Beyond the Dress Code: An Exploration of Dress Code Policies and the Disproportionate Treatment of Black Girls at Midwest High School

Jendayi Mbalia*
Beloit College

Amari Balton
Midwest High School

Leila Wright
Midwest High School

Historically, Black females have been dehumanized by the policing, hyper-sexualization, and fetishizing of their bodies. This dismissal of their humanness is rooted in enslavement and is perpetuated in society at large, the media, and in schools today. As a result, the bodies of Black girls are under constant gaze and scrutiny. This directly connects to the policing of what they wear and results in them being disproportionately dress coded in their learning spaces. This paper, written in dialogue, shares the insight of two Black, female students, and fifteen other Black female students whom they interviewed at Midwest High School as it relates to the disproportionate treatment of Black girls at their school.

Keywords: Black girls, participatory action research, school discipline, girlhood studies, dress codes

"At such a critical time when Black girls and young women are being policed and pushed out of school, being assaulted and killed at the hands of White vigilantes and police officers, threatened by mass incarceration, neighborhood and media violence, what would be the role of the Black girl researcher"? (Evans-Winters, 2019, p. 75)

Historically, the bodies of Black females have been policed, hypersexualized, and fetishized. Rooted in the enslavement of African females, the dismissal of their humanness provided justification for European colonizers to abuse them physically and sexually. This dehumanizing practice directly impacts the lives, bodies, and spirits of Black girls. Too often, in the past as well as today, Black girls are seen as more adult, in need of less nurturing, and more

sexual than their White, female counterparts. Recently, conversations have sparked around the nation highlighting the disproportionate negative treatment of Black girls specifically in their learning spaces. As a result of this treatment, which is often inclusive of harsher punishments, curricular neglect, and spirit-murdering (Love, 2016), Black girls are pushed out of schools via suspensions and expulsions at a higher rate than White girls (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Morris, 2018).

In many cases, punitive measures taken against Black girls are a direct result of their hyper-sexualization and adultification. That is, because of the skewed perception of their needs and innocence, they face harsher punishments for lesser crimes (Crenshaw et al., 2015, Morris, 2018). This disproportionate treatment is also prevalent when exploring the issue of dress code policies and Black girls being "dress coded." Black girls here in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, one of the nation's most segregated cities, are not excluded from this unfair treatment. This paper explores the experiences of Black girls and dress code policies at a high school in Milwaukee, Wisconsin through the lens of two Black girls, Amari and Leila.

Our Theoretical Lens: An Intersectional Approach

Amari and Leila had firsthand knowledge of the aforementioned disproportionate treatment too often experienced by Black girls. This maltreatment, neglect, and oppression was identified in their own learning spaces. When the three of us met, we decided to use intersectionality as a lens through which they would investigate this disproportionate treatment of Black girls at their school. Intersectionality, coined by Kimberle Crenshaw, is a theoretical framework or "lens" that illuminates the intersection of identities and the subsequent oppression and discrimination experienced by those who exist at those intersections. Crenshaw (1989) stated that, "Black women's experiences are much broader than the general categories that discrimination discourse provides. Yet the continued insistence that Black women's demands and needs be filtered through categorical analyses that completely obscure their experiences guarantees that their needs will seldom be addressed" (p. 150). While Crenshaw (1989) speaks specifically about Black women, these experiences, as noted earlier, are also applicable to Black girls. Scholars are using intersectionality in similar ways as Crenshaw (1989; 1991) maps out—to unearth the unfair practices used on and against Black women and girls and the necessity of an intersectional lens to call them out.

Evans-Winters & Esposito (2010) discuss how Black girls are often forcibly overlooked, underappreciated, and devalued in schools because of their unique intersecting identities as Black and female. They state that "because of racism, sexism, and class oppression in the U.S., Black girls are in multiple jeopardy or race, class, and gender exclusion in mainstream educational institutions (p. 13). Evans-Winters & Esposito (2010) call for a critical race feminist lens by which Black girls' academic experiences can be reflective and inclusive of their unique lived experiences. Morris (2015) extends this discussion by highlighting how this multiple jeopardy, as addressed by Evans-Winters & Esposito (2010), works to push Black girls out of schools. In fact, Morris' (2015) work is invaluable in connecting the intersection of identities amongst Black girls in schools in relation to their "push out." She chronicles events in K-12 schools that speak directly to injustices

faced by Black girls that are rooted in a distorted view of who they are. Additionally, she addresses the policing of Black girls and how that policing interrupts and taints their academic experiences. The students' narratives obtained by Morris (2015) point to unfair systems in K-12 schools that contribute to "poor academic and behavioral performances" (p. 195).

Other scholars also recognize the importance of acknowledging the intersecting/interlocking identities that continue to oppress, marginalize, and devalue Black women and girls. The Black Girls Literacy Collective, consisting of English scholars Muhammad, Price-Dennis, Haddix, Womack, and McArthur, address the neglect of Black girls in English Language Arts (ELA) classrooms and curriculum. They aim to highlight the importance of creating a curriculum centered on the unique experiences of Black girls if the academic system hopes to effectively educate them. Morris (2007) addresses the intersecting identities of Black girls in relation to femininity and how they are viewed in the classroom. He also calls out schools for perpetuating the cycle of injustice by "reproducing inequality in these areas" (p. 3). Aligning with Edward Morris's (2007) work highlighting schools' inability to address the needs of Black girls and their unique identities, Sutherland (2005) speaks to the need for an intersectional lens in her work with Black, female high school students. Sutherland (2005) "explored the identity representation and construction" (p. 365) of the girls she worked with as they read *The Bluest Eye*. In this study, Sutherland's (2005) participants explored the text and found representations of themselves and their lives. The text and the conversations that followed helped participants to identify intersecting identities and the oppression that is associated with them. Brown (2013) also makes space for a culturally relevant curriculum though not through text. She created a performance group for Black girls, SOLHOT, and recognizes the importance of making space for "Black" girls whose voices are often left unheard. Aligning with Crenshaw's structural and political intersectionality discussion, Brown (2013) states that SOLHOT "is about a way of thinking about the world that foregrounds the full humanity of Black girlhood, rather than colluding with institutions, interpersonal interactions, and larger social and political systems that thrive on neglecting Black girls and depend on their disposability" (p. 6).

All of these scholars recognize the importance of acknowledging the intersecting/interlocking identities that continue to oppress, marginalize, and devalue Black women and girls. What is threaded throughout their works is the need for the continual use of intersectionality since the perpetuation of multiple forms of oppression are omnipresent for Black women and girls. This is especially so in the academic institution where the maltreatment of Black girls is perpetuated. By engaging Black girls in intersectional research that centers their ways of knowing and learning and produces knowledge to combat this treatment, their lives are prioritized. Thus, it is imperative that Black girls be afforded the opportunity to conduct action-based research in an effort to mediate the maltreatment, hypersexualization, adultification, and discrimination often experienced due to their intersecting identities.

Our Methodology: YPAR 4 Us!

Amari and Leila participated in an eight-week Youth Participatory Action Research project (YPAR): **YPAR 4 US!** centered on the identities and needs of Black girls. According to The University of California, Berkeley, YPAR "is an innovative approach to positive youth and community development based in social justice principles in which young people are trained to conduct systematic research to improve their lives, their communities, and the institutions intended to serve them" (YPAR Hub, n.d.). Furthermore, YPAR that is rooted in culturally sustaining pedagogical practices that can provide opportunities for youth of color who are too often placed at the margins, to explore social justice issues and impact curriculum and policies at their schools and in their communities (Johnston-Goodstar, 2013; Walsh, 2018). While traditional YPAR practices infused with culturally sustaining pedagogy are important, they might not fully consider the intersecting identities of Black girls. If not, YPAR, much like curriculum and schools, can then neglect the needs of Black girls. Thus, scholars seeking to support the unique identities of Black girls, by encouraging them to explore issues specific to their intersectional experiences, should engage in Black Girl Youth Participatory Action Research (*BG*YPAR**).**

Black Girl Youth Participatory Action Research *(BGYPAR*) builds upon 'traditional' youth participatory action research (YPAR) by centering the identities, experiences, and voices of Black girls. It is rooted in intersectional tenets in that it "acknowledges and affirms the knowledge productions of BIPOC" (Esposito & Evans-Winters, p. 21, 2022), particularly focusing on creating and sustaining spaces of action, research, and resistance for Black girls. In order to authentically engage Black girls in *BGYPAR,* while also resisting western, Eurocentric research practices that position scholars in places of power and participants as lesser than, *BGYPAR* must be centered on the identities of those who possess the knowledge: Black girls. In **YPAR 4 US!**, we developed tenets of *BG*YPAR by a) centering the voices and experiences of Black girls and b) ensuring that Black girls were co-researchers, authors, and scholars. Thus, I resisted the role of a "traditional researcher" in that I did not operate as *the* storyteller. Rather, I supported Amari and Leila in writing *their* stories in a way that connected foundational scholarship to their lived experiences. We worked collaboratively so that our process did not center me as a "traditional researcher" or reflect Eurocentric research norms that center research *on* Black girls and not *with* Black girls (Heron & Reason, 2006).

Our Analyses: Unearthing the Unfair Treatment of Black Girls

Over the course of eight weeks, Amari and Leila engaged in critical conversations around issues important to Black girls at Midwest High School. After much deliberation and analysis, they decided to focus their efforts on dress code policies. Amari and Leila followed the YPAR process, composed semi-structured interview questions, and interviewed fifteen students who identified as Black and female (see Appendix A). While collecting data, Amari and Leila reviewed interviewee's responses with them, checking for authenticity of voice and ensuring that participants' true feelings were captured (Esposito and Evans-Winters, 2022). After careful coding

and thematic analysis, their findings revealed that Black girls were hypersexualized, disproportionately dress coded, and silenced. Not surprisingly, data also revealed that these issues stem from a lack of intersectional understanding from staff.

Our Findings: Beyond the Dress Code

Intersectional qualitative research mandates that participants' voices be centered and that they be respected as experts and authors of their own narratives (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2022). Thus, BGYPAR must adhere to those tenets by making space for Black girls to share their stories, findings, and solutions in ways that place their identities at the fore. The following dialogue details the findings from fifteen semi-structured interviews and includes the thoughts and concerns of Black girls at Midwest High School. While scholarly findings are laced throughout the narrative (and serve as an important foundation for this work), Amari and Leila's voices are intentionally illuminated to further acknowledge their roles as experts in the field of Black girlhood *beyond the dress code*. This creative writing approach mirrors that of other scholars whose work centers the needs of youth of color while engaging in critical, self-reflective, and transactional dialogue (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2018; Lyiscott, 2017; Muhammad & Gonzalez, 2016).

Educate Yourself

"This issue can be controlled by holding diversity meetings for teachers and to educate them on black issues."

Ms. J: There has been much discussion on the lack of cultural awareness possessed by educators and the resulting need for culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogical practices in the classroom (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris & Alim, 2017). While extremely important in laying the foundation for educational change for Black and Brown students, these frameworks do not always account for the unique forms of oppression experienced by Black girls due to their intersecting identities. An intersectional lens, however, can illuminate how race, gender, class, and other identities compound to create additional discrimination (Crenshaw, 1989). Issues such as hyper-sexualization and adultification can be corrected if the time is taken to highlight how those misperceptions are in fact racialized, gendered, and classed (Blake & Epstein, 2019). Without this understanding, teachers, administration, and staff are more likely to punish Black girls simply for *being* Black girls (Epstein et al., 2017). Please share your thoughts on this. What, if any, issues arose from those interviewed about staff? How, if at all, did girls report issues with staff as a reason for being dress coded? How might intersectionality inform decisions made by staff?

Amari: When I interviewed girls, they reported feeling like they had no one to talk to or present issues to. I think this happens because when speaking to White teachers a safe space is not created. To me, the girls I interviewed made it seem as though a lack of female teachers played a part in being dress coded. I think that this happens because it's not only a race thing, it's gender as well.

Male teachers have different perceptions of our bodies. Oftentimes, males do not get dress coded as much as girls. If teachers understood that for Black girls, we get dress coded because we are both female and Black, that would create more equity and community amongst everyone.

Leila: All of the girls that I interviewed reported issues with staff as a reason for being dress coded. Like Amari said, this is because there is no safe space. Intersectionality might help teachers to finally realize the challenges that we [Black girls] have to face. They might respect us more.

"Jezebel"

"I've heard many stories of my peers being oversexualized by male teachers and it makes me uncomfortable to hear."

Ms. J: Hyper-sexualization refers to a person being treated or depicted as a sexual object. Historically, the bodies of Black females have been hypersexualized. When exploring the historical roots of Black women's' hyper-sexualization, Holmes (2016) states:

> The narrative of New World imperialism was eroticized by rhetoric that sexualized the imperialist practices of European colonizers. Documentation of the British conquest is riddled with language that suggests the sexual nature of the land and of its discovery… This patriarchal narrative of imperialization depicts the New World through rhetoric normally ascribed to women, suggesting the land's passive and submissive nature, awaiting the conquest of men. This romanticization was used to validate the conquest of the land itself, precluding the sexualization of the women made victim by these imperialist mindsets. The feminization and sexualization of the European imperialist narrative encouraged the sexual exploitation of black women who were perceived as byproducts of manifest destiny (p. 1).

The hyper-sexualization of Black women was a way for colonizers to explain and justify the physical and sexual abuse endured by enslaved, African females. Holmes (2016) goes on to state that Thomas Jefferson "suggests the hyper-sexualized nature of the black woman, not discriminating in her choices of sexual partners. His depiction of black women as having an unlimited and undiscriminating sexual capacity paved the way for a rape culture within the framework of American slavery" (p. 2). Loft (2020) furthers the discussion of the hyper-sexualization of Black females by highlighting its continuation post enslavement. Loft (2020) states that, "The hyper-sexualization of the Black female body during slavery led directly to one of earliest stereotypes of Black women in the United States, the "Jezebel" stereotype" (p. 6). While the Jezebel stereotype might not overtly exist today, the viewing of Black and/or African women as hypersexual beings persists. In a study exploring whether Black women are sexualized more frequently than White females, Anderson et al. (2018) found that Black women were oversexualized more frequently than White women and that their oversexualization is directly connected to the Jezebel stereotype. Their results suggest the following:

> …White participants visually objectify Black women to a greater degree than White women and that this effect is particularly pronounced under conditions of sexualization.

Participants spent significantly longer focusing on the bodies of Black women when sexualized, and in particular fixated more often on the sexualized body regions (e.g., the hips/waist and chest) relative to White sexualized women. This is consistent with the Jezebel stereo- type, demonstrating that the portrayal of Black women in sexualized ways contributes to their objectification to a greater degree than White women (p. 467).

While the hyper-sexualization of Black women persists, it does not end with *them* alone. In fact, this view of the Black, female body can directly impact how Black girls are seen, treated, and valued (Curtis et al., 2022; Epstein et al., 2017). How do you both define and understand the hyper-sexualization of Black girls? As you interviewed girls, what, if anything, did you learn about how they are sexualized?

Leila: Hyper-sexualization is looking at our bodies based on what you hear. It's also judging us based on our bodies versus trying to understand why our bodies look the way they do in the clothes that we wear. When I talked to girls, they shared that certain teachers stare at their bodies and inappropriately touch them before and while they're being dress coded.

Amari: To me, it's a deep-rooted issue that is pushed upon Black females, especially at young ages. It's a disregard of the character of that person. As Lee mentioned, it's a judgment of their outer appearance. It is like condensing our entire beings into a stereotype. They shared that in general, different body shapes are judged differently.

On Being Coded: Differential Treatment for Black Girls

"I feel it's unfair to judge people's bodies when they can't control their shape."

Ms. J: The National Women's Law Center conducted a study on dress code policies as they relate to Black girls in Washington D.C. Findings from their report revealed the following:

Black girls in District of Columbia schools, like girls across the country, miss out on crucial class time simply because of the clothes they wear or the style of their hair or makeup. Again and again, they are suspended for tight pants, sent to the office for shoes that aren't quite the right color, and told they must "cover up" before they can learn. Strict dress, uniform, and grooming codes do nothing to protect girls or their classmates' learning. Rather, these codes needlessly interrupt their education (p. 1).

When compared to their White counterparts, Black girls are dress coded at much higher rates due the hyper-sexualization and adultification of their bodies and beings. As a result of this differential and unfair treatment, Black girls are often pushed out of the classrooms via referrals and can experience learning loss (Knipp & Stevenson, 2022). In other words, Black girls are missing out on pertinent academic and social-emotional experiences simply due to their intersecting identities and the associated misperceptions. How, if at all, did Black girls report receiving differential treatment as it relates to dress code policies? What, if any, connections were made between their bodies and their punishment?

Amari: A lot of the girls that I interviewed stated that White girls can wear whatever they like…like crop tops and leggings. When Black girls wear that, it seems more risqué and is sexualized. While Black girls get in trouble for wearing those things, White girls experience no consequences. If bigger Black girls had more curves, they are judged more harshly. It made them feel uncomfortable. That connects to not feeling comfortable within yourself when other people are judging you in that way.

Leila: They said that they were held to a lower standard than White girls when it came to respect but held to a higher standard when it came to dress codes. They said that because of their bodies, how they were punished, and what they were punished for, it created insecurities about their bodies and things that they could not control.

Silent, yet Powerful

"I feel like I can't do anything because anytime one of us does, they choose not to listen."

Ms. J: Leila, that last statement reminds me of the narratives of many Black girls who have felt unseen and unheard. Historically, the negative experiences of Black women and girls have largely been ignored. As a remedy, Crenshaw (1989; 1991) coined and encouraged the use of an intersectional framework to make the experiences of Black women and girls visible. Yet and still, complaints put forth by Black women and girls continue to go unheard, unbelieved, and unchecked. According to Epstein et al. (2017), this invisibility experienced by Black females can be documented in the media, in schools, and society at large. It is founded in the belief that Black girls require less nurturing, less care, and less attention. This neglect renders Black women and girls invisible and silent. Amari and Leila, in what ways, if any, did Black girls report feeling silenced or voiceless? Why do you think they feel that way? Why is it important to make space for our sisters' voices?

Amari: I witnessed it myself more than they said. Oftentimes, when I would ask a question, I would get one-word answers without many details. It seems as if they were scared to say something because when you're told from a young age that your voice doesn't matter and nothing can be done, regardless of whether you say something or not, you're conditioned to be quiet. It's internalized. In a community like Midwest High School that claims to be inclusive and there for their students, they should consider students' wellbeing. Regardless of if we are young, or students, we still have a right to be heard.

Leila: They said that because of past situations with the board and administration choosing not to do anything about the serious issues that were happening, they felt that it was not a priority since things hadn't been done before. They also connected it to race saying that because they were Black and female, they are at the bottom of their priority list. This also made them feel silenced. Got your phone to handle, got your dress code to handle, got your rules to handle, but when it comes to serious issues about dress codes, you choose not to handle it. Our voices are powerful. If they actually chose to listen, get to know us, learn about us, then the repercussions wouldn't be so high, and we wouldn't be so disrespected.

Amari: I like how Lee stated that it feels as though rules are more valuable than students. We feel constrained to a standard. Us, Black girls, as people are disregarded as long as we are doing what they say.

Change Matches Change

"I believe there should be a fair dress code or no dress code at all. Administrators should work to treat all women of Midwest High School the same."

Ms J: I do not believe that the Black girls here at Midwest High School are the only ones feeling that way, Amari. Unfortunately, this is happening nationwide. The National Women's Law Center composed two reports on dress code policies as they relate to Black girls. The first report, "Dress Coded: Black Girls, Bodies and Bias in D.C. Schools," analyzed the issue of Black girls being disproportionately dress coded. Findings revealed that Black girls in many of the schools evaluated were disproportionately targeted. The second report, "Dress Coded II: Protest, Progress, and Power in D.C. Schools" reviews findings from the first report, highlights the work that has been done thus far, and notes the work yet to be done. That work is being done by those most impacted: Black girls. The authors state:

> Fixing harsh and discriminatory dress code policies is not a job for legislators alone. In fact, many of the most successful changemakers on this issue are not elected officials. They are the people most impacted by harmful dress codes: students, parents, teachers, and school staff…Black girls in Washington, D.C., aren't waiting for schools or district leaders to address dress code disparities; they're creating the change themselves. Across D.C.—on top of schoolwork, social lives, family responsibilities, and planning for the future—girls have launched campaigns, organized protests, and led public education projects to push their schools to rethink harsh and discriminatory dress codes" (p. 12).

After careful analysis of the data received, what solutions were put forth by the girls that you interviewed? What solutions, if any, do you wish to see actualized? What, if any, feedback do you expect to receive from the administrative team?

Amari: They suggested that a) we create our own board of young, Black women that understand our issues and b) review teachers not just based on their educational achievements, but also how they view people. I want to see both of those happen. This would create diversity at Midwest High School and allow young, Black women to feel something that they're not used to, like they matter. It would also break the barrier between students and staff. If teachers were forced to understand us, that would create more unity. Ultimately, in a school, that should be the main goal. Most of all, I hope that they actively listen and use the information that we present throughout their daily lives. Consider it always and not disregard it. Don't give false hope by making it seem like they care, and they really don't. I would hope that they actively listen and consider the wellbeing of all students at Midwest High School.

Leila: I agree with you Amari, but I don't want them to feel forced. I want them to *want* to be here. They should be here for us, talk to us, respect us, and get to know us. Feeling safe and secure around teachers and staff shouldn't be a force.

Amari: When I said forced, I didn't want to force them. I want it laid down that participation in accepting students is not optional. I've gotten to a point where I've lost hope. In a perfect world, they would want to do things. But racism is so deeply ingrained in them, so it's kind of hard to remove biases that have been in place for generations and embedded in them as people. That's why it's important to work together to remove those biases.

Lee: Yeah. It's kind of hard to have hope. A lot of girls that I talked to said that they wanted a meeting with multiple people to talk to the board and administration to devise a plan to fix all of these issues so that they no longer exist. I want to see this happen, but I also want to make sure that the administration matches their words to their actions. Just change honestly. I want to see more Black females at Midwest High School respected, loved, and feeling as though they have a secure place that they can go and talk to somebody. I want to see the administration do their part, but in school, I want to see the actual change happen. I want to see the students comfortable enough to talk to people. This will only happen if the board really does something. *Change matches change*.

Ms. J: Change matches change. You both are instrumental in ensuring that change happens at Midwest High School. I appreciate the two of you so very much. It is my hope that the Midwest High School administrative team hears, digests, and enacts the solutions shared here today. I am immensely proud of you both for not only creating change here, but for redefining the way that research and scholarship have historically been produced. *Snaps*

Our Implications: Supporting Black Girls Beyond the Dress Code

The above discussion with Amari and Leila adds to the existing literature on the disproportionate treatment experienced by Black girls (Epstein et al., 2017; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Morris, 2007; Morris, 2016; Paul & Araneo, 2019). The experiences of fifteen Black girls at Midwest High School parallel those of Black girls across the nation who also experience academic neglect, adultification, and hypersexualization. While these findings further substantiate the scholarly claims produced by experts in the field of Black girlhood, this work is unique in that it was produced by Black girls on behalf of Black girls. In other words, Black girls operated as researchers, participants, and problem-solvers. This work moves beyond the dress code disproportionality experienced via dress codes by Black girls who exist at the intersection of Black and female; it illuminates the need for BGYPAR so that Black girls' voices are no longer silenced, their bodies are no longer hypersexualized, their actions cease to be adultified, and they begin to be viewed in stark contradiction to present misinformed perceptions. The significance of this work is that it documents the need for Black girls to have *more* nurturing, *more* support, *more* care and *more* love.

Conclusion

Using BGYPAR, Amari and Leila were able to identify, analyze, and propose solutions to an issue that is prevalent for Black girls: dress codes. From feeling hypersexualized to voiceless, fifteen Black girls helped to shed light on the disproportionate treatment of Black girls at Midwest High School. However, Black girls there do not exist in a silo; this disproportionate treatment impacts Black girls nationwide (Epstein et al., 2017).

Thus, this work has implications for not only Black girls, but educators, social workers, school counselors, administrators, and others who may work directly or indirectly with Black girls across the nation. First, when working with, supporting, and educating Black girls, one must possess knowledge of intersectionality and its relevance to understanding the lived experiences of Black girls. To understand the ways in which Black girls' intersecting identities often overlap to cause additional discrimination is an imperative first step in remedying issues causing harm to Black girls (Blake & Epstein, 2019). Secondly, Black girls must be afforded opportunities to engage in work that not only positions them as experts, but also provides space for action-based research necessary for the production of knowledge, change, and empowerment. BGYPAR can serve as this opportunity as it centers the voices and experiences of Black girls. Creating and sustaining spaces for Black girls to engage in BGYPAR not only positions them as researchers and scholars, but affords them the opportunity to explore and resolve issues that are unique to *them*. This can help to move *beyond the dress code* and create liberatory spaces for Black girls. We deserve it.

References

Anderson, J, Holland, E., Heldreth, C., & Johnson, S. (2018). Revisiting the Jezebel Stereotype: The Impact of Target Race on Sexual Objectification. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *42*(4), 461-476.

Andrews, D., Brown T., Castro, E., & Id-Deen, E. (2019). The Impossibility of Being "Perfect and White": Black Girls' Racialized and Gendered Schooling Experiences. *American Educational Research Journal*, *56*(6), 2531-2572.

Blake, J. & Epstein, R. (2019). Listening to Black Women and Girls: Lived Experiences of Adultification Bias. Georgetown Law, Center on Poverty and Inequality.

Brown, R. N. (2013). *Hear Our Truths: The Creative Potential of Black Girlhood*. University of Illinois Press.

Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist

Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Policies.

University of Chicago Legal Forum, 1, 139-167.

Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the Margins Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence

against Women of Color. *Stanford Law Review, 43*, 1241-1299.

Crenshaw, K., Ocean, P., & Nanda, J. (2015). Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Overpoliced and

Under protected. https://44bbdc6e-01a4-4a9a-88bc-

731c6524888e.filesusr.com/ugd/b77e03_e92d6e80f7034f30bf843ea7068f52d6.pdf.

Curtis, M. Karlsen, A. & Anderson, L. (2023). Transmuting Girls Into Women: Examining the

Adultification of Black Female Sexual Assault Survivors Through Twitter Feedback.

*Violence Against Wome*n, *29* (2), 321-346.

Epstein, R., Black, J., González, T. (2017). Girlhood interrupted :the erasure of Black girls'

childhood. Georgetown Law, Center on Poverty and Inequality.

https://genderjusticeandopportunity.georgetown.edu/wp-

content/uploads/2020/06/girlhood-interrupted.pdf.

Esposito, J. & Evans-Winters,V. (2022). *Introduction to Intersectional Qualitative Research*.

Sage.

Evans-Winters (2017). Flipping the Script: The Dangerous Bodies of Girls of Color. *Cultural

Studies/Critical Methodologies*, *17*(5), 415-423.

Evans-Winters, V. (2019). *Black Feminism in Qualitative Inquiry: A Mosaic for Writing Our

Daughter's Body*. Routledge.

Evans-Winters, V. & Esposito, J. (2010). Other People's Daughters: Critical Race Feminism and

Black Girls' Education. *Educational Foundations*, *24* (1-2), 11-24

Gay, Geneva. (2000). *Culturally responsive teaching : theory, research, and practice*.

Teachers College Press.

Goldstar, J. (2013). Indigenous Youth Participatory Action Research: Re-visioning Social Justice

for Social Work with Indigenous Youths. *Social Work*, *58*(4), 314-320.

Harris, J. & Kruger, A. (2020). "We always tell them, but they don't do anything about it!"

Middle School Black girls' experiences with Sexual Harassment at an Urban School.

Urban Education, 00(0), 1-27.

Heron, J and Reason, P. (2006). The Practice of Co-Operative Inquiry: Research "with"

Rather than "on" People. In: Reason, P. and Bradbury, H. (Eds.), Handbook of

Action Research (pp. 144-154), SAGE Publications.

Holmes, C. (2016). The Colonial Roots of the Racial Fetishization of Black Women. *Black &*

Gold, 2, 1-11.

Johnston-Goodstar, K. (2013). Indigenous Youth Participatory Action Research: Re-visioning

Social Justice for Social Work with Indigenous Youths. *Social Work*, *58*(4), 314–320.

Knipp, H. & Stevenson, R. (2021). "A Powerful Visual Statement": Race, Class, and Gender in

Uniform and Dress Code Policies in New Orleans Public Charter Schools. *Feminist*

Inquiry in Social Work, *37*(1), 79-96.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American*

Educational Research Journal, 32, 465-491.

Loft, M. (2020). Syrup, Stereotypes, and Sexualization: A Historical Analysis of the Hyper-

Sexualization of the Black Female Body and the Predominating Stereotypes of Black

Women. History Undergraduate Publications and Presentations. (29). University of

Portland.

Love, B. (2016). Anti-Black state violence, classroom edition: The spirit murdering of Black

    Children. *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy, 13*(1), 22-25.

Lyiscott, J. (2017). Racial Identity and Liberation Literacies in the Classroom. *The English*

    Journal, *106*(4), 47-53.

Morris, E. (2007) "Ladies" or "Loudies"? Youth & Society, 38 (4), 490-515.

Morris, M. (2015). *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools*. The New

    Press.

Muhammad, G. & Gonzalez, L. (2016). Slam poetry: An artistic resistance toward identity,

    agency and activism. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, *49*(4) 440-453.

Mullins, S. (2013). Pigtails, Ponytails, and Getting Tail: The Infantilization and Hyper-

    sexualization of African American Females in Popular Culture. *The Journal of Popular*

    Culture, *46*(4), 745-771.

Paul, D., & Araneo, J. (2018). "Orange is the New Black" Comes to New Jersey's Public

    Schools: Black Girls and Disproportionate Rates of Out-of-School Suspensions and

    Expulsions. *Urban Review, 51(2),* 326-343.

National Women's Law Center. (2018). *Dress Coded: Black girls, bodies, and bias in D.C.*

    Schools. https://nwlc.org/resource/dresscoded.

National Women's Law Center. (2019). *Dress Coded II: Protest, Progress and Power in D.C.*

    Schools. https://nwlc.org/resource/dresscoded-ii/.

Palvakis, A. & Roegman, R. (2018). *The Phi Delta Kappan*, *100*(2), 54-58.

Paris, D., & Alim, H. S. (2017). *Culturally sustaining pedagogies: teaching and learning for*

    justice in a changing world. Teachers College Press.

Sealey-Ruiz (2016). Why Black Girls' Literacies Matter: New Literacies for a New Era. English

Education, 48 (4), 290-298.

Sutherland, L (2005). Black Adolescent Girls' Use of Literacy Practices to Negotiate Boundaries of Ascribed Identity. *Journal of Literacy Research, 37* (3), 365-406.

University of California, BerkelEy. (n.d.). *YPAR Hub*. Berkeley YPAR Hub. https://yparhub.berkeley.edu.

Walsh, D. (2018). Youth Participatory Action Research as Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy. *Theory Into Practice*, *57*: 127-126.

Appendix A

1. Can you please share a little bit about yourself?
2. What, if any, hobbies do you have?
3. As a young, Black girl, do you feel comfortable in your own skin?
   > 3a. If so, why?
   > 3b. If not, why?
4. As a Black girl, how has your experience been at Midwest High School so far?
5. We would like to know more about your experiences as a young, Black girl with the dress code policies at Midwest High School.
   > 5a. If you have any, would you mind sharing your experiences?
   > 5b. If not, have you seen anyone have a negative experience with the dress code policy?
   > 5c. How have you felt about the stories that you have heard?
6. If you have experienced issues with dress code policies here at Midwest High School, how did that make you feel?
7. Have you noticed a difference between how you (as a Black girl) and white girls are dress coded?
8. What solutions would you propose to fix this problem?
9. How would you move forward with that solution when trying to solve the problem?
10. Is there anything else that I missed that you want to talk about?