Knowing Her Place: A Review of Two Reports Exploring Black girl leadership and Toxic Identity

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ABSTRACT: This article takes a comparative look at the treatment of Black girls in education and leadership through two reports: *Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls' Childhood* and *Ready to Lead Report*. The former highlights the phenomenon of adultification bias, where Black girls are perceived and treated as more mature and less innocent than their white peers, leading to negative outcomes in various domains of life, including leadership. The latter focuses on the leadership aspirations and skills of Black girls and provides recommendations for supporting their development as leaders. The article synthesizes the findings of both reports and highlights the importance of recognizing and addressing adultification bias in promoting equitable opportunities for Black girls in leadership. The article presents several approaches to deal with these problems, such as giving educators chances for professional growth, establishing safe spaces for Black girls to talk about their experiences, and honoring and applauding these girls' leadership achievements. Therefore, schools and organizations can create a more equal and welcoming atmosphere for Black girls in leadership positions and classrooms by implementing these recommendations.

KEYWORDS: Adultification, Black girls, leadership, development, bias, stereotypes, equity, and support.

I. LEADERSHIP AND ADULTIFICATION

Black girls in the United States face various challenges in their educational and leadership opportunities. Some of these challenges date back to slavery when Black girls were robbed of their girlhood and agency over their bodies (Ricks, 2014). These continued challenges harms their academic and personal lives (Cirincione-Ulezi, 2020). Two reports, *Girlhood Interrupted: The erasure of Black girls' childhood* (Girlhood Interrupted) and *Ready to Lead: Leadership supports and barriers for Black and Latinx girls* (Ready to Lead) have been produced to draw attention to the treatment of Black girls in schools and the lack of leadership opportunities for them. This research paper will analyze and contrast the strategies used in these reports to promote awareness of the issues faced by Black girls. The comparison will demonstrate that, while both reports seek to address systemic issues that Black girls face, they differ in their focus and methods (Showunmi, 2021). Furthermore, this study will shed light on the unique problems that Black girls confront and the need for focused interventions to promote fairness in education and leadership possibilities.

Overview of the Reports: The report, Girlhood Interrupted, examines how Black girls are disproportionately affected by dulcification prejudice and the belief that Black girls are less innocent and more adult-like than their White counterparts. The study demonstrates how this adultification bias influences how Black girls are handled in the classroom, including punishment procedures, academic success, and interactions with peers and teachers (Epstein et al., 2017). The report emphasizes the necessity of measures to combat this bias and give Black girls equal opportunities.
While Ready to Lead measures how Black and Latinx girls view their confidence and leadership abilities, the report also identifies their difficulties in developing leadership skills. The research covers the obstacles Black and Latinx girls must overcome to achieve leadership possibilities and the support structures that can assist these girls (Jacobs et al., 2020). The study offers suggestions for communities, families, and educators to help Black and Latinx girls improve their leadership skills.

Approaches to Raising Awareness: Black girl leadership development is essential for fostering a diverse and inclusive workplace. Nonetheless, possibilities for Black people to develop and ascend into leadership positions may be constrained by systemic racism and biases (Carter Andrews et al., 2019). It takes a variety of strategies, such as research studies, advocacy campaigns, and community participation, to increase awareness of the difficulties Black girls experience in leadership and the classroom.

Research reports : Both research reports highlight the structural inequalities and barriers that Black and Latinx girls face in the education system and society. They provide statistical evidence and qualitative data to support their findings and recommendations. Epstein et al. (2017) emphasize the intersection of race and gender and how it affects Black girls' experiences, particularly regarding discipline and academic achievement. Jacobs et al. (2020) focus on the lack of leadership opportunities for Black and Latinx girls and the importance of mentorship and representation in addressing this issue. Despite their differences in focus, both reports recommend investing in support programs and initiatives that address the specific needs of Black and Latinx girls. They also suggest changing disciplinary procedures and increasing diversity in leadership positions. The research reports ultimately provide valuable insights into the experiences and challenges faced by Black and Latinx girls and offer practical solutions to promote equity and inclusion. Furthermore, the suggestions and solutions presented in both reports overlap in several ways. Both publications, for example, emphasize the importance of mentorship and role models for Black girls. They contend that exposing Black females to positive role models can boost their self-esteem and help them develop leadership abilities (Garcia & Reyes, 2022). Furthermore, both reports advocate for reforms to school punishment rules to combat the school-to-prison pipeline, which disproportionately affects Black girls (Jacobs et al., 2020). They advocate for using restorative justice approaches and investments in support programs that address the underlying causes of disciplinary difficulties. In addition, both publications stress the importance of systemic reform in addressing the structural disparities that Black girls face. They advocate for legislators, educators, and community organizations to collaborate to give resources and assistance to Black girls. For example, both papers recommend investments in leadership and education efforts that primarily address the needs and challenges faced by Black and Latinx girls. These initiatives could include mentorship programs, opportunities for leadership development, and money for support services.

Advocacy campaigns : Advocacy initiatives such as #BlackGirlMagic and "Pushout" are critical for raising awareness and pushing policy reforms that address the disparities that Black girls confront. These campaigns can reach a large audience and motivate action by utilizing social media, mainstream media, and community engagement. For example, celebrities, politicians, and activists have embraced the #BlackGirlMagic movement, which uses the hashtag to promote and uplift Black girls and women (Msila, 2022). The campaign has also inspired Black female empowerment goods, art, and music. Similarly, the "Pushout" campaign has significantly drawn attention to the school-to-prison pipeline and how punishing punishment policies disproportionately affect Black girls. The campaign resulted in policy reforms in several states, including California, which approved legislation preventing schools from suspending kids for "willful defiance," a catch-all category routinely used to punish Black students. The program has also encouraged community-led projects to provide assistance and resources to Black girls at risk of dropping out of school (Marean, 2022). As a result, advocacy campaigns are a potent tool for raising awareness and effecting change regarding the difficulties confronting Black girls in leadership and education. These initiatives can transform cultural narratives, promote positive representation, and inspire action by utilizing social and mainstream media, community participation, and policy lobbying.

Community Engagement : Community involvement is essential for building a safe and welcoming environment for Black girls. Community-based organizations and programs involving parents and community members can aid in recognizing and addressing the leadership and educational problems Black girls experience. For example, the YWCA Metropolitan Chicago's "Black Girls Matter" effort aims to empower Black girls and create chances for them to succeed. Black girls are active in community service, leadership development, and mentorship as part of this initiative, which helps to strengthen their confidence and leadership skills (UNICEF, 2020). The program also works with parents and community members to advocate for legislative changes and educational investments that specifically address the needs of Black girls. This community involvement strategy makes sure that Black girls' perspectives are heard, and their experiences are considered in policy decisions.The African American Parent Advisory Council (AAPAC) in Minneapolis is another example of community engagement. AAPAC's mission is to engage parents and community members in closing the achievement gap and improving educational equity for Black children, including Black girls. AAPAC ensures that policies and procedures are culturally acceptable and meet the needs of Black students by cooperating with the school district (Beyer, 2020). This community-based strategy guarantees that parents and community members actively participate in designing their children's educational experiences, ensuring that their children have the necessary support to achieve (UNICEF, 2020). As a result, community participation is an essential technique for drawing attention to Black females' challenges in leadership and education. Community-based organizations and initiatives that include parents and community members can assist in identifying and addressing the

issues that Black girls encounter in the classroom, as well as promoting equity and inclusivity. Community engagement initiatives ensure that Black girls' perspectives are heard, and their experiences are considered in policy choices by engaging with schools and policymakers.

II.   SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN THE REPORTS

The Girlhood Interrupted report employs a mixed-method approach, combining qualitative and quantitative research approaches. The qualitative data was gathered through interviews with 325 participants, which included Black girls, white girls, and adults who work with them. The quantitative data were evaluated using descriptive statistics to illustrate the discrepancies between Black and white girls' attitudes. Thematic analysis was used to find common themes and patterns in the participants' experiences. The Ready to Lead report, on the other hand, relies heavily on quantitative research. The study examined data from the Higher Education Research Institute's (HERI) College Senior Survey, which polled a nationally representative sample of college seniors in the United States (Epstein et al., 2017). The report examined data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) Freshmen Survey. The researchers used descriptive statistics, regression analysis, and other quantitative tools to identify the causes of the leadership gap and recommend resolving it.

Notwithstanding the various study approaches employed, these studies highlight the structural challenges and obstacles that Black girls face in leadership and education. They provide evidence-based solutions to these concerns and improve outcomes for Black girls. By combining qualitative and quantitative techniques, these studies offer a complete understanding of the issues that Black girls face and potential solutions. Furthermore, Girlhood Interrupted emphasizes the effects of the school-to-prison pipeline and how they affect Black girls' academic achievement and mental health. The research urges changes to school punishment procedures and expenditures for underprivileged students' support programs. In contrast, Ready to Lead emphasizes the lack of Black and Latinx girls in leadership roles and the importance of mentorship, role models, and chances for leadership development. Furthermore, Girlhood Interrupted states expressly that its intended audience includes "policymakers, educators, and advocates" and that the report's goal is to deliver "a call to action for those working to better girls' lives" (Epstein et al., 2017, pg 8). On the other hand, Ready to Lead specifies its target audience as parents, educators, and community organizations. The report's goal is data-driven suggestions for expanding leadership possibilities for Black and Latinx girls. These distinctions in intended audiences imply that each study is customized to specific stakeholders with varying degrees of influence in addressing Black females' issues in education and leadership (Jacobs et al., 2020). Therefore, policymakers, educators, and activists are the target audience for Girlhood Interrupted, while parents, educators, and community organizations are the target audience for Ready to Lead. Since parents and educators may affect change in their immediate communities, whereas policymakers may have more control over systemic change, this difference in the audience may impact the recommendations provided in each study.

In terms of methodology, Girlhood Interrupted incorporates qualitative research methodologies such as focus groups and interviews to provide an in-depth look into the lives of Black girls. Using surveys and data analysis, Ready to Lead presents quantifiable empirical confirmation of the leadership gap faced by Black and Latinx girls. As a result, while Girlhood Interrupted and Ready to Lead Report aim to increase awareness of the obstacles Black girls experience in their pursuit of education and leadership prospects, they differ in methodology, focus, and intended audience. Notwithstanding these disparities, both papers offer insightful analysis and suggestions for advancing equity and removing the structural obstacles that Black girls confront.

III.   CONCLUSION

In the United States, Black girls confront structural and systemic barriers to pursuing education and leadership opportunities. The studies, Girlhood Interrupted and Ready to Lead, comprehensively analyze these difficulties and effective answers. The findings stress the significance of identifying the interplay between Black girls' racial and gender realities. Girlhood Interrupted, in particular, focuses on the impact of the school-to-prison pipeline on Black girls' academic achievement and mental health. In contrast, Ready to Lead emphasizes the lack of Black and Latinx girls in leadership roles and the need for mentorship and leadership development opportunities. Therefore, the studies propose various alternatives to address these issues, including policy changes, advocacy campaigns, and community engagement. For example, the studies advocate for modifications to school discipline methods, additional financing for impoverished students' support services, and legislative reforms that expressly address the needs of Black girls. Furthermore, the

researchers emphasize raising awareness and understanding about how Black girls are handled in leadership and education. Hence, it can be accomplished through research, lobbying, and policy reform, all of which can help to develop a more fair and just society for all girls, regardless of color, country, or socioeconomic class. Therefore, tackling the structural barriers that Black girls confront in leadership and education necessitates a comprehensive and coordinated effort from all stakeholders. Policymakers, educators, parents, and community organizations may work together to improve fairness and inclusion and guarantee that Black girls have the opportunity to grow and reach their full potential.

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