
The Time is Now: (Re)visioning, (Re)assessing, and (Re)storing the State of Educational Research for African American Women and Girls

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We are in a time and place where the lives of Black women and girls have to do more than "matter" in education; they must be researched, understood, and enhanced through transformative educational praxis. The Journal of African American Women and Girls in Education (JAAWGE) issued a call for papers for its inaugural issue that sought to elucidate Black women and girls' educational experiences across a variety of disciplines, contexts, and geographic settings. Through this work, the constituency of JAAWGE aims to illuminate Black women and girls' brilliance and resilience by placing their voices at the forefront of educational research and discourse, while leading and creating pathways that are not only attainable, but sustainable. This inaugural issue highlights research from various fields that speak directly to the multiplicity of these women and girls' experiences in education across disciplines that utilize a vast array of theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches that are humanizing and centered on Black women and girls.

Keywords: African American women, Black women, Black girls, Education, Policy, Gender Equity

Introduction to the Inaugural Issue

On January 21, 2021, through the eyes of little Black girls around the United States and the world, we watched Senator Kamala Harris, a woman of both African and South Asian descent, become the first female and first person of color (POC) to be sworn into the office of Vice President of the United States of America. We also watched, mesmerized by Amanda Gorman, an activist, and first-ever National Youth Poet Laureate, as she captivated the country with a recitation of her original poem entitled “The Hill We Climb.” Vice President Harris and Gorman stood on the platform of the United States capitol, a building built by slaves and space from which their ancestors were formally excluded, as the world paused momentarily to acknowledge this unprecedented time in history. This moment represents hope and affirms the unique contributions that Black women and girls have made and will continue to make in our nation. Yet, even with a Black woman holding one of the most powerful positions in the United States, Black women and girls still face persistent and pervasive educational challenges. The intentional and casual erasure of Black women (Jordan-Zachery, 2013), the adultification of Black girls (Epstein, Blake, & González, 2017), and the silencing of Black voices (McKittrick, 2000; Broussard, 2013) each represent the most consistent and enduring theme surrounding these experiences in the U.S.--that is, our struggle to exist and for our humanity to be seen.

Much of these narratives have remained hidden until recently, while others remain untold. For example, not until recently has Mamie Phipps Clark been credited for much of the design behind the famous “baby doll test” influential in the 1954 landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* case. Mamie Clark was the wife of the first Black president of the American Psychological Association (APA), Kenneth Bancroft Clark, whose career success is mostly credited to the doll test experiment. Nonetheless, when the research was conducted, Mamie Clark was not permitted to serve as the lead researcher, leading to Kenneth Clark’s credit for this work. More recently, former Georgia House Representative and Minority Leader Stacey Abrams is credited for boosting voter turnout in favor of Democrats in the 2020 Presidential election. After narrowly losing the election for Georgia governor in 2018, in large part due to her opponent’s relentless tactics to disenfranchise her supporters, Abrams established the New Georgia Project and Fair Fight. These two initiatives became a part of her 10-year strategic plan to turn Georgia from a red state (Republican-led) to a blue one (Democrat-led). While Georgia had not been a blue state since the early 90s, Abrams confidently built a political infrastructure that mobilized multiethnic Democratic voters and fought against Black voter suppression. Abrams opted out of running for an elected office in 2020 and instead vigorously campaigned for Democratic candidates, including Reverend Raphael Warnock - Georgia’s first Black senator. Despite this historic victory, many political pundits and others still downplayed Abrams’ efforts. These are just two of the many instances in which Black women's contributions have been either hidden or minimized in the name of progress. As we stand here today, we contend that these contributions will no longer remain hidden or told in secret.

Research that centers on Black women and girls' lived educational experiences is emergent and requires focused attention, space, and time to evolve. Historically, Black women and girls' needs have been tangential to various educational research topics, as many educational syntheses indicate that earlier work sought to examine the research concerning Black students compared to other racial and ethnic groups, usually as comparison groups only. Studies deviating from this trend tended to address social, health, discipline, or religious issues related to the Black educational experience, but few focused specifically on the intersections of race and gender

(Morris, 2007; Young, 2019). Although many of these studies included Black women and girls or provided implications to support Black women and girls, these studies often did not choose them as the primary focus of analysis. There remains a dearth of empirical research to explicate our (i.e., Black women and girls) unique experiences in educational settings (Collier-Thomas, 1982; Patton, Crenshaw, Haynes, & Watson, 2016). Moreover, the persistence of anti-Blackness in the mistreatment and criminalization of Black girls continues to persist in schools in ways that negatively impact their learning and subsequently murders their spirit (Love, 2016; Morris, 2016; Hines & Wilmot, 2018). Black women and girls are verivistic and creative, and possess qualities and overall experiences that require dedicated lines of inquiry across multiple educational constructs and content areas (Brown, 2013; Sealey-Ruiz, 2007). Moreover, the acknowledgment and acute attention to our presence and power in the research landscape and practice is critically important to advancing this work (hooks, 1990; hooks, 2014). Hence, we argue that a concentrated educational research space is necessary for empirical evaluation and theory development to propel African American female educational scholarship forward.

The Time is Now!

Black women and girls' hopes and dreams must be more than affirmed or represented in the research; they must be informed and confirmed by data to affect policy, prompt action, and incite change. With these data, the creation of equitable praxis for Black women and girls becomes less elusive. The representation of Black girls in education research is emergent, as evidenced by the numerous books and seminal works published over the last several decades (Dixson, 2003; Evans-Winters, 2005; Evans-Winters & Love, 2015; Smitherman, 2006). However, recent data indicate that studies centered on Black women and girls remain underrepresented in most educational research disciplines (Blake, Butler, Lewis, & Darensbourg, 2011; Cobb-Roberts & Agosto, 2011).

Educational research has the power to challenge and redress the challenging educational conditions of Black women and girls. Yet, education as a collective remains an active participant in the marginalization of Black female learners. Over the last 20 years, trends suggest research on the education of Black students has increased. However, there remains a substantial degree of racial and gender inequity in the published literature. Many scholars have recognized the dearth in the literature (Annamma et al., 2016; King & Pringle, 2019; Muhammad & Dixson, 2008; Annamma & Winn, 2019). More specifically, in a content analysis from 2000 to 2015, Young (2020) identified only 72 studies focused on Black girls or women, compared to 295 studies focused on Black men or boys, and 2,643 studies focused on the education of Black students. These data suggest that Black girls and women were represented in less than 1% of the Black educational scholarship. The implications of these results are numerous, but the time to remediate this trend is now!

The time is now to (re)vision, (re)assess, and (re)store the state of educational research for Black women and girls. We unite and remain steadfast and diligent procurers of our knowledge and experiences. This inaugural issue is a response to the need for a journal to house “the study of African American female research throughout the educational pipeline (P-20) in various contexts (e.g., urban, STEM, policy/law, spirituality, assessment, community partnerships, professional development, etc.), and across various disciplines (e.g., Teacher Education, Educational Leadership, Educational Psychology, Counseling, and the like).” Thus, we hope to create an inclusive educational research space for our scholarship.

This first issue provides an in-depth exploration of our needs through five articles, each representing a unique aspect of the Black female educational experience. This work transcends challenges to inform practice and policy through strengths-based implications and solutions-driven recommendations. In their article, Teasdel, Lee, Calloway, and Adams (2021) explore the experiences of Black women doctoral students who participated in a doctoral sister circle through collaborative autoethnography. Through descriptive qualitative research, Jones (2021) illustrates the needs and challenges associated with developing programmatic outreach to improve the social, academic, and health development of Black girls and women and the contextual forces that influence the sustainability of the programs they manage. In their qualitative study, West and Smith (2021) captured the collective insight of Black women student affairs professionals regarding the evolution of professional counter-spaces to support the unique needs of Black women. Fields and Power-Carter (2021) applied thematic analysis to explore how young Black women utilized literacy to share their sociopolitical consciousness, reposition themselves in powerful ways, and create counter-narratives to master narratives informed by whiteness. And Jones Boss, Porter, Davis, and Maddox Moore (2021) apply Black Feminist Thought (BFT) to explore how contingent Black female faculty conceptualize their labor in the academy.

Together, these articles provide a representative collection of multiple disciplines and voices illuminating Black women and girls' educational experiences. To heal from the past and present wounds, Black women and girls share evidence in educational research through our narrative experiences, paths of resilience, commitment and outreach, and desire to uplift other Black women and girls. *The Time is Now: (Re)visioning, (Re)assessing, and (Re)storing the State of Educational Research for African American Women and Girls* is our inaugural issue's call to action to unmute the counternarratives and experiential knowledge of Black women and girls in education.

Conclusion

“If you educate a man, you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman, you educate a family (nation).” – African Proverb

This African Proverb's words resonate now more than ever as Black women and girls continue to spearhead political, economic, and social change through education, often in silence and unnoticed. We hope that through faith and dedication, the pages of this journal will honor the voices of Black women and girls, delivering us from the systemic erasure of self and illuminating our *herstories* (i.e., the untold, unheard, unanalyzed stories), beauty, and brilliance through rigorous and relevant educational research. This journal is necessary because we deserve a space where our collective voices chronicle our struggles, successes, and stories!

Vice President Kamala Harris provided this message from her mother that resounds our responsibility as a journal, “You may be the first to do something, but make sure you are not the last.” (Lerer & Ember, 2020). Thus, as researchers, practitioners, social justice advocates, diversity advocates, and the like, there is a degree of culpability that must be collectively acknowledged and assumed for the absence of literature related to the educational needs of Black girls. At best, we have been remiss in redressing Black girls and women's educational needs as a field. Several scholars, including the founding JAAWGE board of directors, have championed this cause, and these efforts are commendable; still, much more work is needed in this area. Educational stakeholders have a participatory obligation to ensure Black girls and women's

success, and the immediacy of this call cannot be overemphasized. Moreover, this topic's propinquity to Black female researchers should compel us to consider appropriate discourses, conceptual frameworks, and theoretical lenses for researching and improving the educational experiences, achievement, and outcomes for Black women and girls.

This editorial is written in dedication to the collective voices, trials, triumphs, and experiences of Black women and girls that remain unearthed and erased. To this end, and as an act of collective resistance to institutions that systematically and systemically oppress our work, we call on every author of research concerning Black women and girls to cite this manuscript in memoriam of those narratives that remain untold but live on through our collective work and impact.

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