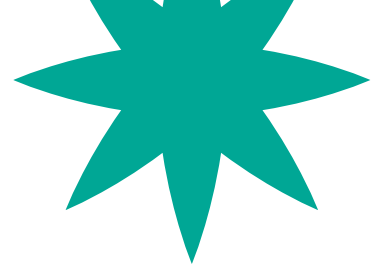
## THINGS TO CONSIDER AS A FACILITATOR

*Prepared by **Hannah Boadu**, this guide seeks to prepare facilitators to create dynamic and inclusive learning environments. This involves being adaptable to unforeseen circumstances while fostering equal participation and engagement among all participants.*

### Be Ready for Any Situation

It's common to have a lesson plan prepared for students, but it's equally crucial to stay adaptable to handle unexpected occurrences. It is essential to guide your group through the lesson and make it easy to engage with the topic prepared. Consider:

> *What will the lesson plan look like?*
> *How long is the session expected to last?*
> *What will the session space look like, such as seating arrangements (e.g. desks and chairs in a circle)?*
> *What materials and resources will you need for the session?*

### Create an Inclusive Environment

Ensuring that everyone in the session feels equally valued is essential. Tailoring the lesson plan to accommodate different learning styles and personality types can be as simple as incorporating relevant visuals or arranging seating in a way to promote participant interaction.

## Set Guidelines and Ground Rules

Establishing clear guidelines sets the tone for the session's attitude and participant behaviour. Engage the group in discussions about what will facilitate their learning experience the most. Collaboratively create a list of guidelines to follow, encouraging everyone to share their opinions. For example, If someone says to be "respectful," ask the group what respect looks like to them. This is also a good time to talk about phone use— to manage any distractions during the session.
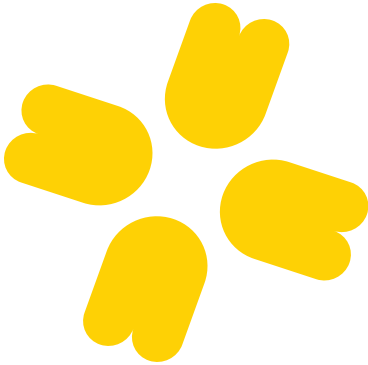
## Flex Your Active Listening Skills

Active listening involves fully engaging with the speaker using both verbal and non-verbal cues. Enhance your active listening skills by practicing techniques such as mirroring, paraphrasing, and tracking:

**Mirroring:** *Repeating back what was said, showing neutrality and building trust.*

**Paraphrasing:** *Shows that you've heard the speaker's thoughts; however, unlike mirroring, paraphrasing is when you use your own words, helping to clarify understanding.*
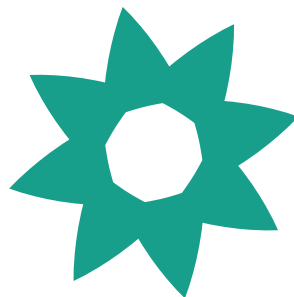
**Tracking:** *Keeping track of the various perspectives during discussions, aiding in maintaining focus and capturing key points.*

## TARGET  GROUPS,  SUGGESTED  TOPICS,  ACTIVITIES

| For Who? | What | Activity Info |
|---|---|---|
| **Black Girls & Femmes** | Friendships and relationship dynamics<br><br>Discrimination<br><br>Their school experiences as a Black girl/femme<br><br>Self-image (body positivity and neutrality)<br><br>Self-care | **Reflective Journaling →**<br>When discussing friendships and relationship dynamics, can use prompts (describing qualities of a good friendship, etc)<br><br>**Case Study →**<br>When discussing discrimination, can incorporate a case study to help connect with topic.<br><br>**Creative Brainstorming →**<br>For self-image/care and relationship dynamics, can do creative brainstorming session with post-it notes (jam board if online). |
| **Mixed / Biracial Girls & Femmes** | Their experiences as a Mixed / Biracial girl & femme<br><br>Discuss the feeling of external pressures to "choose" a side<br><br>History of Mixed / Biracial people in North America | **Creative Brainstorming →**<br>For their experiences as Mixed / Biracial girls & femmes, can do creative brainstorming session with post-it notes (jam board if online).<br><br>**Reflective Journaling →**<br>Exercise based on their self-image and care. |

| For Who? | What | Activity Info |
|---|---|---|
| **LGBTQ Girls & Femmes** | Discrimination and Homophobia<br><br>Their experiences as a Black person apart of the LGBTQ community<br><br>Talk about prominent Black LGBTQ figures | **Case Study →**<br>When discussing discrimination and homophobia. Follow up with solutions on how to handle the situation.<br><br>**Creative Brainstorming →**<br>When discussing their experiences as a Black LGBTQ person.<br><br>**Jigsaw Group →**<br>To research an LGTBQ figure, then teach the rest of the group about their findings. |

## SELF-IMAGE, RELATIONSHIP DYNAMICS

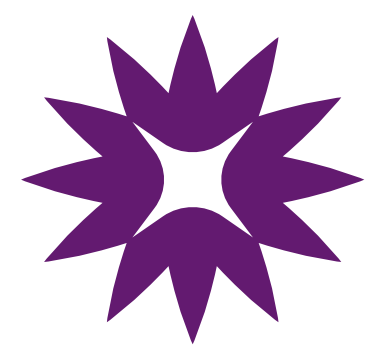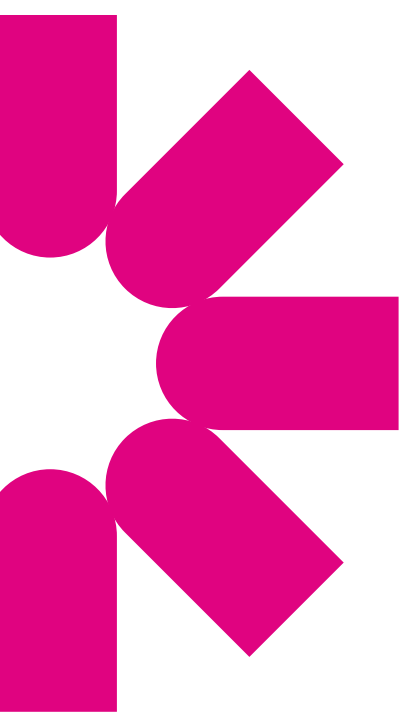| Topics | Questions | Activity Info |
|---|---|---|
| **Self Image →** **Body Positivity, Body Neutrality** | What does self-esteem mean?<br><br>What is body positivity?<br><br>Does anyone know what body neutrality refers to?<br><br>What are some positive things that can boost someone's self-esteem and body image?<br><br>What are some negative things that can lower someone's self-esteem and body image?<br><br>What do you do that helps how you view yourself? | **Creative Brainstorming or Jam Board →** Can ask what comes to mind in response to the selected answer/ phrase/ quote<br><br>**OR**<br><br>Can choose one of the questions and ask what comes to mind before answering the question. |
| **Relationship Dynamics**<br><br>**Four main types of relationship dynamics:**<br>**1. Family**<br>**2. Romantic**<br>**3. Friendships**<br>**4. Acquaintances** | Does anyone know what "relationship dynamic" means?<br><br>Do you feel like your parents understand you?<br><br>How many of you have a good relationship with your parents?<br><br>Do you feel like you can talk to your parents?<br><br>Does anyone know what it means to have "boundaries"?<br><br>Do you have any personal boundaries? If so, what are some of them?<br><br>How do you set boundaries? | **Creative Brainstorming →** Participants can choose one of the questions and ask what comes to mind. They can use sticky notes and post them on the board.<br><br>**Case Study →** Participants can ask how they would handle the situation. They can discuss healthy responses. |

## SELF-CARE, MIXED/BIRACIAL EXPERIENCE

| Topics | Questions | Activity Info |
|---|---|---|
| **Self Care** | What is self-care?<br><br>Why is it important to engage in self-care?<br><br>What activities or images come to mind when you think about self-care?<br><br>What feelings do you associate with self-care?<br><br>How do you engage in self-care? | **Creative Brainstorming →**<br>Can choose one of the questions and ask what comes to mind. They can use sticky notes and post them on the board.<br><br>**Case Study →**<br>Present different scenarios that may require a self-care response. Discuss healthy responses. |
| **Mixed / Biracial Experience** | How do you identify?<br><br>Do you know what code-switching means?<br><br>Do you ever feel like you have to switch between your racial identities?<br><br>What was the situation where you felt like you needed to switch? | **Creative Brainstorming →**<br>Participants can choose one of the questions and ask what comes to mind. They can use sticky notes and post them on the board.<br><br>**Discussion Groups →**<br>Split in groups, if it's a larger group - 10+. Discuss main take-aways. |

| Topics | Questions | Activity Info |
|---|---|---|
| Discrimination | What does discrimination mean?<br><br>What are the effects of discrimination?<br><br>Have you or someone you know ever been discriminated against?<br><br>Who should you tell when you experience it?<br><br>What are some healthy ways we can deal with discrimination?<br><br>What are some unhealthy ways to deal with it?<br><br>What are some ways we can respond when we experience discrimination? | **Case Study** →<br>Present different scenarios that may require a self-care response. Discuss healthy responses.<br><br>**Discussion** →<br>Ask how they would handle the situation. Discuss how we should respond to the problem. |

## HOMOPHOBIA, BLACK HISTORY / CULTURE

| Topics | Questions | Activity Info |
|---|---|---|
| **Homophobia** | What is homophobia?<br><br>What is internalized homophobia?<br><br>What are the effects of homophobia?<br><br>How do you respond if you have ever experienced homophobia?<br><br>What are some healthy ways we can cope with homophobia?<br><br>What are some ways we can respond to homophobia? | **Case Study →**<br>Present different scenarios that may require a self-care response. Discuss healthy responses.<br><br>**Discussion →**<br>Ask how they would handle the situation. Discuss how we should respond to the situation. |
| **Black History and Culture and/or Black LGBTQ History** | What prominent Black figures do you know?<br><br>What prominent Black LGBTQ figures do you know?<br><br>How do any of these figures inspire you (if at all)? | **Jigsaw Group →**<br>Split into smaller groups and have the students find and research a prominent Black and/or Black LGBTQ figure and present a short summary to the rest of the group.<br><br>**OR**<br><br>Prepare prominent figures for the groups to choose from to investigate:<br>  - Who is this person?<br>  - What did they achieve?<br>  - What can we learn from them? |

## MIXED / BIRACIAL EXPERIENCE AND HOMOPHOBIA

The topics "Mixed/Biracial Experience" and "Homophobia" were not facilitated during Phase II of programming. This was primarily due to the lack of appropriate P2G personnel who self-identified as such and could effectively lead these programs. Despite recognizing the importance of these topics, **it was deemed essential to prioritize the presence of facilitators who could authentically relate to and navigate the nuances of these identities and experiences**. While these specific topics were not facilitated during Phase II, the programs and activities were sourced from Phase I Findings, which subsequently indicated a pressing desire from participants to explore these topics.

However, the facilitation of the previously mentioned programs ensured that their facilitation was led by individuals who personally identified with them - granting the capacity to provide meaningful support.

Moving forward, this experience serves as a valuable reminder for other service providers and youth workers to carefully consider representation and expertise when designing and delivering programming, especially when addressing sensitive and nuanced topics related to identity and lived experiences. By prioritizing inclusivity and authenticity in facilitator selection, organizations can better meet the diverse needs of their participants and foster a more supportive environment.
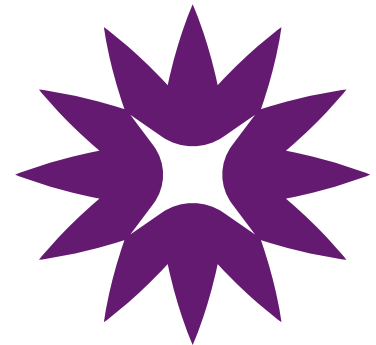
# PHASE II

# The Feedback

# Form

# PHASE II: The Feedback Form

1. **What did you like most about the program / workshop(s)?**

   _____

2. **What did you like least about the program / workshop(s)?**

   _____

3. **Which program / workshop topic(s) did you enjoy?** **(check all that apply)**
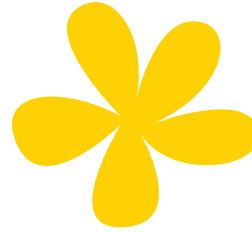   ☐ Self-Image / Body Positivity / Body Neutrality
   ☐ Relationship Dynamics
   ☐ Self-Care
   ☐ Discrimination
   ☐ Black History and Culture

4. **Please tell us why you chose this/these topic(s)?**

   _____

5. **What would you change about any of the program / workshop(s) you attended?**
   *\* Please be honest - we want to know how to best improve the program / workshop.*

   _____

## FEEDBACK FORM RESPONSES

| What did you like most about the program / workshop(s)? |
| --- |
| "snacks and mostly talking" |
| "I love that it teaches us that we should love our skin no matter what" |
| "Getting to talk to people" |
| "I liked when they taught me things about my hair they taught me that my hair has a hard time digesting in water very much" |
| "I liked the hair braiding, shea butter and the mirror one where we put hearts on the mirror" |
| "the activities" |

| What did you like least about the program / workshop(s)? |
| --- |
| "yelling into the mic" |
| "we don't get enough time to do the activity" |
| "when it's really loud to the point that we can't do anything" |
| "I love all of them" |
| "I loved all of the workshops" |
| "some of the people" |

| Which program / workshop topic(s) did you enjoy? (check all that apply) | Number of Student Respondents: |
| --- | --- |
| Self-image, Body Positivity, Body Neutrality | 2 |
| Relationship Dynamics | 1 |
| Self-care | 4 |
| Discrimination | 3 |
| Black History and Culture | 4 |

## Please tell us why you chose this/these topic(s)?

"why not ><"

"it connects with me the most"

"they are topics that interest me"

"I liked the hair one because it taught me stuff about my hair"

"I choose the black history/culture because I like learning more about my culture"

"because it was hands-on"

## What would you change about any of the program / workshop(s) you attended?

"NOTHING"

"I would change the activity a little bit to be more fun"

"We could start at 11:15 instead of 11:35"

"nothing"

"Absolutely nothing I'm being so honest I love it and I'm so thankful for the time and effort you girls put in for us"

"more hands-on thing less talking"

## FEEDBACK FORM ANALYSIS

We observed a positive reaction to the facilitated programs based on the feedback from responses. **Self-care**, **Discrimination**, and **Black history and culture emerged as the most popular topics**. This heightened interest can likely be attributed to these subjects' profound resonance with the lived experiences and identities of Black girls and femmes. Self-care programming addresses crucial aspects of their mental and emotional well-being, providing valuable tools for navigating daily life (Goff et al., 2014). Discussions on discrimination shed light on the challenges they may encounter due to systemic biases and societal prejudices, offering space for validation and support (Linton & McLean, 2017).

Moreover, delving into Black history and culture validates their heritage and highlights Black people's achievements in society, fostering a sense of pride and belonging. It is worth noting that within the educational system, instances of gender and racial discrimination manifest in various subtle and overt forms, often remaining unaddressed (Neeganagwedgin, 2013). Therefore, the opportunity to openly explore these topics within the program validates Black girls' voices and experiences and provides a platform for their empowerment. These responses reveal the need for more spaces for Black girls in the education system. By engaging in discussions that directly resonate with their realities, Black girls and femmes find assurance and recognition, affirming their identities and strengthening their sense of self-worth within a supportive and inclusive environment.

# Recommendations

1. **Increase access to supportive programming, resources and staff training tools for Black 2SLGBTQ+ youth throughout Ontario.**

   **7.5%** of respondents identify as a Black a girl/femme or non-binary person. From this group, notable responses on the Student Survey indicated feeling excluded and isolated from other Black girls/youth, homophobic Parents/Guardians or educational staff. They also indicated a need for 2SLGBTQ+ educational material that caters to Black femmes instead of White femmes by default. Notable respondents expressed a sense of division between their Blackness and femme-ness. This remains consistent with previous Toronto data which highlights that Black 2SLGBTQ+ youth reported decreased levels of enjoyment and feelings of belonging than all straight and non-racialized 2SLGBTQ+ students (Otchere, 2017).

2. **Create targeted programming for Biracial/Mixed girls and femmes across Ontario.**

   Black girls and femmes are not a monolithic group. This is particularly true for Biracial/Mixed respondents, who are also in the minority at only **10.5%** of respondents. Notable respondents shared anecdotal evidence relating to not fitting in with either Black or White students, to the point of questioning whether they qualified to participate in the Roots of A Black Girl study. This was especially true for respondents who wished to participate but felt they were too "White-passing" Mohtady (2023).

3. **Survey Black girls and femmes in schools across Ontario to determine what supportive resources (mental health, guidance counseling, Black Graduation Coaches, etc) they need to succeed.**

   As previously mentioned, **98%** of participants reported school as important to them and **95%** of participants reported feelings of overwhelm due to school work. Although **83%** of participants find it easy to locate supportive resources at school, only **49%** actively use these resources. This, alongside **50%** of participants reporting that their school does not ask them what they think before making changes demands more action by Ontario schools to inquire about resource satisfaction.

4. **Continue to educate non-Black students and staff on anti-racist practices and ally-ship.**

**77%** of participants reported that their race has affected their educational experience. Notable respondents referenced the negative impacts arising from the intersection of race and gender (Crenshaw, 1991). Particularly, Black girls described (1) being viewed as having to work harder than all other students, including Black males, (2) being unfairly reprimanded for similar infractions by White and other non-Black students, (3) having their level of intelligence undermined when demonstrating a preference for Academic over Applied courses (People for Education, 2020). Findings (1) and (2) align with scholarly research on the "adultification" (Carter Andrews et. al. 2019) of young Black women and girls, while (3) corroborates Carl James' finding that 39% of Black students were enrolled in Applied courses, the highest of their peers (Draaisma, 2017).

5. **Increase Black-focused curricula and the hiring of designated, Black- identifying staff and/or educational staff.**

Although **89%** of participants reported learning about non-White cultures at school, **96%** reported a desire to learn more about Black cultures at school. Notable respondents from schools already delivering Black-focused curricula expressed a desire to preserve and grow in the knowledge of their cultural heritage. They also expressed a need for all students to be educated towards better understanding and ally-ship. With the Black Graduation Coach program (Hristova, 2020) underway, it is yet to be seen how this may positively impact school climates across Ontario, where Black girls and femmes are the minority.

6. **Create a "Community Conversation Circle" - a Black support group for Black girls/femmes and Black boys to (re)connect.**

In revisiting the discussion on Black Peers (p.) participants commonly observed a lack of unity within the Black community at large - in comparison to non-Black communities. Unfortunately, social elements of misogynoir (Bailey, 2008) observed in how young, Black boys mistreat Black girls, plant seeds for hyper- independence within Black girls, exposing Black girls to a cultural pattern of rejection by Black boys. This perpetuates an ongoing cycle of disjointedness among members of the Black community.
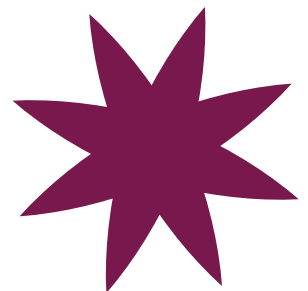
Therefore, an opportunity for Black girls/femmes and Black boys to connect in a culturally safe environment would support a positive, community gathering of Black youth. To preserve the unity of the Black community, it is important to welcome Black boys to the discussion via invitation - rather than obligating boys to attend against their own will. This encourages voluntary attendance and would support transparent conversations between Black girls and Black boys.

7. **Train Ontario School Board staff on the "Prejudice Habit Model" and follow up with training on the "Prejudice Habit-Breaking Intervention".**

On average, **77% of participants say their race has affected their educational experience** - with Ottawa, Windsor-Essex, and Waterloo respondents reporting higher than average at **100%**, **100%**, and **87%** respectively. Peel, Toronto, Halton and Durham are lower than average at **71%**, **69%**, **61%**, and **53%** respectively. Thus, it is worth reviewing how implicit bias (Staats et. al. 2015) may be mitigated moving forward.

The **Prejudice Habit Model** (Devine et. al, 2017) perceives bias as an unconscious mental habit that can be broken and offers strategies aimed at reducing its occurrence (Devine et. al., 2017). The Prejudice Habit Model serves as the foundation for the **Prejudice Habit-Breaking Intervention** (Forscher et. al. 2017), a specific type of implicit bis training developed by Patricia Devine and her colleagues. The current research literature on Anti-Bias Training Programs, an intervention commonly used by the Ontario government (Gray et. al, 2016), reveals that generic, anti-bias training programs attempting to increase awareness and mitigate the effects of implicit bias are **inadequate in problematizing the persistence of bias** in and of itself.

We found that most programs are neither based on evidence nor thoroughly assessed in experimental trials (Moss-Racusin et al., 2014; Paluck and Green, 2009). Additionally, we found that **unconscious bias training programs have little long-term effect on discriminatory behaviour**. An analysis conducted by Katerina Bezrukova and her colleagues (2016) regarding the impact of diversity training drawn from over 200 studies demonstrated that the effects of anti-bias training lasted only in the short term. The analysis failed to reveal any evidence of long-term impacts resulting from anti-bias training, or the mitigation of implicit bias.

In addition, existing literature revealed that unconscious bias training could have unintended consequences; this includes relaying the message that biases cannot be controlled, which could trigger more instances of discrimination as individuals perceive bias as unavoidable (Forscher, 2019). Conclusively, these training programs may also reinforce and harden stereotypical beliefs and attitudes about Black girls, creating unconscious forms of resistance manifesting as defensiveness and increased degrees of racial prejudice (Kowal et al. 2013; Kulik et al. 2000).

Based on the aforementioned, anti-bias literature, the Prejudice Habit-Breaking Intervention is the only anti-bias training experimentally shown to result in long- term changes in unconscious bias and was specifically developed to induce long- lasting changes in behavior. The impacts of this initiative have been shown to last a minimum of two years (Devine et al. 2012; Forscher (2017). Thus, the Prejudice Habit-Breaking Intervention and training provides various strategies to mitigate the incidence of implicit bias over a long period of time (Forscher et al. 2017). The addition of helpful strategies for habit-breakers is particularly noteworthy as a study conducted by the Harvard Business Review on 500 working adults from various US organizations found that only 10% of training programs gave participants strategies to lessen bias (Gino and Coffman 2021).

8. **Increase Black-focused curricula and the hiring of designated, Black- identifying staff and/or educational staff.**

Although **89%** of participants reported learning about non-White cultures at school, **96%** reported a desire to learn more about Black cultures at school. Notable respondents from schools already delivering Black-focused curricula expressed a desire to preserve and grow in the knowledge of their cultural heritage. They also expressed a need for all students to be educated towards better understanding and ally-ship. With the Black Graduation Coach program (Hristova, 2020) underway, it is yet to be seen how this may positively impact school climates across Ontario, where Black girls and femmes are the minority.

**9. Implement Power to Girls' programming model in Ontario schools with a considerable Black female population.**

As a result of Phase II programming, we found that "**Self-care**", "**Discrimination**", and **Black History and Culture** were the most popular topics. Thus, it is clear that such programs resonate with participants - especially as it concerns mental health and the sense of Black pride that numerous Black girls/femmes continuously grapple with. Implementing such programs and activities highly engage participants and helps to ameliorate negative, self-talk within the minds of Black girls/femmes across Ontario.

# Conclusion and Next Steps

## Wrapping Up Phase I and Phase II

Overall, the Roots of A Black Girl study concluded Phase I and II in its endeavor to explore qualitative educational experiences of Black girls/femmes ages 12-17. This project may be considered an entryway to similar projects - unpacking the educational experience of Black girls/femmes, one research project at a time.

## Extending Phase II across Ontario

As Phase II sought to trial programmatic interventions gleaned from Phase I findings, capturing rural experiences for Phase I supports the desire to invite participants from regions representative of Ontario to trial new programs. Thus, trial participants would be inclusive of urban, suburban, and rural region types. Trialling programs with groups of participants from diverse region types would highlight their similar or differing needs concerning each program trialled and tested.

## Dissemination

Power to Girls will publicly share the Final Report, with peers, community organizations, youth and social workers, and other educational stakeholders concerned with the welfare and preservation of Black girls and femmes in Ontario. Equally so, the Report will also be shared with all participants, including participating School Boards, Parents/Guardians, and the broader educational community.
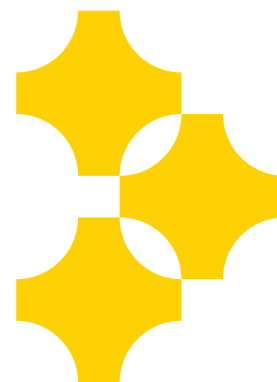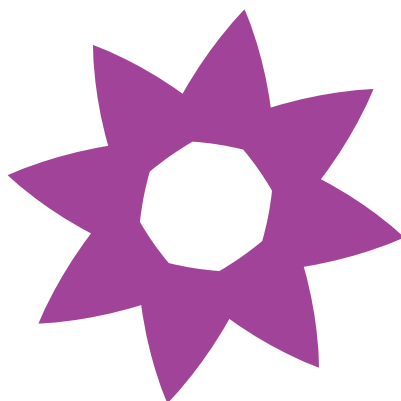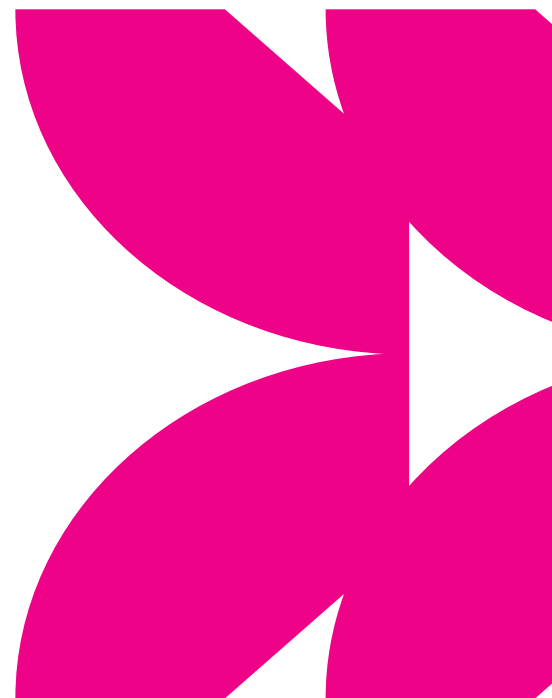
# AFTERWORD

In concluding this groundbreaking research and comprehensive report on the experiences of Black and marginalized girls within the Ontario educational system, I am filled with a profound sense of pride and gratitude. This research project marks a significant milestone in our journey at Power to Girls Foundation, a journey deeply rooted in my own experiences navigating the educational system as an immigrant.

When I first arrived in Canada, I encountered numerous challenges and barriers that many black and marginalized girls continue to face today. It was through these experiences that I was inspired to establish Power to Girls Foundation. My vision was to create a safe and empowering environment where girls could thrive, regardless of their background or circumstances. I wanted to ensure that no girl would feel isolated or unheard, as I once did.

Today, I am proud to say that Power to Girls has grown beyond my initial vision as we share the findings of Ontario's first research highlighting the experiences of black and marginalized girls. This report serves as a call to action highlighting both the challenges and the resilience that young girls across Ontario face.

By shedding light on the unique challenges faced by Black and marginalized girls, we have taken a crucial step towards fostering a more inclusive and equitable educational system.

However, our work does not end here. We remain steadfast in our commitment to amplifying the voices of Black and marginalized girls; through our continued efforts and programming, we will ensure that these voices are not only heard but also valued and acted upon.

We will persist in advocating for policies and practices that promote equality and inclusion, and we will continue to empower the next generation of leaders. Together, we can create a world where every girl has the opportunity to reach her full potential.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the Women and Gender Equality Canada for believing in our work and making this research possible through funding. To our community partners, Youth Rex, Community Research Ethics Office, our Advisory Board, Teachers, Principals, and Stakeholders we thank you for your support in making this project possible. To the entire research team, facilitators and ambassadors
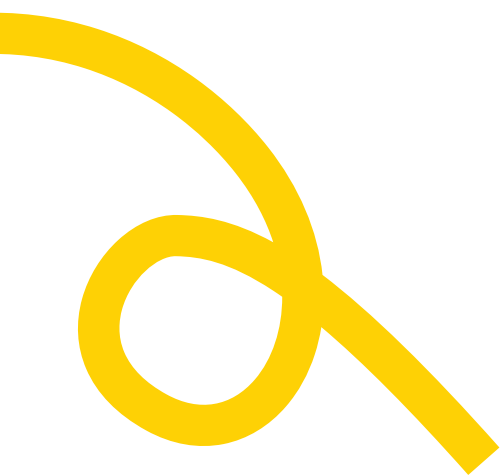
thank you for your support and partnership in this vital work. And to the amazing black and femme girls who are constantly told you can't make it; this is for you. Thank you for sharing your experiences with us and for trusting us to amplify your voices further. We will continue to create safer spaces for you. You are our Reason.
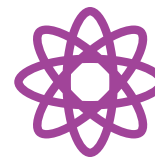
Together we move forward with a renewed determination to make a lasting difference in the lives of Black and marginalized girls in Ontario and beyond. Their Journeys are just beginning.

Sincerely,

*Aisha Addo*

Director of Programs and Founder
**Power to Girls Foundation**
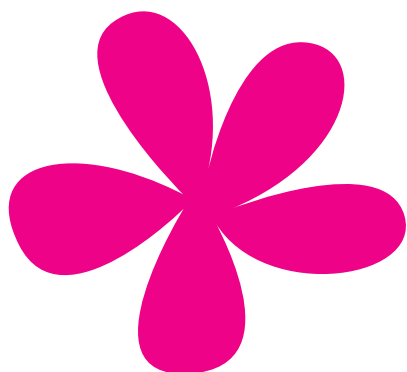
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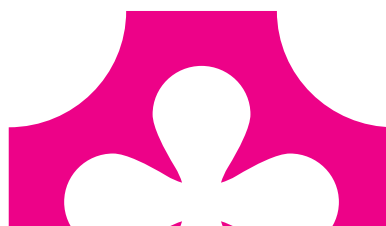
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