BRINGING OUT THE BRILLIANCE IN BLACK GIRLS

by

DENISE L. HAWKINS

(Under the Direction of C. Missy Moore)

ABSTRACT

This study was grounded in the urgent need to understand and disrupt the alarming rise in anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation among Black girls. Although Black girls comprise 13% of the U.S. teen population, they account for 30% of suicide deaths among teens. According to the CDC (2023), 94,000 Black girls have attempted suicide since 2017, with the highest concentration in the southern United States. These troubling statistics are closely linked to intersecting experiences of racial and gender discrimination. It was hypothesized that the internalization of negative stereotypes perpetuated through media contributes to diminished self-worth, which in turn heightens vulnerability to emotional distress and mental health crises. This underscores the critical need to empirically examine culturally relevant factors that promote the externalization of these harmful messages and foster self-definition, resistance, and liberation, key components in the healthy identity development and psychological well-being of Black girls.

Using a cross-sectional design, this study employed a three-block hierarchical multiple regression analysis with a sample of 137 Black girls aged 11–17. The study explored the predictive power of critical consciousness, racial-ethnic identity, and perceived social support on

self-esteem, above and beyond internalized stereotypes, media pressures, and racialized gender microaggressions, within the framework of Black Feminist Thought (BFT). The results demonstrated that these culturally grounded variables explained 33% of the variance in rewards distributed to self and 26% in costs distributed to self, highlighting both the enhancement of self-worth and reduction of self-blame and internalized oppression.

These findings affirm BFT's relevance in empowering Black girls and countering negative stereotypical messaging. Self-esteem among Black girls is not inherent or individually determined but shaped by socio-cultural and structural forces. This research challenges deficit-based narratives that portray Black girls as problems to be fixed and instead centers them as powerful agents navigating dehumanizing systems. Ultimately, the study affirms that Black girls' self-esteem is not a luxury but a necessity for survival, academic persistence, emotional well-being, and liberatory decision-making.

INDEX WORDS: Hierarchical multiple regression, Black girls' self-esteem, internalized stereotypes and media pressures, gendered racial microaggressions, critical consciousness, racial-ethnic identity, social support, Black Feminist Thought

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is lovingly dedicated to the four extraordinary Black women who raised me with unwavering strength, wisdom, and grace: my grandmother Lillian, and my great aunts Theola, Florence, and Sara. Together, they modeled the power of collective care by pooling their resources, doubling up in homes, and creating a safe, opportunity-rich world for me to thrive in. You were my first teachers of what true community means. Your sacrifices, love, and belief in me planted the seeds of everything I have become. Thank you for always making me feel special, seen, and deeply loved. I am earning a doctorate in education, the very field you labored in at a time when Black women were not permitted the opportunity to earn degrees. This achievement is yours as much as it is mine.

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INTRODUCTION

In his iconic speech on May 22, 1962, Malcolm X declared, “The most disrespected person in America is the Black woman. The most unprotected person in America is the Black woman. The most neglected person in America is the Black woman” (Malcolm X, 1962). More than six decades later, these words continue to ring true. Black women, long regarded as “the mules of the world” (Collins, 2000, p. 45), have historically occupied the lowest social position in American society. This dehumanizing status has been inherited by Black girls, who often internalize their marginalized place in the social hierarchy (Collins, 2000). Dating back to slavery, Black women endured unimaginable emotional and physical burdens, including being forced to labor in cotton fields while pregnant, suffering sexual violence, birthing and raising children without medical care, and experiencing the trauma of family separation through the sale of their children (Collins, 2000; Elder & Tillary, 2024; hooks, 1981, 2015). Though they survived these atrocities, Black women were never afforded liberation from the psychological scars of enslavement (Higginbottom, 1992; hooks, 1981). The learned survival strategies, such as the suppression of emotions, developed in response to generational trauma (Decree, 2023), have been passed down to Black girls today, many of whom now face a mental health crisis (St. George et al., 2023).

Black girls are often burdened by societal expectations, making it difficult to fully access and express their natural brilliance (Dotson & Davis, 2023). bell hooks (2003) captured this struggle, writing, “Although our bodies are free, our minds are fixated on trauma” (p. 20).

Brilliance, in this context, refers to the inherent worth, intelligence, self-awareness, and boundless potential of Black girls, qualities too often eclipsed by harmful stereotypes and dehumanizing narratives (Collins, 2000). This brilliance shines through as acts of self-definition, resistance to marginalization, and the reclamation of voice and authentic visibility (Collins, 2000). It is both individual and collective. However, intergenerational survival strategies, such as emotional suppression, intended to protect, now serve to stifle emotional expression and well-being, which is likely contributing to alarming increases in depression, anxiety, and suicide among Black girls (Ncube et al., 2022). According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2021), Black girls in grades 9-12 were 60% more likely to attempt suicide than their White counterparts, often driven by deep feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and psychological distress (OMH, 2024). The same racial traumas and inequities that scholars examined pre-Civil Rights America continue to endanger the mental health and futures of Black girls today (CDC, 2023; Higginbottom, 1992).

For Black girls, the significance of race and gender becomes salient as early as five years old when they first encounter racial and gender microaggressions that begin to fracture their sense of childhood (Epstein et al., 2017). At this tender age, they also start to internalize society's distorted projections, labeled as loud, angry, or inferior, particularly through the media's persistent stereotypes (Apugo et al., 2022). This early confrontation with racialized social constructions occurs precisely when Black girls are in formative stages of developing their identity (Loyd et al., 2021). Tatum (2017) described this tension as the "Syndrome of Not Belonging" (p. 99), where societal messages override internal self-definition. The dominant culture's perceptions constrain Black girls' natural ways of being and communicating, which diminishes their self-esteem (Baker-Bell, 2020; hooks, 2003).

Mass media, including television, music lyrics, music videos, cinema, and social media, amplify these harmful messages, reinforcing internalized narratives of inferiority and unworthiness (Tatum, 2017). These include deeply embedded stereotypes, such as hypersexualization (Muhammad & McArthur, 2021), adultification (Blake & Epstein, 2022), incompetence (Proctor et al., 2022), and the expectation of unyielding strength (Liao et al., 2020). Confronting these stereotypes in early adolescence, a critical period of identity development (Erikson, 1968), significantly strains Black girls' self-perception, well-being, and belief in their capabilities (Higginbottom, 1992). These pressures contribute to a growing mental health crisis (Holcomb-McCoy & Moore-Thomas, 2001).

While adolescence is meant to be a time of exploration, discovery, and envisioning the future, for many Black girls, it is overshadowed by daily experiences of silencing, marginalization, and invisibility (Epstein & Blake, 2023). The cumulative impact of gendered racial microaggressions fills this developmental stage not with freedom, but with psychological distress (Loyd et al., 2021). Racial injury, pain, and suffering are not isolated incidents; they become shared, expected parts of growing up Black and girls (Nunn, 2016). Consequently, Black girlhood is marked by less nurturing, fewer protections, and inadequate support systems (Blake & Epstein, 2023), which contributes to rising rates of sadness, hopelessness, and despair (Baker-Bell, 2020; CDC, 2023; St. George et al., 2023).

In response to systemic oppression and historical erasure of Black women and girls, Collins (2000) developed Black Feminist Thought (BFT), a theoretical framework grounded in the lived experiences of Black women, to offer both historical context and a pathway toward empowerment. BFT centers the voices of Black women, challenging Eurocentric and patriarchal paradigms by reclaiming knowledge and redefining identity through resistance, resilience, and

self-definition (Collins, 2000). This dissertation employed BFT as a guiding framework to connect the historical roots of racial and gender oppression to the empowerment of Black girls today. By shifting the narrative from a deficit-based perspective to one that highlights strengths, this study foregrounded the intrapersonal and interpersonal assets, such as self-awareness, racial-ethnic identity, critical consciousness, and social support, that nurture self-esteem and serve as protective factors against racialized trauma.

Although scholars like Collins (1986), Higgenbottom (1992), and hooks (2003) have laid the groundwork for understanding sociopolitical forces impacting Black girls, empirical applications of BFT to their psychological development remained limited. This research is additive because it investigated what protective measures can be nurtured that will sustain Black girls' healthy development and ensure they have the knowledge and skills to continue to advocate and dismantle systems of oppression.

The words of Audre Lorde deeply inspired this research: "I am not free while any woman, girl, is unfree, even when her shackles are different from mine." This sentiment underscored a central motivation of this study: Freedom for Black girls must include freedom from psychological harm. While acknowledging the societal forces that contribute to poor mental health outcomes for Black girls, it was equally urgent to focus on what promoted healing and restoration (hooks, 2003). That healing must begin with disrupting the negative stereotypes that threaten Black girls' self-esteem, be made accessible, and integrating it into school counseling programs, educational practices, and mentoring programs. Research has shown that when Black girls develop a strong sense of self-esteem, they are more likely to reject internalized racism and sexism and resist harmful messages about who they are and who they can become (Esposito & Edwards, 2017).

Healthy self-esteem is not only an outcome but a form of resistance, healing, and transformation (Collins, 2000). It offers a path from heightened vulnerability, suicide, and anxiety (Agger et al., 2022). This study aimed to interrupt the deficit-centered narratives and instead elevate the protective and empowering factors that support psychological well-being. Rooted in BFT, this quantitative study examined the extent to which critical consciousness, racial-ethnic identity, and perceived social support predicted self-esteem in Black girls, above and beyond the internalization of negative stereotypes, media pressures to conform to beauty ideals, and gendered racial microaggressions.

Self-Esteem in Black Girls

According to BFT, cultivating and protecting Black girls' self-esteem is essential and a radical act of resistance and survival (Collins, 2000). Self-esteem was the primary variable of interest in this study because it serves as the internal foundation from which Black girls derive their sense of worth, embrace their identities, and resist harmful societal narratives. At its core, self-esteem reflected a deep respect for self, appreciation for one's unique strengths, and an honest acknowledgement of one's imperfections (Rosenberg, 1971). Activists and scholars such as Audre Lorde, bell hooks, and Patricia Hill Collins have long asserted that self-esteem is central to Black women's liberation, empowerment, and resilience. The emotional infrastructure supports the development of voice, agency, and visibility (Collins, 2000).

In the context of mental health, self-esteem acts as a critical protective factor. Research from the Emergency Task Force on Black Youth Suicide and Mental Health (2019), as well as Taha et al. (2015), affirmed that higher self-esteem reduces the risk of suicidal thoughts and behaviors by enhancing coping skills, strengthening support systems, and fostering a strong sense of cultural identity. The CDC (2023) reported that adolescents at risk for suicide often

express feelings of unworthiness, an emotional state closely linked to low self-esteem. When self-esteem is low, it manifested as self-doubt (Gadson et al., 2022), fear of expression (Kayser et al., 2018), difficulty accepting feedback (Wax, 2017), poor impulse control (Wax, 2017), and a reluctance to engage in leadership or goal setting (Brandon, 1994; Wayuningsih, 2018).

However, self-esteem is not simply a matter of confidence; it is the determinant of academic achievement, mental health, and life success. Graham and Ford (2003), Sharma and Agarwala (2015), and Perry and Lavins-Merillat (2019) found that self-esteem is positively associated with academic motivation and success, particularly among African American students. Similarly, Galeotti (2015) found that self-esteem contributed to healthy peer relationships and positive self-concept, while Cherry (2022) and Maslow (1943) emphasized its essential role in decision-making and navigating challenges. As Christen and Peterson (2012) and Joseph et al. (2023) observed, self-esteem served as a psychological buffer against external pressures, helping Black adolescent girls resist negative societal influences.

Therefore, this study centered self-esteem as the key outcome variable, grounded in the understanding that Black girls are more likely to flourish across all areas of life when they see themselves as worthy, powerful, and capable. Through the lens of BFT, this research affirmed that self-esteem is measurable and transformational. It is a pathway to healing, a tool for resistance, and a cornerstone for building empowered, self-defined futures for Black girls.

Theoretical Framework

According to BFT, developing self-esteem in Black girls requires equipping them with the cognitive and emotional tools to resist negative stereotypes that target their identity and diminish their worth (Collins, 2000). In psychological terms, cognition includes perception, memory, learning, understanding, and problem solving (Cherry, 2022), all of which are impacted

when harmful messages are internalized. As hooks (2003) explained, symptoms of oppression persist through cognitive endorsement; if Black girls come to believe the stereotypes they see, they may unknowingly uphold the very forces that oppress them. Collins (2000) referred to these stereotypes as controlling images, which are socially constructed representations of Black women and girls that are negative, inaccurate, incomplete, and deeply rooted in racialized gender histories (To et al., 2023). These include enduring tropes like Jezebel, Mammy, and Sapphire, which in contemporary media are projected in terms like "hoochie", "THOT", "matriarch" "ratchet," or "ghetto". Coupled with media-driven beauty ideals, these images serve as distorting, diminishing, and dominating narratives that Black girls internalize about themselves.

BFT offers a guide to disrupt these harmful narratives and a resistance pathway. It teaches that Black girls can reclaim their narratives and combat stereotype-based oppression by cultivating self-esteem through self-definition, critical consciousness, and solidarity (Collins, 2000). Furthermore, BFT encourages Black girls to challenge threats to their healthy development, such as internalized negative stereotypes, and conformity pressures by critically questioning, affirming identity, lifting voices, and standing firm in meaning-making (Porter et al., 2020). In alignment with these principles, the present study sought to examine how critical consciousness, racial-ethnic identity, and perceived social support contribute to the self-esteem of Black girls above and beyond the internalization of negative stereotypes, media pressures, and gendered racial microaggressions. By empirically testing BFT's foundational claims, this study affirmed the brilliance and agency of Black girls and expanded the knowledge base on what helps them thrive.

The Source Attacking Black Girls' Self-Esteem: Internalized Negative Stereotypes and Media Pressures

BFT asserts that negative stereotypes are tools of oppression that shape how Black girls are perceived and how they perceive themselves (Collins, 2000). In today's digital age, the media is one of the most powerful vehicles for transmitting these negative stereotypes. Media consumption has become a central sociocultural influence in the lives of Black girls, shaping not only how others view them but also how they come to understand their identities. It is both a source of internalized messaging and, at times, a place for identity formation (Harris-Perry, 2011; Muhammad & McArthur, 2015).

According to Common Sense Media (2022), Black girls spend up to 10 hours daily engaging with media, not including time spent on school-related tasks. This high exposure, especially to visual platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and television, increases their vulnerability to racialized and appearance-based stereotypes that are prevalent across these mediums (Martins & Harrison, 2012). Researchers have offered several explanations for this engagement. Stokes (2007) noted that Black girls seek out media content to find representations of themselves; Tynes et al. (2008) found that media is often used as a coping strategy to manage racial and gender-based stress; and Erba et al. (2019) described social media as a space where Black girls can explore identity, build community, and connect with peers when they feel marginalized in traditional settings like school.

However, while media can offer moments of connection, it often reinforces harmful beauty ideals, gendered racial microaggressions, and negative stereotypes that threaten healthy self-esteem (Coltrane & Messineo, 2000). For Black girls, constant exposure to these messages increases the risk of internalized negative stereotypes about their worth, appearance, and

behavior, especially in the absence of affirming counter-narratives (Adams-Bass et al., 2000). Therefore, this study theorized that frequent media use may contribute to the internalization of negative stereotypes, gendered racial microaggressions, and media-driven appearance ideals. These factors were hypothesized to interfere with self-esteem development.

In alignment with the goals of BFT, this study sought to empirically examine how internalized stereotypes and media-based pressures function as risk factors, and how they compare with protective factors, such as critical consciousness, racial-ethnic identity, and perceived social support, in predicting Black girls' self-esteem. This section follows a review of studies on media exposure, stereotype internalization, and self-esteem in Black girls.

Self-Other Appraisal

Media representations do not exist in a vacuum; Black girls absorb and internalize these portrayals, which become embedded in how they view themselves and navigate the world (Strasburger, 2010). This process, often unconscious, significantly influences their daily experiences and self-efficacy (Adams-Bass et al., 2014; Harris et al., 2015). When Black girls begin to endorse the negative stereotypes portrayed in the media, such as the "freak", "gold digger", or "ho" this internalization has been empirically linked to risky sexual behavior (Davis & Tucker-Brown, 2013), substance use (Peterson et al., 2007), and self-blame following sexual victimization (Donovan & Williams, 2002). Beyond physical risk, this internalization also contributes to emotional burdens (Brown et al., 2013). For instance, endorsement of the "Sapphire/Angry Black girl" stereotype led some girls to assume responsibility for others' discomfort and alter their behavior to appear less threatening in cross-racial interactions (Ashley, 2014; Greene, 1994).

These behaviors and psychological outcomes are deeply rooted in social appraisal processes (Mastro, 2017). Erikson's (1968) psychosocial theory emphasized that self-definition is obtained through the eyes of others, beginning in early adolescence. Building on this, Spencer's (1995) Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST) asserts that Black adolescents' self-perception is shaped by how they are seen and interpret those within the broader context of social and economic stressors. For Black girls, this includes experiences of racism, gender bias, media messaging, and interactions with teachers, counselors, caregivers, and peers (Rogers & Meltzoff, 2017).

A compelling example is found in the work of Barrie et al. (2016), which examined the psychological effects of internalized stereotypes, such as being lazy, angry, violent, hypersexual, or unintelligent, on 144 African American girls aged 12 -19. They found a statistically significant relationship between stereotype endorsement and psychological maladjustment, including increased levels of anxiety, stress, and depression (Barrie et al., 2016). Taken together, these findings highlight how negative appraisals from others and negative images in media are not just external forces; they become internalized and affect how Black girls define themselves (O'Connor et al., 2000). This process, when unaddressed, undermines self-esteem (Campbell & Valera, 2020).

Internalized Negative Stereotypes from the Media

Socially constructed messages about Black girls are widely disseminated through mass media, shaping not only how society treats Black girls but also how Black girls perceive themselves (O'Connor et al., 2000; Mastro, 2017; To et al., 2023). As Ward (2004) explained, the media is often used as a lens through which individuals interpret the world, and many adolescents, including Black girls, regard media portrayals as accurate reflections of reality. This

is concerning as the American public relies heavily on media to shape its understanding of race, gender, and power (To et al., 2023). Consequently, media that normalize the dehumanization of Black girls contribute to a societal perception that expects Black girls to endure mistreatment without support (Umana-Taylor, 2014). Frequent exposure to these negative stereotypes intensifies their impact. For example, Mastro (2017) found that negative portrayals of racial and ethnic groups are directly linked to diminished self-esteem, and the effect increases with higher media consumption. It is reported that Black adolescents in the U.S. spend more than half of their waking hours engaging with media (Pew Research Center, 2018), and that Black girls often seek out these spaces for identity validation and coping. Thus, the potential for internalizing negative stereotypes is profound (Morgan et al., 2015).

Internalized Media Pressures

Cultivation theory (Gerber & Gross, 1976) suggested that television and media function as powerful societal storytellers, with frequent media exposure leading individuals to internalize mediated narratives as reality. Hinkelman (2022) found that Black girls consume an average of eight or more hours of media a day. Thus, placing Black girls at a heightened risk for absorbing and adopting negative stereotypical portrayals. According to Relational Cultural Theory (Jordan, 2018), identity and resilience are shaped by relationships with others, including media figures, influencers, and fictional characters. As such, media plays a relational role in the socialization of Black girls, shaping their self-perceptions and self-worth through repeated exposure to distorted representations of Black girlhood (Thompson et al., 2004).

Spencer's (1995) Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST) refers to this phenomenon as the self-other appraisal effect, the process by which marginalized youth internalize how they believe others view them (Tatum, 2017). For Black girls, consistent

exposure to stereotypes like Jezebel, Sapphire, Mammy, or the Strong Black Women (Collins, 2000) compromises identity development and contributes to deteriorating self-esteem.

Empirical studies support these claims. For instance, Opara et al. (2022) found that stereotype internalization leads to feelings of invisibility and powerlessness. Gadson and Lewis (2021) qualitatively examined the internalized costs to the psyche from stereotypes projected on Black girls. They described the psychological toll that negative stereotypes have on Black girls' self-esteem. Townsend et al.'s (2010) qualitative study links the Jezebel stereotype to identity formation in Black girls, concluding that even Black girls with a strong racial identity may struggle to reject the influence of stereotypical media portrayals. These studies offer valuable qualitative information. However, the next step is empirical research that quantifies the relationship between stereotyping internalization and protective factors that might foster resistance.

This study extended previous research by investigating whether critical consciousness, racial-ethnic identity, and perceived social support predicted self-esteem above and beyond the internalization of negative stereotypes, media pressures to conform to Eurocentric beauty ideals, and gendered racial microaggressions. Informed by Black Feminist Thought, which centers resistance through voice, community, and self-definition, this study foregrounded protective intrapersonal and interpersonal assets.

To assess the unique contribution of these protective constructs, it is essential to account for the impact of media use. Therefore, television and social media consumption were entered as control variables to isolate the predictive power of critical consciousness, racial-ethnic identity, and perceived social support. In doing so, this study offered a deeper understanding of how

Black girls can be supported in rejecting harmful narratives and embracing empowered, resilient identities.

Predictors of Self-Esteem in Black Girls

Critical Consciousness

Critical consciousness is essential for enhancing the self-esteem of Black girls because critical analysis is a necessary skill for deconstructing media portrayals of Black girls (Jean et al., 2022). Critical consciousness enhances awareness and resistance to factors that fuel oppression (Jacobs, 2016), encourages positive racial and gender identity (Buckley et al., 2005), provides the skills to cope with racial stress (Gale et al., 2023), and serves as a protective factor (Seider et al., 2021). Critical consciousness is the process by which individuals understand, analyze, and reject systems of oppression (Freire,1970). When critical consciousness is present, Black girls have the skills to analyze negative messages from media critically and question whether they accurately represent them (Jacobs, 2016). Rather than subconsciously internalizing controlling images, critical consciousness allows for informed decision-making based on an understanding of the historical experiences of African American women (Collins, 2000).

Given that adolescence is a critical period for development, critical consciousness provides Black girls with media literacy skills, autonomy, and a sense of collectivism (Baker-Bell, 2020; Muhammad & Haddix, 2016). Researchers report that adolescents with higher levels of critical consciousness reduce the impact of stereotypes portrayed in media (Seider et al., 2020). Additionally, critical consciousness may enhance self-esteem and protect against the internalization of negative stereotypical images (Patterson et al., 2022). Moreover, Jacobs (2016) found that Black girls with critical consciousness develop positive racial and gender identity, supporting the protective strength of consciousness and racial-ethnic identity. For example,

Jacobs (2016) noted that higher-level analytical skills can be developed by teaching Black girls to use a critical lens and analytical skills to unpack their experiences. Critical analysis and reflection protect against self-blame by recognizing historically and structurally rooted disparities (Collins, 2014). Ward (2000) notes that critical analysis builds healthy resistance through naming sexism, racism, and microaggressions, opposing hostile forces, and embracing uniqueness.

Furthermore, critical consciousness fosters empowerment through group identification, group consciousness, and self and collective efficacy (Holcomb-McCoy, 2023). Godfrey et al. (2019) found a positive impact on early adolescent depression, academic engagement, and competence when youth understand and react to inequality through critical consciousness. Diemer et al. (2016) noted that critical consciousness development enhanced the development of historically marginalized and oppressed youth.

Critical awareness provides context on where the need for domination and control originated, offering Black girls agency (Collins, 2000). The knowledge that stereotypical messages such as angry black women and hypersexualized black women are rooted in society's need to dehumanize black women so that they can remain immobilized reverses the automatic self-blame when Black girls are faced with discrimination (Collins, 2000), when Black girls understand the reasons behind their behavior, psychological well-being increases (Simpson, 2021).

Consciously changing one's environment can free Black girls from this affliction because they learn the skills to detach from messages pushed through in social media, television, and popular music, and attach to something positive and fulfilling (Lendzion, 2024). By questioning and analyzing, Black girls gain agency to decide what fits them best (Byrd & Anh, 2020). This is

what Collins' (2000) Black Feminist Thought refers to as a self-defined standpoint. Black girls can learn to critically counter-narrate, instead of accepting narratives forced out to maintain domination and control (Collins, 2000). By understanding critical consciousness, Black girls are given the ammunition to question the information from mass media, analyze it, and decide whether to integrate it (Lendzion, 2024). Developing critical consciousness skills is a way to teach Black girls to fight structures that uphold oppression (To et al., 2023). Therefore, the current study aims to quantify critical consciousness using a standardized scale and examine its predictive role in enhancing self-esteem.

Racial Ethnic Identity

Identity development is the hallmark of adolescence (Erikson, 1968; Steinhart & Morris, 2001). Erikson (1968) described this process as a period when youth seek meaning, direction, and purpose, ultimately forming a coherent sense of self, competence, and the adaptive skills necessary for adult functioning. Identity for Black adolescents is cultivated through racial and cultural life experiences (Tatum, 2017). Often, identity development for Black girls is marked with experiences of racialized and gendered biases, discrimination, and negative conflicting messages received from educators, the media, peers, and often parents. Therefore, understanding racial-ethnic identity development is essential to fully grasp Black girls' psychosocial development (Agger et al., 2022).

Racial ethnic identity is multifaceted and encompasses a shared history, a sense of pride and belonging, shared experiences, heritage, attitudes, beliefs, and a commitment to one's ethnic group (Phinney, 1992). Race is associated with skin color and belonging to a particular racial group, but ethnicity is defined as specific cultural beliefs and practices that a group of people shares. Furthermore, group affiliation and belonging, considered racial-ethnic identity, is a basic

human need (Tatum, 2017; Wubbolding, 2000) and a protective factor for Black youth (Murray et al., 2018). Phinney (1990) explained that Black adolescents with a diffused or foreclosed identity are at risk of accepting and internalizing negative stereotypes.

Racial-ethnic identity promotes self-esteem (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014). It provides a framework for exploring intersecting identities and navigating sociocultural influences (Agger et al., 2022). For Black girls, a strong racial-ethnic identity serves as a protective factor, helping them move beyond internalized negative stereotypes toward more affirming and accurate representations of their group, which in turn builds self-esteem (Collins, 2000). Active exploration of both racial and gender identity is therefore essential to supporting the development of Black girls' self-esteem. As emphasized in Collins' (2000) BFT, racial-ethnic identity becomes most salient when Black girls are asked to critically reflect on what it means to be both Black and female within supportive, affirming community spaces. In this way, perceived social support is crucial to racial-ethnic identity development and foundational to the development of critical literacy and resistance to harmful stereotypes.

Building upon the foundational role of racial-ethnic identity, a growing body of research affirms its function as a protective factor in developing a strong sense of self (Collins, 2000; Loyd et al., 2021; Mandara et al., 2009). Racial-ethnic identity has been identified as a cultural coping asset that shields Black youth from adverse mental health outcomes (Murray et al., 2018). Mandara et al. (2009) defined racial identity as a multidimensional construct involving "knowledge of one's racial group's history and cultural norms, engagement in shared group activities, beliefs about one's group's social status, and feelings of pride", each of which contributes to a positive racial self-concept (p.1661). For Black girls, racial identity development is a critical psychosocial task during adolescence (Phinney, 1989), one that equips them to

navigate racially charged experiences in ways that preserve self-esteem. Indeed, promoting positive racial identity may help counteract the harmful effects of explicit and implicit racism within school environments (Addington, 2021), while also enhancing self-esteem (Grimes et al., 2013). These findings underscore the importance of supporting racial-ethnic identity to foster resilience, cultural affirmation, and psychological well-being among Black girls. Therefore, the current study aims to quantify perceived racial-ethnic identity using a standardized scale and examine its predictive role in enhancing self-esteem.

Perceived Social Support

In addition to racial-ethnic identity, perceived social support emerges as a vital sociocultural asset that protects and enhances self-esteem in Black girls. While racial-ethnic identity provides a framework for internal validation and group pride, perceived social support addresses the relational and environmental contexts in which Black girls grow and navigate adversity. Perceived social support is conceptualized as the appraisal of adequate quality support from social networks in a time of need, which may include family, friends, educators, counselors, mentors, or significant others (Garbardo-Martins et al., 2017). Under conditions of racial stress, gendered discrimination, and identity development, perceived social support has been found to shape self-esteem in Black girls. First, Rosenberg (1965) identified perceived social support as a core component of self-esteem, while Green (1990) emphasized communal and familial validation in the development of self-esteem in Black women. Similarly, Gibson et al.'s (2007) quantitative study found that support from family and friends reduced depressive symptoms among Black girls exposed to violence. Building on this, Smith-Bynum et al. (2014) showed that perceived support buffered the effects of internalized racism on self-esteem in Black girls. Bryant-Davis et al. (2015) extended this relationship to trauma and resilience, highlighting

support as a mediator between trauma and mental health outcomes. Taylor et al. (2015) found that perceived social support predicted lower levels of depression and anxiety in African American adolescents. Rueger et al. (2016) further clarified that it is youth's personal interpretation of emotional, instrumental, and affirmational support that influences mental health outcomes. More recently, Johnson et al. (2022), in their study on Black girls, emphasized that gendered racial socialization is interpreted through the lens of support, enhancing self-esteem in Black girls. Middleton & Owens (2023) concluded that perceived social support not only predicted self-esteem but also served as a buffer against emotional distress. These studies collectively affirm that perceived social support is a dynamically culturally embedded source of empowerment for Black girls. Therefore, the current study aims to quantify perceived social support using a standardized scale and examine its predictive role in enhancing self-esteem.

Rationale for the Current Study

The current research study draws from Black Feminist Thought to offer a holistic strength-based approach to understanding Black girls' self-esteem. Prior studies have used qualitative designs and cultural analysis to richly explore the lived experiences of the challenges that Black girls face in navigating stereotypical media portrayals and gendered racial microaggressions. What is missing is evidence-based insights for school counselors, mental health professionals, and educators aiming to disrupt internalized oppression and foster resilience in Black girls. The current study quantifies how internalized negative stereotypes affect distinct aspects of self-esteem while simultaneously identifying critical consciousness, racial-ethnic identity, and perceived social support as protective factors that could buffer against these harmful experiences. By integrating BFT into a quantitative framework, this research offers an actionable roadmap for supporting the holistic development and empowerment of Black girls.

Purpose of the Study

Self-esteem is one of the most critical psychological constructs for adolescent mental health and a psychological buffer from damaging environmental factors (Mandara et al., 2009). Using the framework of BFT, I explored the contributions of critical consciousness, racial-ethnic identity, and perceived social support to self-esteem in Black girls above and beyond the internalization of negative stereotypes, media pressures to conform, and racial and gender microaggressions. The research question guiding this study is: Does critical consciousness, racial-ethnic identity, and perceived social support predict self-esteem in Black girls above and beyond internalized negative stereotypes, internalized pressures from the media to conform to ideal standards, and the frequency and stress of gendered racial microaggressions?

Overview of the Study

This study is a cross-sectional, correlational design utilizing a hierarchical multiple regression analysis. Hierarchical multiple regressions examine theory-based hypotheses (Cohen & Cohen, 1983). I used convenience and snowball sampling to recruit Black girls who have access to media to participate in the study. I sought to model the core tenets of BFT by determining if critical consciousness, racial-ethnic identity, and perceived social support predicted self-esteem above and beyond internalized negative stereotypes and internalized pressures from the media to conform to ideal standards while controlling for social media and television use. Using a combination of in-person and electronic data collection procedures, Black girls ages 11 to 17 were first invited to complete a demographic survey to determine whether they met the inclusion criteria to participate in this study. The inclusion criteria included age, grade, gender, racial identity, and access to media.

Informed by research such as King (2015), which highlights the protective influence of religion in Black girls' lives, a demographic survey was administered to gather data on protective and risk factors. Participants responded to questions regarding religious orientation, involvement in extracurricular activities, religious activities, participation in honors classes, and risk-related behaviors such as time watching television and using social media. Next, Black girls were invited to complete the following instruments by the key variables under study: (a) The Modern Jezebel Study (Townsend et al., 2010) to measure the internalization of negative stereotypes, (b) The Taylor Self-esteem Inventory (Jones et al., 1996) to measure self-esteem rewards and costs Black girls distribute to themselves, (c) The Multidimensional Media Influence Scale (Harrison, 2009) to measure pressures to emulate ideal standards promoted in the media, (d) The Gendered Racial Microaggression Scale (Lewis & Neville, 2015) to measure the frequency and stress level of microaggression events experienced by Black girls, (e) The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (Phinney, 1992) assesses Black girls' sense of affirmation, belonging, and commitment to their race and/or ethnicity. (f) The Short Critical Consciousness Scale (Diemer et al., 2017) measures Black girls' critical analysis of socioeconomic, racial/ethnic, and gendered inequalities, and (g) The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support Scale (Zimmet et al., 1988) was used to assess Black girls' perception of social support from family, friends, and significant others. These instruments provided a comprehensive approach to understanding the internal, intrapersonal, and societal factors that shape self-esteem among Black girls (Agger, 2022).

Significance of The Study

Critical theories suggest an asset-based approach focusing on Black girls' strength, resilience, and brilliance (Mayes & Byrd, 2021). This research highlighted essential interpersonal and intrapersonal skills such as racial-ethnic identity, perceived social support, and

critical consciousness that protect Black girls' self-esteem. Through this study, I uncovered that critical consciousness, racial-ethnic identity, and perceived social support predict rewards distributed to self, enhancing self-esteem, and costs distributed to self-esteem, eroding self-esteem. Additionally, I uncovered that perceived social support is the most salient unique predictor of rewards to self, enhancing self-esteem, and the internalization of negative stereotypes is the most salient predictor of costs distributed to self, eroding self-esteem in Black girls. The current study advances the conversation beyond deficit-based narratives toward empowerment and healing. Findings from the current research can inform school counselors, mental health professionals, parents, and educators in identifying strategies that counter internalized stereotypes and foster self-esteem (McNally, 2023). By gaining a deeper understanding of what affirms Black girls' self-esteem beyond internalized negative stereotypes, media-driven beauty standards, and gendered racial microaggressions, I can offer practical guidance for school counseling interventions, parenting practices, and inclusive educational policy. Rooted in Black Feminist Thought, the current study reframes Black girls as influential individuals shaped by sociocultural systems. This study is significant because it initiates critical healing dialogue for Black girls. By doing so, systemic inequities will no longer have a stronghold on Black girls (ASCA, 2021).

Assumptions

This study explored self-reported factors that predict self-esteem in Black girls. Therefore, one assumption is that Black girls will understand the survey items and offer an honest account of their perceptions and experiences. Additionally, self-esteem may have different meanings for different ethnicities. Thus, another assumption is the adoption of the universal sense of self-esteem, and the selected conceptualization of self-esteem has construct

equivalence for Black girls. Furthermore, the variables studied are complex, multifaceted constructs. It is assumed that the available instruments accurately measure the constructs of interest.

Delimitations

This study only utilized participants residing in southeast Georgia, impacting the ability to generalize the findings. Variables beyond this study's scope are parental demographics (e.g., education level and socioeconomic status). This is a delimitation because prior research suggests these factors may impact the self-esteem of Black girls. Additionally, the population for this study will be limited to Black early adolescent girls between the ages of 11 and 17. An additional assumption is that Black girls in this study engage in media consumption, which may influence the quantity and type of negative messages presented to Black girls through media. Additionally, data collection occurred in the social climate following the first Black woman candidate in the United States not being elected as president, which influenced the prevalence of stereotypical messages in the media, Black girls' self-esteem levels, and the willingness of parents to give consent for their daughters to participate in this study.

Operationalization of Definitions

Self-esteem refers to one's overall sense of self-worth or personal value (Rosenberg, 1971). Holistically, self-esteem is defined as living consciously, having self-acceptance, self-responsibility, self-assertiveness, living purposefully, and having personal integrity. This study used the Taylor Self-Esteem Inventory as the primary measure of self-esteem in Black girls because, unlike traditional unidimensional self-esteem instruments, TSEI is designed to capture the culturally nuanced experiences of Black adolescents. The inventory is conceptualized as a balance between two dimensions: rewards distributed to self and costs distributed to self.

Rewards are positive evaluations, affirmations, and acknowledgements (e.g., I am proud of the kind of person I am). In contrast, costs reflect internalized criticism, self-blame, or devaluation (e.g., I feel like I always mess things up). This study uses the rewards and costs subscales to assess self-esteem in Black girls because it accounts for the dual realities they often navigate, experiencing personal pride while simultaneously confronting devaluation (Jones et al., 1996).

Internalized Negative Stereotypes *are* deeply structural, shaped by the repeated exposure to intersecting forms of oppression, including racism, sexism, and classism (Crenshaw, 1991; hooks, 1994). According to Bandura's Social Learning (1977), internalized behaviors and beliefs start with observing others in influential roles (e.g., parents, teachers, and media figures). For Black girls, internalization involves the adoption of negative stereotypes and societal messages about Blackness and femininity. Internalizing the negative beliefs of others that are informed by biases can diminish the self-esteem of Black girls (Opera et al., 2021). The Jezebel trope is one stereotype that continues to shape Black girls' self-concept and identity by continuing to frame Black girls as hypersexual and objects of desire. The internalization of negative stereotypes was evaluated using scores from the Modern Jezebel Scale (MJS). The MJS was designed to assess Black girls' identification with stereotypes constructed about Black girls/women (Townsend et al., 2010).

Jezebel is defined as a primitive sex object, one that is savage and animal-like with uncontrollable sexual needs. The Jezebel is depicted as manipulative, seductive, and highly sexual (Townsend et al., 2010). This stereotype was scripted for Black women to overshow and justify the dehumanizing and degrading sexual exploitation of their bodies (Townsend et al., 2010).

Internalized Media Influence and Pressure is the awareness, pressures, and comparisons influencing human thought, affect, and action (Bandura, 2001). Mass media include television, radio, magazines, and digital media. The adoption of media's publicized ideals and the pressure to emulate what is seen in the media impact Black girls' psychosocial development. Furthermore, the Media is a source of sociocultural knowledge. The most prevalent portrayals of Black girls in the media depict them as uneducated, opportunistic, hypersexual, and unapproachable (Brown, 2013). These representations of Black girls can be seen in popular reality television shows like Love and Hip Hope and Bad Girls Club, which normalize conflict, aggression, and oversexualization (Gordon, 2008). Young Black girls internalize these representations as a social schema that informs self-perception, thus hurting Black girls' mental well-being (Jerald, 2017). The internalization of media pressures to conform was assessed using the Multidimensional Media Influence Scale, which focused on media awareness, internalization, and pressure (Cusumano & Thompson, 2000).

Gendered Racial Microaggression is defined as the subtle and everyday verbal, behavioral, and environmental expressions of oppression (Lewis & Neville, 2015). Black girls experience gendered and racial microaggressions through their interactions with the environment (e.g., educators, police officers, community, and policy). Implicit biases shape views of Black girls and manifest in mistreatment laden with microaggressions, discrimination, hyper-surveillance, assumption of criminality, adultification, and intellectual inferiority (Baker-Bell, 2020). The frequency (how often) and stress (feeling upset, bothered, offended, and annoyed) of internalized gendered racial microaggressions will be measured using the Lewis and Neville (2015) Gendered Racial Microaggression Scale (GRMS) total frequency and stress scores. The GRMS also assesses how frequently, and the stress assigned to assumptions of beauty and sexual

objectification, silencing and marginalization, the assumption of strength, and the perception that Black girls are angry.

Critical Consciousness is defined as the cognitive process by which individuals learn to understand, analyze, and reject systems of oppression (Freire, 1970). Critical consciousness situates Black girls as agents who can create change by critically examining how they are positioned, degraded, and ignored in society (Jacobs, 2016). Diemer et al. (2017) Short Critical Consciousness scale (SCCS) used in this study evaluated black girls' critical reflection – the critical analysis of socioeconomic, racial-ethnic, and gendered inequalities; critical motivation – the perceived ability and commitment to enact social change; and critical action – the participation in social and political action to change perceived inequalities.

Perceived Social Support is defined as a multifaceted construct that includes the perception of social network adequacy, including friends, family, and significant others (Canty-Mitchel & Zimmet, 2000). A broad web of support can help Black girls navigate challenges, increase self-esteem, and buffer against the negative impact of microaggressions (Griffeth et al., 2022; Middleton & Owens, 2023). This study used the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) to assess perceptions of adequate social support from family, friends, and significant others (Zimmett et al., 1988).

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter briefly introduces the Bringing Out the Brilliance in Black Girls dissertation, which is grounded in Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000) and highlights the sociocultural factors (e.g., internalized negative stereotypes perpetuated in the media and interactions with society as a whole, including educators) that Black girls have to navigate daily but flipping from a deficit lens, focuses on how strength-based approaches centering nurturing Black girls'

interpersonal and intrapersonal assets (e.g., self-esteem, critical consciousness, racial-ethnic identity, and perceived social support) can serve to counter negative messages affecting Black girls. Chapter 2 is a review of the literature examining the systemic inequities that contribute to increased levels of anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation in Black girls (CDC, 2023). It also explores the critical role of self-esteem in promoting and maintaining psychological health. It reviews the empirical research on critical consciousness, racial-ethnic identity, perceived social support, and sociocultural variables that enhance self-esteem in Black girls. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology used in the study, Bringing Out the Brilliance in Black Girls, including the research design, instrumentation, participants' demographics, and data collection and analysis procedures. Chapter 4 includes the cross-sectional, correlational design results, using two hierarchical multiple regressions. This chapter details descriptive statistics, bivariate correlations, and the outcome results of the three regression models for each hierarchical regression used to examine the predictors of self-esteem. Chapter 5 discusses preliminary and primary findings, the results within the broader literature, and addresses the study's contributions, limitations, and implications for counselors, school counselors, counselor educators, research, practice, and policy.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter provides a review of the literature examining the sociocultural and systemic factors that contribute to the mental health crisis facing Black girls in the United States. Using Collins' (2000) Black Feminist Thought (BFT) as a lens, this chapter explores how internalized stereotypes, disseminated through the media, erode Black girls' self-esteem. This chapter begins with the mental health disparities Black girls face, highlighting the link to decreased self-esteem. Then the internalization of negative stereotypes is situated in historical and media contexts. Finally, a review of the literature on self-esteem in Black girls and a presentation of the strength-based theoretical framework guided by BFT that introduces three core protective variables, critical consciousness, racial-ethnic identity, and perceived social support, as essential to reclaiming self-worth and affirming the brilliance of Black girls.

The Mental Health Crisis of Black Girls

On the cover of Time Magazine, The National Black Women's Justice Institute declared, "Suicide among black girls is a hidden mental health crisis" (Alessandrini, 2021, p.1). Although Black girls represent 13% of the U.S. population, they account for nearly 30% of suicide deaths (CDC, 2019). A study in Pediatrics (HHS, 2019) found that Black girls are twice as likely to die by suicide, often amid elevated experiences of anxiety, depression, incarceration, and a lack of affirming identity development (Lindsey et al., 2019). These disparities are not incidental but outcomes of persistent racial discrimination and structural oppression. Brooks et al. (2019)

demonstrated that increased exposure to racial discrimination is a significant predictor of anxiety, depression, and poor psychosocial adjustment among Black girls.

These mental health outcomes are deeply entangled with the effects of structural racism and cultural devaluation (Johnson, 2022). Manifesting as self-doubt, hopelessness, and internalized oppression, these dynamics take a direct toll on Black girls' self-esteem. Collins (2000) explains that negative stereotypes of Black women portrayed in the media do not represent reality, but relatively obscure power relations and justify inequality. These stereotypes not only shape how society views Black girls, but more critically, how Black girls come to view themselves. Over time, the repeated exposure and cognitive absorption of these negative stereotypes chip away at self-worth, contributing to a measurable decline in self-esteem (Johnsson, 2022).

According to BFT, the root of these emotional, social, and psychological harms lies in the internalization of negative stereotypes. When Black girls absorb these narratives, they do not simply believe a lie about themselves; they embody the cumulative effect of systemic oppression disguised as cultural norms. (Collins, 2000; Johnson, 2022).

The Internalization of Negative Stereotypes

Internalization is a powerful tool because it is not recognizable from the outer appearance; it is a cognition. hooks (2003) explained that cognitive endorsement of unworthiness is the power behind systemic issues. The devaluation of Black women in America has historically impacted Black girls' self-esteem (Aston et al., 2017). Cultivation theory and social cognitive theory are two theories that explain how messages internalized from the media and society can be detrimental to the development of people of color. First, cultivation theory (Gerber, 1998) posits that regular exposure to negative messages via television will lead viewers

to adopt the social attitudes aligned with the content. Second, social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2001) asserts that adolescents' beliefs and behavior are informed by how they conceptualize and relate to the media content. Exposure to discriminatory messages in the mass media, a source of sociocultural knowledge, shapes Black girls' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (Adams-Boss & Bentley-Edwards, 2021; Muhammad & McArthur, 2015). Drawing on this and the awareness that research suggests that Black girls spend a minimum of 8 hours a day engaging with some form of media content (Jean et al., 2022; Ward & Grover, 2010), this study argues that Black girls' sense of worthiness/self-esteem is informed by media content (Ward, 2017).

Cultural Socialization

Mass media play a dominant role in cultural socialization, serving as a dominant vehicle for the transmission of negative stereotypes about Black girls. Among the most persistent are the Sapphire (loud, angry, and combative), Jezebel (hypersexual and seductive), and Mammy (self-sacrificing and nurturing others) archetypes, which originated during slavery to justify dehumanization, and exploitation of Black women (Epstein et al., 2017; Jerald et al., 2017). These images have been repackaged into modern portrayals across reality television, social media, music videos, and advertising.

Contemporary iterations such as Gold Digger, Baby Mama, Ratchet Woman, Angry Black Woman, and Black Barbie perpetuate the same demeaning narratives under new names (Collins, 2000; Liao et al., 2020; Porter & Byrd, 2021). These depictions are not harmless entertainment; they shape cultural consciousness (Thompson et al., 2004). For example, Ward and Carlson (2013) found that adolescent viewers of reality television normalized socially aggressive behaviors. Programs like Love & Hip Hop, Basketball Wives, and Baddies repeatedly showcase distorted portrayals of Black womanhood, reinforcing the beliefs that these stereotypes

reflect truth (Adams-Bass, 2017). Over time, Black girls, who are among the most engaged media consumers, may begin to internalize these messages, perceiving them as reflections of their own identities (Apugo, 2020; Esposito & Edwards, 2017; Muhammad & McArthur, 2015; Wallace et al., 2011).

This internalization process is particularly dangerous when Blak girls are not provided the tools to critically analyze, reject, or reframe the narratives imposed upon them. A national study of 1,200 women found that media portrayals of Black women most commonly depict them as uneducated, opportunistic, hypersexual, and unapproachable (Walton, 2013). Repeated exposure to such narratives erodes Black girls' self-esteem (English et al., 2020; Williams-Butler et al., 2022). Thus, the historical and ongoing transmission of these stereotypes provides the foundation for this research, which seeks to examine how protective factors like critical consciousness, racial-ethnic identity, and perceived social support may interrupt this cycle of internalized oppression and bolster self-esteem.

Historical Context and Herstory

The dominant paradigms of Black women that originated during slavery have persisted into the present-day culture, painting Black females as "hypersexual, boisterous, aggressive, and unscrupulous" (Epstein et al., 2017, p.6). Historical tropes falsely depicting the behavior and attitudes of Black women and girls reflect and perpetuate racial and gender biases (Wallace et al., 2011). hooks' (2003) argument that oppression cannot exist without the control of the mind illustrates the deep connection between the historical construction and perpetuation of negative stereotypes about Black girls.

Stereotypes of Black Women

The stereotype “Sapphire” became popular in the all-white cast/black face Amos and Andy radio show, which aired from 1928 to 1960, and later became a syndicated television show, which aired from 1928 to 1960 (Pilgram, 2023). The stereotype Sapphire depicts Black women and girls as emasculating, loud, aggressive, angry, stubborn, and unfeminine (Pilgram, 2023). The Jezabel trope can be traced back as early as 1600 and continued through to slavery, and through Jim Crow, as well as can be seen in present-day music videos (Pilgram, 2023). The Jezebel stereotype is a hypersexualized, seductive, Black woman or girl who exploits men's weaknesses (Townsend et al., 2010). The “Mammy,” on the other hand, was depicted as a dominant cultural image of Black women during slavery to the 1950s (Pilgram, 2023, p. 11), and can be seen in grocery stores on pancake boxes and bottles of syrup. The Mammy was portrayed as a self-sacrificing, nurturing, loving giver who always considered others’ needs ahead of hers (Epstein et al., 2017). Finally, the Strong Black Woman stereotype emerged during the civil rights movement, highlighting the strength and resilience of Black women while suppressing and minimizing their emotional needs.

Although these images are historical stereotypes, the present-day consequences include blind endorsement and the shaping of Black girls’ identity, as well as fueling implicit biases that manifest in how educators, lawmakers, and peers perceive Black girls (Jerald et al., 2017; Townsend et al., 2010). Thus, these stereotypes are not relics of the past; they actively shape how Black girls’ self-views (Blake et al., 2011), the invalidation of their emotions, the assumption of incompetence, and the stifling of their development. For example, Higginbottom (1992) notes that racialized social constructions are inevitable for Black girls as they begin to internalize their social positions in society through their experiences with the mass media. These findings affirm

that both mass media and educational systems are primary sites where Black girls internalize negative stereotypes.

The Role of Mass Media in Perpetuating Stereotypes

The Jezebel stereotype continues to thrive in modern media through the hypersexualized portrayals of Black women in music videos and by social media influencers who perpetuate unattainable beauty ideals centered on desirability and objectification (Stephens & Few, 2007). The Mammy stereotype endures in popular cinema through characters like Madea, who embody self-sacrificing nurturance and comedic servitude, reinforcing expectations of emotional labor without reciprocity (West, 2008). Reality television frequently promotes the Sapphire archetype, portraying Black women as combative, loud, and irrational traits normalized and celebrated in shows such as Basketball Wives and Love & Hip Hop (Adams-Bass et al., 2014. Meanwhile, the "Strong Black Woman" trope is embedded in prime-time television characters like Olivia Pope in Scandal and Annalise Keating in How to Get Away with Murder, who are depicted as emotionally stoic and hyper-competent, yet isolated and emotionally burdened (Harris-Perry, 2014).

Collectively, these representations reinforce negative stereotypes that shape how society views Black women and inform the internalized beliefs of Black girls (Pilgram, 2008). These portrayals are not just fictional narratives; they manifest in the public discourse surrounding prominent Black women (Pilgram, 2008). For example, in 2008, Michelle Obama was framed by the media as angry and threatening, reinforcing the Sapphire trope (Pilgram, 2008). The Mammy image reemerged in advertising through figures like the Pine-Sol Lady (2018), representing the domestic, cheerful caretaker. Serena Williams was labeled angry and aggressive for expressing justified frustration during a tennis match, once again invoking the Sapphire stereotype.

Meanwhile, Beyoncé (2023) and Vice President Kamala Harris (2024) have both been described through the lens of the Jezebel stereotype (Lempinen, 2024). These examples illustrate how historical stereotypes are sustained in the media, reinforcing negative messages that shape societal perceptions of Black womanhood. For Black girls, these portrayals are internalized, shaping identity development, self-worth, and navigating educational and social spaces (Townsend et al., 2010). Thus, examining the impact of these stereotypes is central to this study's focus on Black girls' self-esteem and the protective factors that can interrupt this cycle.

Negative Outcomes Associated with Stereotypes in the Mass Media

Black girls' schooling experiences are filled with discrimination, inequitable access to advanced course work and leadership opportunities, disproportionate suspension rates, adultification bias, zero tolerance school discipline, hyper-regulation, aesthetic trauma, curriculum erasure, stereotypes, microaggressions, surveillance, and confinement (Apugo et al., 2021).

Educational Experiences and Academic Participation. Beverly Daniel Tatum (1997) provides a developmental perspective on this process in her work "Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?" Drawing on William Cross's Nigrescence Model, Tatum emphasizes that adolescence is a key stage in racial identity development, a period during which youth begin to make sense of the racial messages they have absorbed and actively seek out affirming understandings of Blackness. For Black girls, this process can be complicated by the constant barrage of negative stereotypes that define Black femininity in both overt and subtle ways. Tatum (1997) explains that when affirming messages about racial identity are absent, internalized oppression can emerge, causing Black girls to adopt dominant narratives that devalue their racial group and, by extension, themselves.

In addition to cultural narratives, the criminalization of Black girlhood through frequent exposure to police brutality and over-policing further contributes to harmful internalization. Incidents such as the violent arrest of a Black female student in a South Carolina classroom or the killing of Aiyana Stanley-Jones reflect a broader societal narrative: that Black girls are less innocent and more dangerous. Research on adultification bias (Epstein, Blake, & González, 2017) confirms that Black girls are often perceived as older and more culpable than their white peers, which influences how they are disciplined in schools and treated by authority figures. Morris (2016) argues that these messages push out Black girls and shape their sense of worthiness, intrapersonal relationships, and motivation to engage in academic environments.

Identity Formation. Although reasonably new terms, adultification bias and hypersexualization are two experiences that have impacted the mental health of Black girls through negative messages. First, adultification bias refers to a process of socialization whereby adults learn to believe that Black girls are naturally more adult-like, have adult-like intentions, and can handle adult-like responsibilities, reducing or removing the protective factor of taking childhood and immaturity into consideration when evaluating behavior (Epstein et al., 2017). Black girls are presumed to be willfully engaging in behaviors expected of Black women and thereby robbed of their childhood (Epstein et al., 2017). Often, adultification bias occurs as a form of racial prejudice that manifests from the belief that Black girls need less nurturing, less protection, less support, and less comfort, which drives society to hold Black girls to adult-like standards (Epstein et al., 2017).

Adultification Bias. Several studies show the significance of adultification bias's impact on Black girls' self-esteem. For example, Greene et al. (2006) found a meaningful relationship between decreased self-esteem in Black girls and perceived adult discrimination. Drown (2022)

reported that adultification bias in school systems leads to an increase in punishment, alienation, and sexualization of Black girls or cultural stereotypes. Gadson and Lewis (2021) connected daily experiences of subtle racial microaggressions (e.g., slights and insults) experienced by Black girls as a spillover from adultification bias, which takes on the form of objectification through devaluation, silencing due to severe discipline, and assumptions of unintelligence. Furthermore, these microaggressions are informed by projected stereotypes (e.g., angry, ghetto, or overly sexual), as noted above.

Moreover, Curtis et al. (2022) linked adultification bias to an increase in sexual violence against Black girls. In their study, they reported that sexual violations are excused because Black girls were labeled "fast-tailed" (p.325). This belief has led to internalization and self-blame when sexually victimized. Moreover, the authors explained that labeling Black girls "fast-tailed" creates an assumption that there is no presumption of innocence but instead, a conclusion that somehow Black girls' enticed their perpetrator, which silences Black girls' voices. Curtis et al. (2022) concluded that adultification bias has led to "pervasive body-shaming, slut-shaming, and victim blaming" (p.339). The interruption of development by constant threats of gender and sexual violence and the lack of protection from adultification bias serve to decrease the self-worth in Black girls, which also diminishes self-esteem (Williams-Butler et al., 2022).

Hypersexualization is the belief that Black girls are naturally and overly sexual, resulting in a rise in sexual assault (Blake & Epstein, 2023). Hypersexualization is understood as the objectification of Black women whereby they are perceived as instruments to be used for the pleasure of others (Anderson et al., 2018). The objectification of Black female bodies is a form of control (Apugo et al., 2020). Furthermore, there is a direct link between the present-day hypersexualized stereotype (i.e., hoochie, ho, THOT) and yesterday's stereotype, the Jezebel

(Apugo et al., 2022). The Jezebel stereotype was created during slavery as an alluring and seductive Black woman who enjoyed meeting the sexual needs of enslavers (Jewell, 1993). This narrative was designed to excuse raping Black women and girls for the sole purpose of making more enslaved people. However, the belief that Black women and girls are hypersexual has permeated throughout mainstream society through media (Anderson et al., 2018). For example, an analysis of 120 music videos (Turner, 2011) found that Black women were presented in provocative clothing compared to other characters in the video.

Furthermore, Anderson et al. (2018) found that hypersexuality is the underlying message in rap music videos with an overemphasis on Black women's physical appearances (e.g., breasts and buttocks). The endorsement of this narrative is not only damaging to the self-esteem of Black girls but also puts them at a heightened risk for victimization and exploitation (Frisby & Aubrey, 2012; Muhammad & McArthur, 2015). Moreover, Black girls who are susceptible to an outsider's perception see themselves as objects, with the appearance of their bodies being their value of worth, thus impacting their self-esteem (Cheeseborough et al., 2020). Ward (2016) found that when presented with Black characters on television and in music videos, the participants reported identifying with those characters regardless of whether they were depicted positively or negatively. This research supports the fact that Black girls' self-definition is based on media depictions and portrayals (Ward, 2016).

Emotional Expression. Black girls' emotional stability and academic motivation are heavily influenced by teachers, school counselors, parents, and peers. Sanders et al. (2022) suggested that interactions with teachers, inept and punitive practices, peers at school, and aggressive social norms predict aggressive behaviors in elementary and middle school students. Black girls' interactions with teachers are laden with microaggressions, discrimination, hyper-

surveillance, assumption of criminality, adultification, and an assumption of intellectual inferiority (ASCA, 2022; Baker-Bell, 2020; Jacobs, 2016; Lloyd et al., 2021). Black girls internalize these experiences, leading to emotional instability, self-doubt, and diminished self-esteem (Stephens & Phillips, 2003).

Physical Appearance. Black girls' self-esteem is shaped by the messages they receive about their physical appearance, primarily through mass media, which often perpetuates Eurocentric beauty standards as the norm (Jean et al., 2022). Media outlets like music videos, social media platforms, and television frequently promote narrow ideals of attractiveness, emphasizing lighter skin tones, long straight hair, thin body types, and hypersexualized femininity (Apugo, 2020). These portrayals are not incidental; they are strategically curated and reinforced by media industries that often select artists and influencers based on how closely they align with dominant beauty norms and how willing they are to showcase their bodies in ways that reinforce the Jezebel stereotype (Apugo, 2020; Collins, 2000).

Popular Black women artists like Megan Thee Stallion and Nicki Minaj are routinely praised and commercialized for performances that highlight sexual confidence and body exposure, which are traits rooted in longstanding stereotypes that equate Black womanhood with hypersexuality (Durham, 2012; Martin Martinez, 2020; Rajah, 2022). While these artists may be reclaiming their power in some ways, their market success is also contingent upon their compliance with exploitative visual standards, sending mixed messages to Black girls who look to them for inspiration. As Ward (2016) notes, Black girls often identify with these media figures, even when the portrayals are problematic, internalizing the belief that beauty and value are contingent upon sexual appeal and Eurocentric aesthetics. This pressure extends into everyday life. For many Black girls, wearing natural hairstyles such as afros, locs, or braids is

seen as unprofessional or unattractive in school and work settings (Rosette & Dumas, 2020). Instead, they may feel compelled to wear straight weaves, wigs, or chemically relax their hair to be accepted or to fit in, reinforcing a message that their natural appearance is inadequate (Smith & Hambrick, 2022). These pressures contribute to a fragmented self-concept, in which cultural identity and personal worth feel in conflict.

The psychological toll of these expectations is significant. Internalized media messaging about beauty has been linked to body dissatisfaction, shame, and lower self-esteem among Black girls (Frisby & Aubrey, 2012; English et al., 2020). Furthermore, the normalization of hypersexualized and appearance-based representations of Black women fosters stereotype endorsement, which can result in self-blame, identity confusion, and the erosion of authentic self-expression (Jerald et al., 2017). According to BFT (Collins, 2000), building self-esteem in Black girls through consciousness-raising, self-evaluation, and a supportive community can help Black girls counteract negative messages perpetuated through mass media. Thus, using BFT as a theoretical guide, this dissertation explored the predictive power of critical consciousness, racial-ethnic identity, and perceived social support above and beyond the internalization of negative stereotypes.

The Erosion of Self-Esteem

Stereotypical portrayals have an impact on the self-esteem of Black girls (Stanton et al., 2017). Prior research suggests that enhancing cognitive self-appraisal buffers against the impact of exposure to stereotypical media images (Umana-Taylor, 2016). Therefore, over time, the cumulative effect of these messages intersects and results in the internalization of limiting beliefs about what it means to be a Black girl. These beliefs affect self-esteem, academic identity, sense of belonging, and long-term educational outcomes (Cokley et al., 2014). Nevertheless, as Tatum

(1997) and Black Feminist scholars such as Collins (2000) and hooks (1994) emphasize, Black girls are not passive recipients of oppression. They possess the capacity for resistance, critical consciousness, and redefinition. Affirming cultural spaces, racial pride, and exposure to counter-narratives play a crucial role in interrupting internalization and fostering empowered identities.

In the following section, I detail the key tenets of BFT and explain how they inform the selected variables under study. Finally, I connect the current research on the importance of critical consciousness, racial-ethnic identity, and perceived social support to building self-esteem in Black girls.

Reclaiming Worth: Strengthening the Self-Esteem in Black Girls

Rejecting Negative Stereotypes

Challenging negative stereotypes and finding a voice to express a collective, self-defined Black standpoint is a way to disrupt and empower Black girls (Collins, 2000). Critical theories suggest an asset-based approach to illuminate Black girls' strength, resilience, and brilliance (Porter & Byrd, 2021). Thus, it is vital that a strength-based examination of factors (e.g., critical consciousness, racial-ethnic identity development, and perceived social support) that can build Black girls' self-esteem despite negative experiences is needed (Stevens, 1999). Negative stereotypes can be disrupted through knowledge, consciousness, and empowerment (Collins, 1999).

Flipping the Script

Black female scholars (e.g., Audre Lord, Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, Kimberle Crenshaw, and many more) have changed the narrative by transforming scholarship on Black female experiences to reflect the unique struggles of Black women and girls, thereby turning negative connotations created to marginalize Black women and girls into something significant

and meaningful for Black women and girls (Taylor, 1998). Black women have created significance. For example, although some hip-hop culture devalues Black women through lyrics, name-calling, and music videos, Black female lyricists (e.g., Queen Latifah and Rhapsody) have used hip-hop to empower Black women and girls (Payne, 2020). Additionally, Ava DuVernay and Regina King have used television and cinema as a space to highlight the actual lived experiences of Black women and girls, countering cinematic and prime-time television shows that depict Black women as angry, gold diggers, controlling, and overly sexual (Cox & Ward, 2019). Through their stories in film and television, these women have illuminated shadowed histories, offering Black girls counternarratives to negative stereotypes (King, 2015; Muhammad et al., 2015; Toquet, 2022).

Empowered Cultural Socialization

Hall et al. (2012) reported that Black girls with cultural orientation (i.e., racial-ethnic identity) can counter media stereotypes, which helps them maintain a positive identity. Gordon (2008) found that exposure to and identification with Black women can contribute to Black girls' self-esteem. Moreover, Ward (2004) explained that more robust identification with Black women in and outside the media protects against controlling images and enhances Black girls' self-esteem. This further demonstrates the power that cultivating critical consciousness, racial-ethnic identity, and social support can have on the self-esteem of Black girls (King, 2015; Toquet, 2022).

Centering Self-Worth: Why Self-Esteem Matters for Black Girls

Distinguishing Self-Esteem from Related Constructs

Before discussing the importance of self-esteem in Black girls, differentiating self-esteem from related constructs is necessary. Self-efficacy is task-specific; it directly refers to an

individual's belief in their ability to execute specific tasks (Bong & Clark, 1999). For example, a Black girl might feel confident in her abilities academically but struggle with feelings of self-worth due to societal stereotypes. Self-concept, on the other hand, is a comprehensive self-perception that encompasses various identities and roles. Self-concept is described as what a person believes about their skills, personality, abilities and social roles one has about themselves. Self-concept is not self-esteem, but self-esteem is a component of self-concept. Self-concept includes hobbies, habits, and areas of weakness (McLeod, 2008). Confidence is often mistaken for self-esteem. Confidence is trusting one's ability. For example, a talented Black athlete might have confidence in her ability as an athlete but struggle with low self-esteem because of societal messages of harboring negative feelings about herself (Ackerman, 2024). Self-esteem is the outcome variable for this study because the focus is on fostering a positive overall sense of self-worth despite societal messages that say the opposite. This includes rejecting societal stereotypes, promoting positive racial-ethnic identities, and leaning into supportive environments that affirm black girls' values and capabilities.

Outcomes Associated with Low v. High Self-Esteem in Black Girls

Accordingly, Orenstein's (2000) School Girls project posits that Black girls face a significant reduction in self-worth because of the intersection of race, gender, and often sexuality. As a result, an inevitable sense of failure renders an inability to take risks. Similarly, girls with low self-esteem overcompensate, seek to align themselves with the dominant culture, and internalize negative stereotypes (Middleton & Owens, 2023).

Low self-esteem in Black girls is significantly associated with depressive symptoms, self-objectification, and vulnerability to social stressors, such as peer victimization and beauty ideals inflicted by the media. For example, Morin and Brier's (2019) longitudinal study on

victimization resulted in Black girls with low self-esteem being prone to victimization, which resulted in depressive symptoms. Additionally, Ladd et al. (2022) conducted a cross-sectional study on Black girls ages 13 – 18 and found that low self-esteem predicted self-objectification. These findings reinforce the urgency of building self-esteem in Black girls.

In contrast, Black girls with healthy self-esteem feel a sense of entitlement, a license to take up space in the world, a right to be heard, and the courage to face all challenges (Orenstein, 2000). For example, Higher self-esteem is associated with a lower likelihood of mental health diagnoses like depression, PTSD, and suicidality among Black women, according to Dale (2022). Wheeler (2010) found that higher self-esteem in Black girls was connected to better academic performance and decision making, and a lower risk of illegal substance use. Furthermore, Zheng et al. (2020) found that higher self-esteem predicts better grades in Black girls.

Protection, Overcoming, and Building Resistance

Research suggests that self-esteem is a protective factor (Branden, 2011) and a psychological buffer from harsh environmental factors (Mandera et al., 2009). Maslow's (1958) hierarchy of needs depicts self-esteem as a basic need directly impacting mental well-being. Branden (2011) referred to self-esteem as the immune system of consciousness. For Black girls, self-esteem is crucial because it influences perception, feelings, and how they respond to the world (Paixao et al., 2018). Black girls' healthy development depends on their self-esteem (Paixao et al., 2018), as self-esteem correlates with self-understanding (Branden, 2011). Collins (2000) noted that self-esteem is the empowerment that Black girls need to overcome gender and racialized experiences. The American School Counseling Association positions that self-esteem is related to critical thinking, positive relationships, empathy, self-motivation, the ability to

identify and overcome barriers, perseverance, leadership, teamwork, and practical coping skills (ASCA, 2021).

Additionally, in a study examining the impact of culture and ethnic relevant intervention conducted in schools, Grimes et al. (2013) found that increased self-esteem and self-efficacy are associated with a powerful sense of ethnic identity for Black girls. The overall well-being of Black girls is the responsibility of all those who serve in the helping professions (ACA, 2024; ASCA, 2001). Therefore, factors associated with higher levels of Black girls' self-esteem must be explored and thoroughly understood.

Self-Esteem as Resistance: A Protective Factor for Black Girls

Icons such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X., Audre Lorde, bell hooks, and Patricia Hill Collins wrote about the importance of building self-esteem, self-worth, hope, and courage in Black people (Gaines, 2017). Audre Lorde (1984) reminds us that "caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare." These acts of self-care and self-love are tools of survival and transformation. In his Letter from Birmingham (1963), Martin Luther King, Jr. encouraged challenging systems of injustice through instilling confidence in our youth.

Beyond Confidence: Understanding the Role of Self-Esteem in Black Girlhood

Self-esteem can serve as a protective factor (e.g., coping skills, help-seeking behaviors, and utilizing support systems), thereby fostering resilience against suicidal thoughts and attempts (Coleman et al., 2019). Furthermore, Taha et al. (2015) found that self-esteem cultivated through culturally informed interventions reduced suicide risk in African American females and helped them navigate hardships. Higher self-esteem positively affects academic achievement, especially for gifted African American students (Graham & Ford, 2003), influencing self-perception and

motivation, thus increasing the likelihood of tackling challenges rather than fearing failure (Sharma & Agarwala, 2015). Moreover, Perry and Lavins-Merrillat (2019) found that a strong sense of self-worth encourages school engagement and belonging (Perry & Lavins-Merrillat, 2019). Galeotti (2015) found that Black girls could maintain a positive outlook through self-esteem, which fostered confidence in healthy relationship choices.

Furthermore, self-esteem encouraged Black girls to celebrate their authentic selves, promoting personal empowerment. A strong self-concept supports overall adjustment and success in society. Finally, Christens and Peterson found that higher self-esteem in Black girls reduces engagement in risky behaviors, such as violence and substance use, strengthens resilience against online racial attacks (Joseph et al., 2023), and empowers Black women and girls in abusive relationships to change their circumstances (Taha et al., 2015). Self-esteem correlates with resilience, emotional regulation, and bolstered mental health

Protective Factors According to Black Feminist Thought

Black Feminist Thought (BFT) is a critical theory created to empower Black women. The internalization of negative stereotypes erodes the self-esteem of Black women and maintains oppression and inhibits Black women from reaching their full potential. However, Collins (2000) BFT theory explains that self-esteem, cultivated through critical consciousness, racial and ethnic identity, and social support, can counteract negative internalized stereotypes. Although BFT is a well-studied theory with Black women, this research explored the contributions of these strengths-based predictors: 1. critical consciousness, 2. racial-ethnic identity, and 3. perceived social support on self-esteem in Black girls above and beyond the internalization of negative stereotypes.

Black Feminist Thought (BFT) was created to empower Black women by embracing their uniqueness. BFT offers Black girls a framework for viewing themselves differently than the world's established social order. BFT posits that identities of strength, independence, and resilience can be protective factors for Black girls (Collins, 2000). This framework encourages Black girls to value their subjective knowledge base. Through the lens of BFT, Black girls can value their identity by pulling on collective identity to leverage their natural strengths through active self-reflection, self-love, self-care, and embracing embodied knowledge (Collins, 1999). BFT is an appropriate framework for this study because of its focus on empowerment through self-esteem (Smith et al., 2003). Accordingly, BFT will be used as a lens and a guide to understanding the predictors that can enhance, heal, and develop self-esteem in Black girls (Mayes & Byrd, 2022). The core tenets of BFT are (a) self-defined standpoint and self-valuation, (b) the interlocking nature of oppression and the matrix of domination, and (c) the importance of Black Women's culture, solidarity, and community (Collins, 1989).

Self-Definition, Identity, and Self-Worth as Foundations of Self-Esteem

Collins (1989) states that BFT is essential to Black girls' self-esteem because it is centered on self-definition. The self-defined standpoint is best understood as creating meaning by understanding Black women's historical context (Collins, 2000). Collins (2000) refers to ways of knowing and being a standpoint. BFT affirms the challenging stereotypes of Black women and replaces those stereotypes with self-definition (Collins, 2000). Self-definition happens through subjective knowledge (Collins, 2000). The empowerment process includes learning to examine controlling images critically, taking a self-defined stance, establishing social capital through relationships, and rejecting messages influencing Black girlhood and

relationships (Collins, 2000). Black girls can build self-esteem by understanding that stereotypes are not reality, but weapons used to maintain the status quo (Collins, 2014).

Elite groups often use controlling images to dominate and trick others into thinking that racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice are a necessary part of life (Collins, 2014). However, an understanding of African American history can create the motivation to combat devaluation, silencing, and marginalization. Furthermore, Murray et al. (2018) note that racial socialization and identity are protective cultural coping assets. Collins (2014) explains that when there is a deep understanding of self, an appreciation for one's uniqueness is naturally high (Porter et al., 2013). Self-defined standpoint (identity development), awareness, analysis, meaning-making, resistance, and self-definition (critical consciousness), and creating connections (perceived social support) that build agency and pathways are the tenets that will enhance self-esteem in Black girls (Collins, 2000).

To sustain the frequent assaults that Black women endure and maintain a positive sense of self requires self-definition and self-valuation (Collins, 1986). Self-valuation completes self-definition by replacing externally derived images, embracing Black girls' assertiveness and sassiness, and using these values to transcend and survive the harsh environments that Black women and girls are in. Collins (1986) noted that "defining and valuing one's consciousness of one's self-defined standpoint in the face of images that foster a self-definition as objectified is an important way to resist the dehumanization essential to systems of domination" (p.S18). Racist and sexist ideologies serve to keep Black women in their place (Collins, 2014). While internalizing controlling images is damaging to Black girls' self-esteem, self-esteem can be enhanced through awareness. Collins suggests taking elements and themes of Black Women's culture and tradition and infusing them with a "rearticulated consciousness" (Collins, 2000,

p.32). Through this, Collins explains that Black women/girls gain another tool to resist subjugation. Collins' BFT encourages redefining the unique experiences of Black women by Black women (Collins, 1989).

Self-Esteem-The Outcome Variable

Self-esteem is built through cultural affirmation, empowerment, and resisting dehumanizing societal standards (Collins, 2000). Researchers argue that self-esteem creates a psychological buffer against negative experiences (Grimes et al., 2013; Hughes et al., 2009; Mandara et al., 2009). For example, Paixo et al. (2018) found a negative relationship between self-esteem and mental health disorders in 359 adolescents studied. Paixo et al. (2018) noted that self-esteem influences perceptions, feelings, and how people respond to the world. Self-esteem is fundamental for healthy development. It touches the meaning we attach to affection, love, appreciation, success, and failure. Addington (2021) found that creating a space promoting positive racial identity is a way to enhance self-esteem in Black girls. Racial identity is an "understanding and acceptance of one's socially constructed racial label, knowledge of one's racial group's history and cultural norms, a sense of shared activities, beliefs about the social position of one's racial group, and feelings of pride regarding one's racial group" Increasing supportiveness in schools improve school connectedness for Black girls. n her study on Black Womanhood in hip hop videos, Emerson (2002) points to the notion that the social constructed negative stereotypes of Black women (e.g. Jezebel, mammy, matriarch, welfare recipient) shapes the perceptions of Black feminity and gives space for Hip Hop rappers to use depictions of Black females in videos, which impact the development of self-esteem in Black girls. However, self-esteem can be cultivated through a sense of belonging (Perry et al., 2014), positive representation (Cini, 1997), self-awareness (Galeotti, 2015), affirmative spaces and relationships (Mandera et

al., 2009), security, identity and competence (Sussman, 2022), racial-cultural identity (Addington, 2021) and positive school climates including teacher expectations and encouragement (Sharma & Agarwala, 2015).

Racial-Ethnic Identity – The Predictor Variable

Black girls will find purpose when they first understand their history. Knowing history creates space for a unique narrative (Esposito & Edwards, 2017). When racial-ethnic identity is explored and developed, there is an increase in self-esteem, self-concept, and motivation and a reduction in self-doubt, promiscuity, anger, and aggression (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014). More robust Black identification promotes the development of a strong, positive academic identity (Umana-Taylor et al., 2014). "Youth who do not know who they are (including the truth of their histories) risk passively believing anything about their identities; a strong sense of self is a must to navigate society" (Muhammad & Mosley, 2021, p. 193).

Identity exploration is a natural developmental process during early adolescence (Erikson, 1968). However, Black girls' identity development is disrupted by gender and racialized discrimination. Racial-ethnic identity development has been identified as a source of strength, independence, and resilience, creating protective barriers and building a sense of self (Collins, 2000; Loyd et al., 2021; Mandara et al., 2009). Murray et al. (2018) identified racial-ethnic identity development as a cultural coping asset that can protect Black youth from adverse mental health outcomes. Racial identity is an "understanding and acceptance of one's socially constructed racial label, knowledge of one's racial group's history and cultural norms, a sense of shared activities, beliefs about the social position of one's racial group, and feelings of pride regarding one's racial group" (Mandara et al., 2009, p.1661). Racial identity development among Black girls is a salient psychosocial task (Phinney, 1989).

Furthermore, Addington (2021) found that promoting positive racial identity is a way to enhance self-esteem in Black girls. Additionally, in a study examining the impact of culture and ethnic relevant intervention conducted in schools, Grimes et al. (2013) found that increased self-esteem and self-efficacy are associated with an intense sense of ethnic identity for Black girls. Moreover, Zayes (2001) posited that minority youth benefit from discussing their struggles with racism and ethnic identity. Zayes (2001) concluded that allowing Black girls to clarify, actively explore, and examine ethnicity will enhance their development and self-esteem. Researchers called for professionals working with Black girls to engage in identity development and exploration (Holcomb-McCoy & Thomas, 2001; Lepford-Sanders & Bradley, 2005; Mayes et al., 2021). In addition to critical consciousness and racial-ethnic identity, research has highlighted the benefit of perceived social support in resilience and agency-building benefits (Adams-Boss & Bentley-Edwards, 2021; Griffith et al., 2022; Varga & Zaff, 2018). Cast and Burke (2002) noted that self-esteem is a necessary ingredient in the self-verification process that can be strengthened through relationships that verify identity. Raising Black girls' self-esteem benefits Black girls and society (Cast & Burke, 2002).

From Awareness to Empowerment: Critical Consciousness as a Predictor of Self-Esteem Among Black Girls

Black Feminist Thought was created for Black women to understand how interconnected organizations work together to continue to oppress and control Black women (Collins, 2014). The Interlocking Nature of Oppression describes the simultaneous oppressions that serve to dominate and marginalize Black women and girls (Luna, 2024). According to BFT, the intersection of sociocultural and systemic issues puts Black girls at a unique social disadvantage (Collins, 2000). For example, Black girls exposed to poverty must navigate economic,

environmental, and institutionalized conditions that impact their well-being (Byrd & Ahn, 2020). The interlocking nature of oppression and the matrix of domination tenet of BFT is essential to self-esteem because it fully acknowledges all systems and experiences that harm Black girls. By understanding all systems that serve to oppress Black women, Black girls can transform their sense of meaning, defining for themselves who they are outside of controlling images and stereotypes (Porter & Byrd, 2021).

Additionally, with knowledge of oppression, Black girls can choose what to accept or reject. This supports the need to create space for Black girls to engage in self-identity (Porter & Byrd, 2021). Thus, the researcher aims to use the theory of BFT to investigate whether self-esteem can be enhanced in Black girls with a self-defined standpoint and self-value, understand and critically analyze the matrix of domination, and have connection and solidarity in a community that can provide guidance and support.

Critical Consciousness - The Predictor Variable

Paulo Freire (1979) first coined the term critical consciousness. Critical consciousness is an awareness and analysis of existing power relationships in place that inform social relationships and positions (Freire, 2000). Critical consciousness is defined as the process by which individuals understand, analyze, and reject systems of oppression. This skill is essential to Black girls' self-esteem because critical consciousness will equip them with the cognitive skills needed to redefine internalized stereotypes. By learning to be critically conscious, Black girls question the information disseminated by the mass media, analyze it, and decide whether to integrate it. By explicitly resisting, analyzing societal definitions, challenging socially constructed stereotypical descriptions, questioning what Black girls see and hear, and leaning into their ways of knowing, critical consciousness aligns with BFT (Collins, 1986).

The three elements of the critical consciousness model are (a) critical reflection and analysis, (b) critical motivation, and (c) critical action (Diemer et al., 2016). First, with critical reflection and analysis, Black girls will analyze social structures and recognize systemic inequities (Dimer et al., 2016). Critical analysis and reflection protect against self-blame by recognizing historical disparities and structural roots (Collins, 2014). Ward (2000) noted that critical analysis builds healthy resistance through naming sexism, racism, and microaggressions, opposing hostile forces, and embracing uniqueness. Jacobs (2016) noted that higher-level analytical skills can be developed by teaching Black girls to use a critical lens and analytical skills to unpack their experiences.

The second component of critical consciousness is critical motivation, which is the belief in one's capacity to effect change (Diemer et al., 2016). Critical motivation socializes Black girls to counter dominant norms (e.g., the strong black woman schema) and protects them emotionally and psychologically (Jacobs, 2016). Godfrey et al. (2019) found a positive impact on early adolescent depression, academic engagement, and competence when youth understand and react to inequality through critical motivation. The final component is critical action; the steps Black girls take to address and rectify social inequities. Seider et al. (2020) describe critical action as participating in individual or collective action to effect change. Furthermore, involvement in critical action has benefits for academic identity (Seider et al., 2020), career expectancies (Rapa et al., 2018), and youth voting (Diemer & Li, 2011).

The empowerment and identity affirmation accomplished through critical consciousness positively impact Black girls' self-esteem (Singh et al., 2020). Moreover, critical consciousness is a buffer against racial discrimination and stabilizes self-esteem in Black girls (Gale et al., 2023). Research suggests that awareness (critical reflection) and combatting oppression (critical

action) contribute to higher levels of self-esteem in Black girls (Gale et al., 2023; Singh et al., 2020). Enhanced self-efficacy (critical motivation) enhances self-esteem in Black girls (Riegle-Crumb et al., 2022).

Perceived Social Support and Self-Esteem: The Bedrock of Belonging for Black Girls

Collins (1986) discussed the importance of social relations, where Black women can share self-definition and self-valuation, which are essential for coping. Culture is "the symbols and values that create the ideological frame of reference through which people attempt to deal with the circumstances in which they find themselves" (p. S22). Furthermore, Collins (2000) acknowledges that culture constantly changes and transforms. Whereas family and the church may have been the only reprieve for Black women, those supportive spaces have now transformed into podcasts, online support, sister circles, and even hip-hop music. Sisterhood has tangible psychological benefits (Jordan, 2018). Though pain and dysfunction come from harmful societal messages that create disconnection and isolation, the heart of psychological healing is meaningful connections (Jordan, 2018).

Black women may overtly conform to the societal roles laid out for them yet covertly oppose those roles when in a supportive environment. Even rejecting external definitions in private is a form of activism. "Black women's consciousness, their analytical, emotional, and ethical perspective of themselves and their place in society becomes a critical part of the relationship between the working of oppression and Black women's actions" (Collins, 1989, p. S24). Collins (1989) encourages collective identity by encouraging counternarratives that present a different view of Black women and their world. According to Collins, this different view encourages Black women to value their subjective knowledge base.

Black girls build resilience through belonging, connection, and community (Jones, 2013). Relational cultural theory states that connectedness, secure attachment, and responsiveness from others can shift patterns of isolation and immobilization (Jones, 2013). Hope Theory informs that those relationships (e.g., peers, family members, teachers, counselors, and mentors) can increase hopefulness, agency (self-efficacy), and pathway thinking (Snyder, 2002). Black women and girls are relational. Resilience and understanding are developed through consuming the opinions of others. Collins (2000) states that Black girls understand themselves through relationships. Therefore, collectivism and solidarity with other Black girls and women are vital to building a sense of self, which is necessary for self-esteem. Because Black girls' current relationships with mass media are forming their identity, BFT encourages shifting to learning identity through community and relationships with other Black girls and women. This requires intentionally building relationships with other girls and women with shared experiences and developing the skills to analyze those experiences critically.

Therefore, the key tenets of BFT suggest that building self-esteem in Black girls must come from racial-ethnic identity development, critical consciousness development, and perceived social support (Collins, 2000). These three skills are sustainable strengths that highlight the importance of self-acceptance. Additionally, BFT resists negative media images of Black women with active self-reflection, self-love, and self-care (Patterson et al., 2016). The current state of Black girls' holistic health (as discussed above) suggests a need to focus on the strengths of Black girls (Mayes & Byrd, 2022). Thus, Collins (2000) BFT is the lens for a strength-based holistic examination of factors that protect Black girls against controlling stereotypes (Collins, 2000; Luna et al., 2024).

Perceived Social Support - The Predictor Variable

Collins' (1986) last tenet, "Black Women's Culture, Solidarity, and Community," in BFT, references social relations essential to coping for Black girls. Perceived social support is also essential for self-esteem (Middleton & Owens, 2023). Black girls must perceive their support as effective and unconditional to nurture healthy self-esteem (Porter et al., 2020). Where the solid black woman schema can activate the development of maladjusted behaviors through suppression, perceived social support is validating, normalizing, and accepting (Gaylord-Harden et al., 2007). Perceived social support can take the form of mentorship, affinity groups, close friendship groups, individual friendships, or relationships developed through shared experiences or shared religious beliefs (Zimet et al., 2010). Perceived social support can manifest as having someone physically present in a time of need, a listening, nonjudgmental ear, or an accountability partner when needed (Porter et al., 2020). Canty-Mitchel and Zimet (2000) explained that for urban adolescents, perceived social support is the perception of the social network's adequacy, including family, friends, and significant others. Collective village, agency thinking, and resiliency are needed to build a protective shield for Black girls' emotional and psychological health (Myers & Sweeney, 2000; Rosco, 2009). Perceived Social support is the broad web of support that can help Black girls navigate challenges (Adams-Boss & Bentley-Edwards, 2021; Griffith et al., 2022; Varga & Zaff, 2018).

Middleton and Owen (2024) found that perceived social support impacts self-esteem. African American women with low perceived social support are four times as likely to suffer from depressive symptoms (Middleton & Owens, 2024; Patterson, 2004). Conversely, social support can reduce symptoms of hopelessness (Smith et al., 2020). Supportive voices reaffirm worthiness (Gale et al., 2023). Perceived social support has been found to serve as a buffer

against experiences like microaggression (Taylor, 2015). Perceived social support permits Black girls to lean into the totality of who they are. It offers permission to unleash toxic beliefs and relationships and move toward spaces and people that foster growth and self-esteem (Jordan, 2018).

Chapter Summary

This chapter overviews the sociocultural factors damaging Black girls' self-esteem. These factors include negative controlling messages received from the mass media, education, and having to combat adultification bias and hypersexualization stereotypes. Using BFT as a theoretical frame, this research proposes to understand factors that build the self-esteem of Black girls, even when Black girls are exposed to negative controlling images. Research suggests that more quantitative examinations are necessary to properly generalize the experiences of Black girls (Middleton & Owens, 2024). This research proposes that Black girls with high levels of self-esteem can reject negative controlling messages. The three factors investigated are based on the theoretical tenets of BFT. Accordingly, racial-ethnic identity, critical consciousness, and perceived social support are closely aligned with 1. self-defined standpoint and self-valuation, 2. The interlocking nature of oppression and the matrix of domination, and 3. Black women's culture, solidarity, and community. According to BFT, equipping Black girls with the above skills will motivate them to combat the negative controlling messages and build healthy self-esteem.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

This chapter introduces the research methodology for the cross-sectional, correlational study conducted. This strength-based research sought to predict self-esteem in Black girls above and beyond the internalization of negative stereotypes and internalized pressures from the media to conform. This study used Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000) as a theoretical lens.

The following six-part methods chapter is a roadmap for how this dissertation was conducted. The first section discusses the research design. Second, I provide the research questions and hypotheses that guided the study. Third, I discuss the participants and procedures. Fourth, I describe the selected instruments for this study. Fifth, I discuss the data analysis plan. I conclude with multicultural and social justice considerations.

Research Design

A correlational design was employed to empirically examine the predictive power of theoretical tenets of BFT on self-esteem in Black girls. Specifically, I studied constructs that contribute to self-esteem in Black girls based on theory: critical consciousness, racial-ethnic identity, and perceived social support (Collins, 2014; hooks, 1992; Goodkind et al., 2020; Lendzion, 2024. Specifically, the current study's criterion variable is self-esteem; the control variables were daily hours of television consumed, daily hours of social media use, internalized negative stereotypes, internalized pressure from the media, frequency, and stress appraisal of gendered racial microaggressions; the predictor variables were critical consciousness, racial-ethnic identity, and perceived social support. The researcher employed a correlational design

because the researcher assumes a linear relationship between the criterion and predictor variables (Balkin & Kleist, 2017). The magnitude and statistical significance of the relationships between the outcome and predictor variables were analyzed using a hierarchical multiple regression (Graziano & Raulin, 2013).

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The following research question guided this investigation: Does critical consciousness, racial-ethnic identity, and perceived social support predict self-esteem in Black girls above and beyond internalized negative stereotypes, internalized pressures from the media to conform, and the frequency and stress appraisal of gendered racial microaggressions?

Black Feminist Thought (BFT) emphasizes the importance of self-esteem in resisting systemic oppressions impacting Black girls, such as dehumanization (i.e., being controlled by negative stereotypes in the media), devaluation (i.e., assumptions of inferiority in education), and subjugation (i.e., the suppression of normal development). Self-esteem has been found to create a psychological buffer against the negative experiences that Black girls face daily (Grimes et al., 2013; Hughes et al., 2009; Mandara et al., 2009). Therefore, my primary assumption was that an increase in self-esteem is necessary to protect the mental health of Black girls (Mandara et al., 2009). More importantly, I hypothesized that the predictive strength of critical consciousness, racial-ethnic identity, and perceived social support would have a moderate to large effect on the self-esteem of Black girls.

Collins (2000) suggested that rejecting negative, controlling images creates space for self-definition and self-valuation (aka self-esteem), thus empowering Black women and girls (Taylor, 1998). The dismantling of structures of domination through intellectual thought and political activism (aka critical consciousness) is decisive; however, the most substantial influence

is the energy and the skills to resist and transform discrimination through recognizing Black women's solidarity and cultural heritage (Taylor, 1998). Consequently, the hypotheses for this study are as follows:

- The linear relationship between internalized negative stereotypes, internalized pressures from the media to conform, and the frequency and stress appraisal of gendered racial microaggressions will have a moderate relationship with the self-esteem scores of Black girls.
- The linear combination of critical consciousness, racial-ethnic identity, and perceived social support will have a moderate to high effect on the self-esteem scores of Black girls above and beyond any internalized negative stereotypes, internalized pressures from the media to conform, and the frequency and stress appraisal of gendered racial microaggressions.

Participants and Procedures

After receiving approval from the institutional review board, I utilized convenience and snowball sampling procedures. My research flyer was sent to my social network and posted on social media groups that worked directly with Black girls. Additionally, I emailed local private schools, mentoring organizations, sororities, and churches to recruit participants. Because I was studying a vulnerable population, building trust with the organizations I was contacting was important. Therefore, when contacting each organization, I asked permission to meet with the governing team to present my research. Once given, I answered questions and asked permission to meet with parents to gain parental consent for potential participants. I initially offered in-person collection, but it was more convenient for participants to complete the survey online due to different locations and parents' schedules. Response rates can be seen in Table 1. Due to the

low response rate, I submitted an institutional review board application for approval to collect data at my job site. Upon receiving approval, I emailed parents of 6th, 7th, and 8th-grade students' information about my research study, and included a link to the consent form. Each participant completed eight questionnaires and a demographic questionnaire. Data was protected and securely stored in a safe place only accessible to the researcher. A priori power analysis using G*Power 3.1, a multiple regression analysis using five predictor variables and six control variables, with a medium effect and a minimum .80 power level with alpha set at .05, yielded a sample size of 92 (Faul, 2007).

Table 1.

Participant Response Rates by Recruitment Source

Recruitment Source	Response Rate (%)
Personal Contacts	18.00
Mentoring Organizations	31.00
Local Churches	0.00
Sorority Organizations	0.00
Private Schools	0.02
Professional organizations (e.g. ASCA & GSCA)	0.00
Charter Schools	25.00
Job Site	28.00

Note. Response rates were calculated based on the number of individuals contacted through each recruitment source and the number who completed the survey. Convenience and snowball sampling methods were used.

Participant Screening and Inclusion Criteria

Of the original 156 data points collected, 12 participants were excluded due to not meeting the inclusion criteria. The criteria for inclusion in the study were that participants identified as African American or Black, were between the ages of 11 and 17 years old, and had access to media. Nine participants were excluded because they did not complete the demographic questionnaire, and I could not determine whether they met the study's eligibility criteria. Two participants were excluded because they were 10 years old. One participant was excluded because she was 18 years old.

Demographic Profile of the Study Sample

Black girls ages 11 to 17, who identified as Black or African American and had access to media (e.g., social media, television, streaming, music and music videos, print media, online content, websites, and/or advertising), were invited to complete a survey either online or in person. Through convenience and snowball sampling, 56 participants completed paper and pencil surveys at the respective schools or during a mentoring meeting. Ninety-two participated using the online version of the survey. Of the original 148 data points collected, 12 participants were excluded due to not meeting the inclusion criteria.

Out of the 137 eligible participants, 89% (n = 128) identified as Black, Biracial 8.5% (n = 12), and Multiracial 2.8% (n = 4). Participants' ages ranged from 11 to 17 years old. On average, participants were approximately 14 years old, 34.3% (n = 47, M =13.87, SD =1.53), followed by 7 participants, 5.1% (n =7) aged 11, and 10 participants, 7.3% (n =10) aged 17. Participants' religious affiliation was predominantly Christian, 80% (n = 79), with a small number identifying as Islamic, 1% (n = 1), and Muslim, 1% (n = 1). A notable portion, 17.2% (n = 17), reported no religious affiliation. More than half of the sample 54% (n =74), reported that their religious

beliefs were very important to them, 31.9% (*n* =43) reported religious beliefs as somewhat important, 8.15% (*n* =11) reported that religion was not important, and 5.2% (*n* =7) reported that religion was not at all important. Most participants (*n* = 111, 82.6%) reported sharing religious beliefs with their parents, while some 15.7% (*n* = 21) reported developing their own. Similarly, most participants (*n* =110, 82%) reported alignment in their religious beliefs with their friends.

Regarding living arrangements, most participants reported residing with both parents, 43% (*n* = 59), or with their mother only, 35% (*n* = 47). Additional reported living arrangements included multigenerational households, 8% (*n* = 11), living with grandparents, 5% (*n* = 7), or other extended family members, 4% (*n* = 6), father-only households, 2% (*n* = 3), and adoptive families, 2% (*n* = 3). In terms of educational settings, most participants attended public schools 80% (*n* = 109), while others attended charter schools 9% (*n* = 12), private schools 7% (*n* = 10), were homeschooled 1.5% (*n* = 2), or other types of schools 2% (*n* = 3). Additionally, over half of the participants reported enrollment in honors-level courses, 50% (*n* = 64), whereas 48% (*n* = 61) did not, and a small portion, 2% *(n = 2)* were unsure.

Participants reported diverse engagement in religious and spiritual activities. Specifically, 40% (*n* = 34) reporting attending church services, 28% (*n* = 24) engaged in multiple religious practices 23% (*n* = 20) reported praying regularly, 6% (*n* = 5) attended Bible study, 1% (*n* = 1), participated in youth services, and 1% (*n* = 1) engaged in non-traditional spiritual practices such as saging. In terms of frequency, 29% (*n* = 40), reported daily participation in religious activities 28% (*n* = 39) participated weekly 5% (*n* = 7) engaged monthly 15% (*n* = 21) reported occasional participation, another 15% (*n* = 21), rarely participated and 7% (*n* = 9) reported engaging in religious or spiritual activities. Regarding extracurricular involvement, the majority of participants, 71% (*n* = 97), reported participating in multiple extracurricular activities, while

29% (*n* = 40) reported no extracurricular involvement. Among those involved, 48% (*n* = 43) participated in sports, and 34% (*n* = 30) reported engagement in multiple activities. Additional areas of involvement included the arts, 11% (*n* =10), mentoring programs, 2% (*n* = 2), leadership opportunities, 2% (*n* = 2), and school clubs, 2% (*n* = 2).

The majority of participants, 95% (*n* = 130), reported engaging in daily television viewing as part of their media consumption, with reported durations ranging from 30 minutes to 12 hours per day, with the average being 4 hours per day (*M* = 3.68, *SD* = 4.04). Participants reported watching television on a variety of devices, including personal televisions 12% (*n* = 16), iPads 7% (*n* = 9), computers 1% (*n* = 2), and phones 9% (*n* = 13). The majority, 68% (*n* = 93), indicated using multiple devices for television viewing. When asked whether parental controls were enabled on their devices, 25% (*n*=34) responded 'Yes', while 53% (*n*=72) responded 'No.' A total of 112 social media platforms were reported by participants, with the most frequently used being TikTok 53% *(n=73)*, followed by Instagram 44% (*n* = 60, 43), YouTube 21% (*n* = 29), Snapchat 7% (*n* = 10), Pinterest 4% (*n* = 6), Twitter 1.5% (*n* = 2), Tumblr 1.5% (*n* = 2), Roblox 1% (*n* = 1), Disco 1% (*n* = 1), and Lockett 1% (*n* = 1). Reported reasons for using social media included posting content 62% (*n* = 85), scrolling or browsing 90% (*n* = 124), communicating with friends 77% (*n* = 105), and playing games 55% (*n* = 76). Other media activities included streaming videos or shows 47% (*n* = 65), listening to music 87% (*n* = 119), watching music videos 36% (*n* = 50), scrolling through online content 44% (*n* = 61), surfing websites 44% (*n* = 60), reading print media 11% (*n* = 15), and watching advertisements 12% (*n* = 17). All demographics are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.

Summary Demographics of Participants

Demographic Variables	Frequency (n)	%	M	SD
Sex				
Female	134	97.8		
Trans	2	1.5		
Nonbinary	1	.7		
Race/Ethnicity				
Black/African American	121	88.3		
Biracial	12	8.8		
Multiracial	4	2.9		
Age			13.87	1.53
11	7	5.1		
12	18	13.1		
13	28	20.4		
14	47	34.3		
15	11	8.0		
16	13	9.5		
17	10	7.3		
Daily Hrs. TV Consumed			3.78	1.79
Daily Hrs. SM Accessed			5.54	5.60
Living Arrangement				
Both Parents	59	43.4		
Mother Only	47	34.6		
Multigenerational	11	8.1		
Grandparents	7	5.1		
Extended Family	6	4.4		
Father Only	3	2.2		
Adoptive Family	3	2.2		
School Type				
Public	109	80.0		
Charter	12	8.8		
Private	10	7.4		
Homeschool	2	1.5		

Other	3	2.2

Table 1. continued

Honors Classes		
Yes	64	50.0
No	61	48.0
Not Sure	2	1.6
Religious Affiliation		
Christian	79	79.8
Islamic	1	1.0
Muslim	1	1.0
Multiple Religions	1	1.0
None	17	17.2
Importance of REL		
Very Important	74	54.0
Somewhat Important	43	31.9
Not Important	11	8.1
Not At All Important	7	5.2
Influence of Religious Beliefs		
Parents	111	82.8
Formed Own Beliefs	21	15.7
Shared Beliefs with Friends	110	82.0
Does Not Share Beliefs with Friends	17	12.7
Religious Activities		
Church Attendance	34	40.0
Multiple Activities	24	28.2
Prayer	20	23.5
Bible Study	5	5.9

Youth Services	1	1.2
Non-Traditional Activities	1	1.2
Religious Frequency		
Daily	40	29.2
Weekly	39	28.5
Monthly	7	5.1
Occasionally	21	15.3
Table 1. continued		
Rarely	21	15.3
Never	9	6.6
Extracurricular Involvement		
Involved	97	70.8
Not Involved	40	29.2
Activity Type		
Sports	43	48.3
Multiple	30	33.7
Arts	10	11.2
Mentoring	2	2.2
Leadership	2	2.2
School Clubs	2	2.2

Instruments

McDonald's Omega was estimated to determine the internal consistency of the seven scale scores in this sample. In alignment with the core tenets of BFT, the Taylor Self-Esteem Inventory (Jones et al., 1996) was used to measure self-esteem levels by assessing rewards and costs distributed to self. Internalized stereotypes were measured using the Modern Jezebel Scale (Townsend et al., 2010), and internalized media pressures to conform were measured using the Multidimensional Media Influence Scale (Harrison, 2009). Additionally, frequency and stress appraisal of gendered racial microaggressions were measured using the Gendered Racial

Microaggression Scale (Lewis & Neville, 2015). Racial-ethnic identity was measured using the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM, Phinney, 1992). To measure critical consciousness, the researcher used the Short Critical Consciousness Scale, which measured critical reflection, critical motivation, and critical action (Diemer et al., 2017). The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) measured participants' perceived social support (Zimmet et al., 1988).

Taylor's Self-Esteem Inventory (TSEI)

Taylor's Self-Esteem Inventory was developed to measure the distribution of rewards and costs to self. For this inventory, self-esteem is conceptualized by examining how African American young women distribute rewards and costs to themselves (Jones et al., 1996). It is a 16-item instrument, which includes eight reward items ("I am satisfied with the kind of person I am") and eight cost items ("I dwell on my faults"). Reward items reflect positive self-esteem constructs, and cost items reflect negative self-esteem constructs (Jones et al., 1996). Each item has eight categories: acceptance, pleasurableness, resourcefulness, regard, pridefulness, focal support, global support, and cooperativeness (Jones et al., 1996). The scores range from 0 to 128; higher scores indicate higher self-esteem (Jones et al., 1996). Respondents indicate the frequency with which they distribute rewards and costs to themselves using an 8-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 0 (never) to 8 (always). In the current study, McDonald's omega was (ω = .82). In developing the TSE, item scores were evaluated and refined in samples of low-income African American teenage mothers, enhancing item variability, item-subscale correlations, item-total correlations, and subscale and total scale internal reliability (Jones et al., 1996). The scores show good internal and test-retest reliability and construct validity based on positive associations with other self-esteem measures (Jones, 1996).

Modern Jezebel Scale (MJS)

The Modern Jezebel Scale (Townsend et al., 2010) was designed to explore identity development, beauty standards, and sexual attitudes when Black adolescent girls endorse stereotypical images (e.g., the Jezebel or Sapphire). For this sample, the internal consistency was (ω = .89). Townsend et al. (2010) gathered valid evidence of the MJS scores by utilizing 270 Black adolescent girls living in Southwest Philadelphia, ages ranging between 10 and 15. Townsend et al. (2010) designed the MJS to measure modern images of Jezebel and Sapphire. Using a 5-point Likert-type response format (1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree). Higher scores suggest internalization of the Jezebel and Sapphire stereotypes. Sample statements to measure Jezebel's internalization include "Black girls always want to have sex. Black girls use sex to get what they want." Sample statements to measure Sapphire include "Black girls are loud and have attitudes. Black girls are always mad and ready to fight". Townsend et al. (2010) reported that the internal consistency of $(a = .82)$. Test-retest reliability at 6 months $(r = .45, p < .001)$. Black girls who scored high on the MJS endorsed stereotypical images of Black girls, which means they endorsed Western standards of beauty and rejected the natural way that Black girls look. The researchers also found that higher endorsement, according to the MJS score, was correlated with a low self-concept (Townsend et al., 2010).

Gendered Racial Microaggression Scale (GRMS)

The Gendered Racial Microaggression Scale was created to measure the stress appraisal (i.e., how stressful each event was for them) and frequency (i.e., how often they experienced each event in their lifetime) of gendered and racial microaggressions experienced by Black women (Lewis & Neville, 2015). The frequency subscale demonstrated an internal consistency of (ω = .92), and the stress appropriateness subscale (ω = .93). The scale includes 32 questions.

Using a 6-point Likert-type response format (0 = never or not stressful at all to 5 = once a week or more or highly stressful). Higher scores equal a higher frequency and higher stress appraisal of gender-racial microaggressions. Lower scores represent lower frequency and lower stress appraisal. Items are intended to assess nonverbal, verbal, and behavioral negative racial and gender slights represented by the three subscales: (1) Projected stereotypes, (2) Silenced and marginalized, and (3) Assumptions about style and beauty.

GRMS scores were validated with a sample of 259 African American women between 18 and 77, with an average age of 39. The Construct Reliability factors range from .74 (for Strong Black Woman Stereotype - e.g., being strong, too assertive, or too independent) to .88 (for Silenced and Marginalized - e.g., authority being challenged in work, school, or other professional settings) for frequency and appraisal. The GRMS reliability coefficients are .92 (frequency scale) and .93 (stress appraisal scale). Although the initial scale was validated using Black emerging adults and Black women, Gadsen et al. (2021) adapted Lewis et al. (2016) GRMS questions to capture the gendered racial microaggression experiences of Black adolescent girls (ages 14-17) in a qualitative study that resulted in similar themes (e.g., Silenced and Marginalized, Projected Stereotypes and Standards of Beauty and Objectification).

The Multidimensional Media Influence Scale (MMIS)

Cusumano & Thompson (2001) developed an 11-item youth measure of media-specific sociocultural influence, tested in predominantly Black youth samples (e.g., Harrison, 2009). The MMIS scale has three dimensions: (a) awareness of the thin ideal body shape (e.g., "Clothes look better on thin people"), (b) internalization of the media-presented body is ideal as one's ideal (e.g., "I would like my body to look like the people on TV), and (c) perceived pressure from the media to lose weight (e.g., "Watching movies makes me want to diet"). For the present sample,

McDonald's omega indicated (ω = .84). Responses on the MMIS are rated on a 3-point Likert-type scale (1=Disagree, 2 = Not Sure, 3=Agree). Cronbach's alpha for the reliability of scale scores was .73 for awareness, .91 for internalization, and .71 for pressure.

Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM)

The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (Phinney, 1992) was designed to measure adolescents' ethnic identity by examining adolescents' sense of belonging, pride, and positive ethnic identity for their ethnic group. The internal consistency for this sample was (ω = .80). The multigroup ethnic identity scale consists of 14 items designed to measure three aspects of ethnic identity: positive ethnic attitudes and sense of belonging, and ethnic identity achievement, which includes an exploration and resolution of identity and ethnic behavior or practices (Phinney, 1992). A 4-point Likert-type scale is used for respondents to indicate their extent of agreement, with the response format ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 4=strongly agree. Higher scores indicate a stronger ethnic identity. Example items include "I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as history, traditions, and customs," "I have a clear sense of my ethnic background and what it means to me," "I am happy that I am a member of the group I belong to" (Phinney, 1992, p.172). The overall reliability of the ethnic identity scale was .81 when used on a sample of 417 high school students who attended an urban school with an ethnically diverse student population (Phinney, 1992).

Short Critical Consciousness Scale (SCCS)

Diemer et al. (2017) developed the Short Critical Consciousness Scale to measure the ability of marginalized and oppressed people to analyze their social and political conditions critically. The Critical Consciousness Scale is a 13-item scale with three components: (a) critical reflection (ω = .92), defined as perceived inequality and egalitarianism, and measures the ability

of students to reflect on perceived societal inequities and their endorsement of societal inequities; (b) critical motivation(ω = .84), the perceived ability and commitment to enact social change, and (c) critical action(ω = .88), defined as the individual or collective action taken to make a change. A 6-point Likert-type agreement from strongly disagree to agree strongly is used to score the critical reflection and motivation questions, and a 5-point Likert-type behavioral frequency scale from never did this to at least once a week to score the critical action items (Diemer et al., 2017). Sample statements for critical reflection are: "Perceived inequality includes certain racial and ethnic groups having fewer chances to get ahead," and "women have fewer chances to get ahead" (Diemer et al., 2017, p.465). Example statements measuring critical action include "joined a protest, march, or political demonstration," "worked on a political campaign," or "participated in human rights or women's rights" (Diemer et al., 2017, p. 465).

The initial development of the SCCS scores demonstrated good reliability and validity in a sample of 326 students from four Title I urban high schools in the Midwest (Diemer et al., 2017). Ages range from 13-19, with an average age of 15. Internal consistency and Cronbach's Alpha of (.85) for critical reflection: perceived inequality, (.87) for critical action, as reported by Diemer et al. (2017).

Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS)

The multidimensional scale of perceived support was developed by Zimet et al. (1988) to measure the role of social support as a coping mechanism. Zimet et al. (1988) aimed to assess the perception of social support from family, friends, and significant others. The MSPSS is a 12-item, 7-point Likert-type scale in which ratings range from (1) very strongly disagree to (7) agree (Zimet et al., 1988). Sample items include "There is a special person with whom I can share my joys and sorrow,"; "I get emotional help and support I need from my family,"; "There is a special

person in my life who cares about my feelings"; "I have a special person who is a real source comfort for me" (Zimet et al., 1988, p. 35). The researchers propose that their measure is simplified and combines objective and subjective social supports.

Although the initial validation of the MSPSS scale was validated on 275 Duke University undergraduate students (Zimet et al., 1988), which might suggest a homogenous sample, Canty-Mitchell and Zimet (2000) investigated the reliability and validity of the MSPSS scale with 222 urban African American adolescents (58% female, mean age 15.8). In this sample, Cronbach's alpha was .91 for the Family Subscale, .89 for the Friends Subscale, and .91 for the Significant Other Subscale. According to Canty-Mitchel and Zimet (2000), discriminant validity was established for the Family Subscale ($r = .76, p < .001$), the Friends Subscale ($r = .33, p < .001$), and the Significant Other Subscale ($r = .48, p < .001$, respectively.

Table 3 represents each instrument's means, standard deviations, and McDonald's Omega.

Table 3.

Means, Standard Deviations, and McDonald's Omegas for Variables under Study

Variable	M	SD	ω
Self-Esteem (Rewards)	47.27	9.27	.82
Self-Esteem (Costs)	29.38	11.85	.86
Internalized Negative Stereotypes	1.94	.865	.89
Internalized Media Pressure	15.58	4.31	.84

Frequency of Gendered Racial Microaggressions	1.83	.892	.94
Stress Appraisal of Gendered Racial Microaggressions	1.95	1.16	.93
Racial-Ethnic Identity	2.94	.865	.80
Critical Consciousness (critical reflection)	14.97	6.97	.92
Critical Consciousness (critical motivation)	19.77	6.16	.84
Critical Consciousness (critical action)	8.54	5.26	.88
Perceived Social Support	5.45	1.38	.93

Data Screening and Analysis

Before the analysis, all continuous variables were screened for missing data. Across the variables of interest, 6.3% of the data were missing. I performed Little's MCAR test to determine if 6.3% of the missing data were missing completely at random. According to Little's MCAR test, data were missing completely at random ($x^2 = 6038.20$, $df = 6020$, p = .43). Therefore, I used multiple imputations to replace missing values and used the 5th iteration of these data in all analyses.

Basic screening started with examining skewness and kurtosis values to assess the normality of variables. Field (2018) stated that an absolute skew value greater than |2.1| is a

reference for substantial departure from normality. Field (2018) also proposed an absolute kurtosis value greater than |7.1| as a reference for a substantial departure from normality. All skewness and kurtosis values were within the recommended thresholds, and visual inspection of the histograms suggested that the variables were normally distributed. To assess for univariate outliers, I examined the box plots for each instrument. Eighteen univariate outliers were identified across the variables. Two were removed for being influential on these data. After comparing the trimmed mean to the mean for all variables of interest, 16 were retained because they had little impact on these data. Multivariate outliers were assessed by conducting a chi-square test with Mahalanobis distance. One multivariate outlier was identified and removed from these data, as multiple regression is sensitive to multivariate outliers (Pallant, 2020).

Table 4.

Skewness and Kurtosis Values for Variables Under Study

Variable	*Skewness*	$SE_{skewness}$	*Kurtosis*	$SE_{kurtosis}$
Microaggression frequency	.380	.213	-.554	.423
Microaggression stress	.273	.213	-.953	.423
Racial-ethnic Identity	-.701	.213	.091	.423
Media Influence	1.233	.213	1.285	.423
Internalized Negative Stereotypes	1.001	.213	.703	.423
Self-Esteem	.132	.213	-.216	.423
Perceived Social Support	-1.165	.213	1.510	.423
Critical Consciousness				
Critical Reflection	.766	.213	3.598	.423
Critical Motivation	-1.286	.213	1.273	.423
Critical Action	1.203	.213	.548	.423

Chapter Summary

This chapter explained how the researcher engaged in her strength-based study to bring out the brilliance in Black girls. Thus, the researcher provided a roadmap for how she conducted the cross-sectional correlational study utilizing a hierarchical multiple regression analysis. The steps for analyzing the data in this study were situated in the tenets of Collins's (2000) Black Feminist Thought. The researcher's goal was to empower Black girls by designing a study that would predict the self-esteem of Black girls despite the internalization of negative stereotypes, the internalization of pressures from media to conform, and the frequency and stress appraisal of gendered racial microaggressions experienced. By examining the unique variability in self-esteem when critical consciousness, racial-ethnic identity, and perceived social support were added, the researcher can offer educators, school counselors, and parents tangible ways to counter negative messages and bring out the brilliance in Black girls.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This research employed a cross-sectional, correlational design to examine the relationships between self-esteem, negative internalized stereotypes, critical consciousness, racial and ethnic identity, and perceived social support among Black girls using a hierarchical linear regression. The current study aimed to empirically test the Black Feminist Thought framework (Collins, 2000) by investigating whether critical consciousness, racial-ethnic identity, and perceived social support predicted the self-esteem of Black girls above and beyond the internalization of negative stereotypes while controlling for television and social media use. This study explored how sociocultural (e.g., experiences with microaggressions) and psychological factors (e.g., the internalization of negative stereotypes) uniquely shape the self-perception of Black girls within a media-saturated and stereotype-driven environment (Collins, 2014). This study used a cross-sectional design to examine factors influencing self-esteem in Black girls. Participants included Black girls between 11 and 17 who completed questionnaires measuring self-esteem, perceived social support, racial-ethnic identity, critical consciousness, and internalized negative stereotypes. Data were collected through online and paper-based surveys and analyzed using two hierarchical multiple regressions to explore these variables' unique and combined contributions to rewards distributed to self (enhancing self-esteem) and costs distributed to self (decreasing self-esteem). To model the core tenets of Black Feminist Thought, scores from The Modern Jezebel Scale (MJS), Multidimensional Media Influence Scale (MMIS), Gendered Racial Microaggression Scale (GRMS), Short Critical Consciousness Scale (CCS-S),

Multigroup Ethnic Identity Scale (MEIM), and the Multidimensional Scale for Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) were used to examine the variables under study. The research question that guided this study was: Does critical consciousness, racial-ethnic identity, and perceived social support predict self-esteem in Black girls above and beyond internalized negative stereotypes, internalized pressures from the media to conform to ideal standards, and the frequency and stress of gendered racial microaggressions?

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were calculated to examine participants' responses to all primary study variables. The Taylor Self-Esteem Rewards subscale and Costs subscales' possible scores ranged from 0 to 64. Participants reported an average score of approximately 47 for rewards distributed to self (M = 46.84, SD = 9.07) and 29 for costs distributed to self (M = 29.38, SD = 11.85*)*, indicating relatively high self-esteem. The internalized negative stereotypes, measured by the Modern Jezebel Scale, possible scores ranged from 1 to 5. Participants reported an average score of approximately (M = 1.94, SD = .86) for internalized negative stereotype, which means that on average, participants disagreed with stereotypical statements like "Black girls are loud and have an attitude", indicating a general rejection of negative, internalized beliefs about black girls. Participants' internalized media pressures to conform, measured by the Multidimensional Media Influence Scale, possible scores ranged from 11 to 33*,* with participants' reported an average score of approximately (M = 15.58, SD = 4.31*)*, this suggest that while some exposure to media pressures existed, the majority of participants did not strongly endorse or internalize societal expectations regarding appearance or behavior as portrayed in the media. Additionally, participants' internalization of ideal standards ranged from 6 to 18, reported an average score of approximately (M = 8.34, SD = 2.96), suggesting lower levels of media internalization.

The frequency and stress appraisal of possible gendered racial microaggression scores ranged from 0 to 5. Participants reported frequencies of experiences with gendered racial microaggressions, with an average score of approximately (M = 1.83, SD = .89). These findings suggest that, on average, participants experience gendered racial microaggressions a few times a year. Stress appraisals were reported with an average score of approximately (M = 1.95, SD = 1.16), suggesting that microaggressions, when experienced, are moderately stressful.

Racial-ethnic identity, measured by the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure, possible scores ranged from 1 to 4, and participants reported an average score of approximately (M = 2.94, SD = 0.86), suggesting participants on average agreed with questions like "I feel good about my cultural or ethnic background". Critical consciousness critical reflection subscale possible scores ranged from 4 to 24, with participants reporting a total score of approximately (M = 14.97, SD = 6.97). Critical consciousness critical motivation subscale possible scores also ranged from 4 to 24, and participants reported a total score of approximately (M = 19.77, SD = 6.16). Critical consciousness critical action subscale scores ranged from 5 to 25, and participants reported a total score of approximately (M = 8.54, SD = 5.26), which can be interpreted as participants reported being aware of racial and social injustices and motivated to advocate for change, but factors are inhibiting them from acting.

Finally, perceived social support, measured by the multidimensional scale of perceived social support, has possible scores ranging from 1 to 7. Participants reported an average of (M = 5.45, SD = 1.38), indicating high levels of perceived social support.

Bivariate Correlation Results

Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) statistics were calculated to investigate the research hypotheses. Pearson's r correlation is used to explore the strength and direction of the linear

relationship between the variables under study (Pallant, 2011). Accordingly, the hypotheses for this study were as follows:

- The linear relationship between internalized negative stereotypes will have a moderate relationship with the self-esteem scores of Black girls.
- The linear combination of critical consciousness, racial-ethnic identity, and perceived social support will have a moderate to high effect on the rewards and costs self-esteem scores of Black girls above and beyond any internalized negative messages, internalized media pressure, frequency, and stress of gendered racial microaggressions.

For hypothesis 1, results revealed no significant correlation between internalized negative stereotypes and rewards distributed to self (r =.03, p = .40*)*, however, a moderate negative correlation was found between internalized negative stereotypes and costs distributed to self (r = -.25, p <.01), indicating that higher endorsement of negative stereotypes is associated with greater costs to self-esteem. A small, negative correlation was also observed between rewards distributed to self and the frequency of gendered racial microaggressions (r = -.16, p =.07), though this was not statistically significant. In contrast, moderate negative correlations were identified between costs distributed to self and both the frequency (r = -.37, p < .001) and stress appraisal (r = -.36, p < .001), of gendered racial microaggressions; suggesting that increased exposure to and distress from microaggressions are linked to higher costs to self-esteem. All correlation results are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 5.

Correlation Matrix for Self-Esteem Rewards and Control/ Predictor Variables

		1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.
1.	SE-R	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
2.	D.TV	-.234*	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
3.	D.SM	-.053	.218*	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
4.	I.N.S.	-.026	-.076	-.008	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
5.	I.M.P.	-.313**	-.113	-.008	-.016	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	
6.	F.GRMS	-.159	.176*	.070	.246**	.522***	1	-	-	-	-	-	
7.	S.GRMS	-.268	.092	.067	.177*	.537***	.822***	1	-	-	-	-	
8.	C.R.	-.117	.015	-.139	.010	.372***	.326***	.258**	1	-	-	-	
9.	C.M	.045	.029	-.197*	-.246**	.216*	.156	.181*	.403**	1	-	-	
10.	C.A.	.029	.000	.025	.164	.190*	.438***	.352***	.049	.063	1	-	
11.	P.S.S.	.416***	-.188*	-.200*	-.075	-.119	-.160	-.184*	.023	.388**	.050	1	
12.	R.E.I.	.236**	.081	-.108	-.326	.007	.016	.071	.103	.501**	.003	.494**	1

Abbreviations: SE-R: Self-esteem Rewards, D.TV: Daily television consumption, D.SM: Daily Social Media Use, I.N.S.: Internalized Negative Stereotypes, I.M.P.: Internalized Media Pressures, F.GRMS: Frequency of Gendered Racial Microaggressions, S.GRMS: Stress appraisal of Gendered Racial Microaggression, C.R.: Critical Reflection, C.M.: Critical Motivation, C.A.: Critical Action, P.S.S.: Perceived Social Support, R.E.I.: Racial-Ethnic Identity.

Note: $*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001$

Table 6.

Correlation Matrix for Self-Esteem Costs and Control/ Predictor Variables

		1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.
1.	SE-C	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
2.	D.TV	-.052	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
3.	D.SM	-.144	.206*	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
4.	I.N.S.	-.255**	-.085	.005	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
5.	I.M.P.	-.328	-.109	-.003	-.003	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	
6.	F.GRMS	-.366***	.159	.059	.247*	.538***	1	-	-	-	-	-	
7.	S.GRMS	-.359***	.071	.062	.188*	.830***		1	-	-	-	-	
8.	C.R.	-.287**	.015	-.147	-.018	.409***	.333***	.288**	1	-	-	-	
9.	C.M	-.115	.015	-.210*	-.263**	-.234*	.141	.188*	.395***	1	-	-	
10.	C.A.	-.106	-.040	.005	.167	.209	.420	.355	.046	.032	1	-	
11.	P.S.S.	.065	-.211*	-.209*	.076	-.118	-.175	-.193*	.024	.385***	.028	1	
12.	R.E.I.	.059	-.143	-.131	-.326**	-.003	-.008	.036	.154	.527***	-.47	.498***	1

Abbreviations: SE-R: Self-esteem Costs, D.TV: Daily television consumption, D.SM: Daily Social Media Use, I.N.S.: Internalized Negative Stereotypes, I.M.P.: Internalized Media Pressures, F.GRMS: Frequency of Gendered Racial Microaggressions, S.GRMS: Stress appraisal of Gendered Racial Microaggression, C.R.: Critical Reflection, C.M.: Critical Motivation, C.A.: Critical Action, P.S.S.: Perceived Social Support, R.E.I.: Racial-Ethnic Identity.

Note: $*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001$

Results of Hierarchical Regression Analyses

To answer my research question and address hypothesis 2, I conducted two hierarchical multiple regressions to empirically model Black Feminist Thought's theory and predict contributions of critical consciousness, racial-ethnic identity, and perceived social support on Black girls' distribution rewards and costs to self, above and beyond internalized negative stereotypes while controlling for media use. The first hierarchical regression investigated the predictive power of the research variables on rewards distributed to the self, enhancing self-esteem, and the second investigated costs distributed to the self, decreasing self-esteem.

Hierarchical Regression 1

Self-esteem Rewards Model 1- Media Intake

Two control variables, daily hours of television consumption and daily hours of social media use, were entered in the first block. This model was not statistically significant (F (2,87) = 2.52, R^2 =.05, p =.10*).* An examination of the beta coefficients revealed that hours of television consumed (β = -.23, p < .05), was a statistically significant predictor of rewards distributed to self, while social media use (β = -.00, p = .99) was not.

Self-Esteem Rewards - Model 2 – Internalization of Negative Stereotypes

Next, internalized negative stereotypes (The Modern Jezebel Total Score), internalized media pressures to conform (The Multidimensional Media Total Score), the frequency of microaggression experiences (The Gendered Racial Microaggression frequency total score), and the stress appraisal of microaggression experiences (The Gendered Racial Microaggression total stress score) were entered into block 2. This model was statistically significant (F (6,83) =3.90, R^2=.22, p < .01) and and explained 22.0% of the variance in rewards distributed to self. Accordingly, hours of daily television consumption (β = -.31, p < .01), the frequency of gendered

racial microaggressions (β = -.39, p < .05), the stress appraisal from gendered racial microaggressions (β = -.35, p < .05), and media pressures (β = -.36, p < .01) were all statistically significant predictors of rewards distributed to self. Conversely, social media use (β = .01, p = .92) and the internalization of negative stereotypes (β = -.04, p = .73) were not statistically significant predictors of rewards distributed to self.

Self-Esteem Rewards - Model 3 – Critical Consciousness, Racial-Ethnic Identity and Perceived Social Support

Critical consciousness (Short Critical Consciousness Subscale scores: critical reflection, critical motivation, and critical action), racial-ethnic identity (The Multigroup Ethnic Identity total score), and perceived social support (The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support) were entered into block 3. The final model was statistically significant (F (11, 78) = 4.332, R^2 = .34, p < .01) and had a large effect *(ω^2=.24;* Field, 2018), indicating that approximately 34% of the variance in self-esteem was explained by the complete set of predictors.

A review of the beta coefficients showed that social media use (β = .06, p = .56), the frequency of gendered racial microaggressions (β = .35, p = .06), critical reflection (β = -.03, p = .76), critical motivation (β = -.02, p = .86), critical action (β = .03, p = .75), and racial-ethnic identity (β = .12, p = .32) were not statistically significant predictors of rewards distributed to self by Black girls. However, daily hours of television consumed (β = -.24, p < .05), stress associated with gendered racial microaggression (β = -.34, p = .05), internalized media messages (β = -.30, p < .05), and perceived social support (β = .30, p < .05) were statistically significant predictors of rewards distributed to self. For every .24 decrease in hours spent watching television, there is a 1 unit increase in self-esteem. For every .34 decrease in stress associated

with gendered racial microaggressions, there is a one-unit increase in rewards distributed to self; for every .30 decrease in internalized media messages, there is a one-unit increase in rewards distributed to self; for every .30 increase in perceived social support, there is a one-unit increase in rewards distributed to self, enhancing self-esteem in Black girls.

Hierarchical Regression 2- Costs to Self-Esteem

Model 1- Media Intake

In the first model of the second hierarchical regression, daily hours of television consumption and daily hours of social media use were entered in the first block. The second hierarchical regression's first model (F (2,84) =.91, R^2=.02, p = .40) was not statistically significant. The beta coefficients of daily television consumption (β = -.02, p = .84) and daily hours spent on social media (β = -.14, p = .21) were not statistically significant predictors of costs distributed to self by Black girls.

Model 2- Internalization of Negative Stereotypes

In block 2, internalized negative stereotypes, internalized media pressures to conform, the frequency of microaggression experiences, and the stress appraisal of microaggression experiences were entered into the model. This model was statistically significant (F (6,80) = 3.80, R^2=.22, p < .01). Television consumption (β = -.05, p = .64), daily social media use (β = -.12, p = .23), the frequency of microaggressions (β = -.07, p < .72), the stress appraisal of the microaggressions (β = -.13, p =.48), and the internalization of media pressure (β = -.23, p <.07) were not statistically significant predictors of costs distributed to self.

Model 3–Critical Consciousness, Racial-Ethnic Identity, and Perceived Social Support

In the third model of the second hierarchical regression, the critical consciousness subscales (i.e., critical reflection, critical motivation, and critical action) were entered at block 3.

The final model was statistically significant (F (11, 78) = 2.41, R^2 = .26, p < .05*)* and had a large effect *(*ω^2=.15*;* Field, 2018), indicating that approximately 26% of the variance in costs to self-esteem was explained by the complete set of predictors. The BFT predictors accounted for an additional 4% of the variance in the costs to self-esteem after accounting for media exposure and internalized messages.

Daily hours of television consumption (β = -.03, p = .80), daily social media use (β = -0.17, p =.11)*,* the frequency of microaggressions (β = -.06, p =.76), stress appraisal of microaggressions (β = -.13, p = .49), the internalization of media pressure (β = -.15, p = .25), perceived social support (β = -.04, p =.77), critical reflection (β = -.17, p = .16), critical motivation (β = -.09, p = .49), critical action (β = .05, p = .64), and racial-ethnic identity (β = .05, p = .68) were not statistically significant predictors of the costs distributed to self. The only statistically significant predictor of costs distributed to the self was the internalization of negative stereotypes (e.g., Jezebel, Sapphire and Mammy tropes; β = -.24, p < .05). These results can be interpreted as for every .24 unit increase in internalized negative messages; there is a one-unit increase in costs distributed to self. A summary of the hierarchical regression results is presented in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 7.

Hierarchical Multiple Regression Variables Predicting Self-Esteem Rewards with Critical Consciousness, Racial-Ethnic Identity and Perceived Social Support

Variable	F	df	p	R^2	B	$SE\ B$	β
Model 1	2.522	(2,87)	.086	.055			
Constant					51.33	2.217	
Daily TV					-1.348	.616	-.234*
Daily SM					-.004	.194	-.002
Model 2	3.891	(6,83)	.002	.220			
Constant					62.817	4.595	
Daily TV					-1.815	.609	-.315**
Daily SM					.019	.181	.010
Internalized Negative Stereotypes							-.036
Internalized Media Pressures							-.359**
Stress Appraisal					-.2971	1.447	-.359*
Gendered Racial Microaggression Frequency of Gendered Racial Microaggression					4.104	1.933	.387*
Model 3	3.581	(11,78)	.001	.336			
Constant					41.650	7.629	5.460*
Daily TV					-1.403	.597	-.243*
Daily SM					.104	.178	.057
Internalized Negative Stereotypes							.027
Internalized Media Pressures							-.297*
Stress Appraisal					-2.781	1.417	-.336*
Gendered Racial Microaggression Frequency of Gendered Racial Microaggression					3.701	1.954	.349
Critical Consciousness (critical reflection)					-.051	.165	-.034
Critical Consciousness (critical motivation)					-.044	.251	-.022
Critical Consciousness (critical action)					.072	.229	.033
Perceived Social Support					2.198	.903	.289*
Racial-Ethnic Identity					1.736	1.752	.122

Note: Daily TV = hours spent watching television daily. Daily SM = hours spent accessing social media daily.
$*p < .05.$ $**p < .01.$ $***p < .001$

Table 8.

Hierarchical Multiple Regression Variables Predicting Self-Esteem Costs with Critical Consciousness, racial-Ethnic Identity and Perceived Social Support

Variable	F	df	p	R^2	B	$SE\ B$	β
Model 1	.917	(2,84)	.404	.021			
Constant					31.393	2.974	
Daily TV					-.169	.818	-.023
Daily SM					-.319	.252	-.140
Model 2	3.800	(6,80)	.002**	.222			
Constant					51.230	5.886	
Daily TV					-.372	.792	-.050
Daily SM					-.278	.230	-.122
Internalized Negative Stereotypes					-3.350	1.604	-.219*
Internalized Media Pressures					-.571	.311	-.229
Stress Appraisal					-.1.324	1.889	-.127
Gendered Racial Microaggression Frequency of Gendered Racial Microaggression					-.915	2.542	-.068
Model 3	2.410	(11,78)	.013*	.261			
Constant					55.702	10.693	
Daily TV					-.201	.836	-.028
Daily SM					-.391	.241	-.172
Internalized Negative Stereotypes					-3.661	1.779	-.239*
Internalized Media Pressures					-.383	.334	-.153
Stress Appraisal					-1.364	1.951	-.131
Gendered Racial Microaggression Frequency of Gendered Racial Microaggression					-.803	2.681	-.060
Critical Consciousness (critical reflection)					-.324	.228	-.169
Critical Consciousness (critical motivation)					-.238	.345	.094
Critical Consciousness (critical action)					.148	.317	.052
Perceived Social Support					-.357	1.213	-.037
Racial-Ethnic Identity					1.024	2.507	.055

Note: Daily TV = hours spent watching television daily. Daily SM = hours spent accessing social media daily.
$*p < .05.$ $**p < .01.$ $***p < .001$

Chapter Summary

In summary, the researcher was interested in empirically examining BFT's theory that internalized negative stereotypes, internalized media pressures to conform (e.g., television and social media), and the frequency and stress appraisal of microaggression experiences serve to deteriorate Black girls' self-esteem (Tatum, 1997). Accordingly, this research employed two three-block hierarchical multiple regressions to examine the predictive power of critical consciousness, racial-ethnic identity, and perceived social support on Black girls' rewards and costs distributed to self, above and beyond internalized negative stereotypes, media pressures to conform, and frequency and stress appraisal of gendered racial microaggressions. The first hierarchical multiple regression analysis showed that critical consciousness, racial-ethnic identity, and perceived social support, were statistically significant predictors of rewards distributed to self above and beyond television consumption, social media use, internalized negative stereotypes, internalized media pressures, and the frequency and stress of microaggressions, and the whole model accounted for 34% of variance in rewards distributed to self by Black girls. Adding critical consciousness, racial and ethnic identity, and perceived social support significantly improved the prediction of rewards distributed to self by 12%. The final model demonstrated a significant effect ($\omega^2 = .24$). The statistically significant predictors in the model were television consumption, stress appraisal of gendered racial microaggressions, internalized negative stereotypes, and perceived social support.

The second hierarchical multiple regression showed that critical consciousness, racial-ethnic identity, and perceived social support, were statistically significant predictors of costs distributed to self above and beyond television consumption, social media use, internalized negative stereotypes, internalized media pressures, and the frequency and stress of

microaggressions, and the full model accounts for 20% of variance in costs distributed to self by Black girls. Adding critical consciousness, racial ethnic identity, and perceived social support significantly improved the prediction of costs distributed to self by 4%, and the whole model had a large effect size ($\omega^2 = .15$).

In conclusion, the final block in both hierarchical regression models examining rewards and costs to self-esteem showed statistically significant contributions from the combined predictors of critical consciousness, racial-ethnic identity, and perceived social support, above and beyond the effects of television consumption, social media use, internalized negative stereotypes, media pressures, and gendered racial microaggressions. These findings offer support for the applicability of the tenets of Black Feminist Thought with Black girls (Collins, 2000), particularly its emphasis on self-definition, communal support, and resistance to controlling images. The significance of the full models underscores the theoretical power of BFT in identifying how to effectively nurture and protect Black girls' self-esteem. The next chapter will include a discussion of the research results and their implications.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study employed a cross-sectional, correlational research design to understand the relationships between self-esteem, internalized negative stereotypes, internalized media pressures, frequency, and stress appraisals of microaggressions, critical consciousness, racial-ethnic identity, and perceived social support among Black girls. This chapter will discuss the results of the study, the study's limitations, the contributions of the study, and the implications of the results of the study. First, I will provide a brief overview of the study. Next, I will discuss the results, including a discussion of the demographic data, results from the preliminary analysis, and the study's primary results. Next, I will present the study's contributions, limitations, and implications. Finally, I will conclude with recommendations for future research.

Restatement of the Study and Its Significance

This study was grounded in the need to understand and disrupt the alarming rise in depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation affecting Black girls (CD 2023; OHM, 2024). Research from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) (2021) and scholars such as Lindsey et al. (2019) discussed the alarming increase in suicide rates among Black girls. Despite these trends, empirical studies using Black Feminist Thought focusing solely on Black girls and taking a strength-based lens to address these concerns are scarce (Agger et al.; Goss-Graves et al., 2014). Pervasive images of Black women and girls in television (Collins, 2001), social media, advertisements (Harris-Perry, 2011), and music (Jerald et al., 2017) often reinforce harmful narratives that negatively impact Black girls' self-esteem. These representations do not come

without a cost to the psyche of Black girls (West, 1995). They shape how Black girls see themselves, navigate social environments, and interpret their societal value (Gordon, 2008). Furthermore, these images fuel biases that influence how educators, education policies, and the broader community treat Black girls (Brown, 2013). Therefore, this study sought to provide empirical evidence of internal and external resources that empower Black girls and validate their experiences.

The research question guiding this study was "Does critical consciousness, racial-ethnic identity, and perceived social support predict self-esteem in Black girls above and beyond internalized negative stereotypes, media pressures, and gender and racial microaggressions?" The researcher hypothesized that there would be a moderate relationship between internalized negative stereotypes and the costs to self-esteem in Black girls. The second hypothesis was that the combination of critical consciousness, racial-ethnic identity, and perceived social support would produce a moderate to high effect on predicting self-esteem in Black girls above and beyond the internalization of negative stereotypes, media pressures, and experiences with microaggressions. The results confirmed both research hypotheses. Internalized negative stereotypes have a negative, moderate relationship with costs distributed to self-esteem. As the internalization of negative stereotypes increases, there is an increase in costs distributed to self, resulting in a decrease in self-esteem in Black girls. Furthermore, the two hierarchical regressions on rewards and costs distributed to self were statistically significant, suggesting that critical consciousness, racial-ethnic identity, and perceived social support predicted self-esteem in Black girls above and beyond the internalization of negative stereotypes, media pressures, and gender and racial microaggressions. The following section will review the results of the study.

Discussion of Preliminary Results

Demographic Data and Descriptive Statistics

Before the primary analysis, the researcher examined the descriptive statistics for the sample across all variables of interest. Participants reported high rewards distributed to themselves, suggesting an endorsement of self-affirming internal messages enhancing self-esteem. Conversely, the low costs distributed to self suggest that the sample are less likely to engage in self-criticism and self-damaging. This is encouraging given participants' reported experiences with frequent and stress appraisal of racial and gender microaggressions. It is possible that this sample has higher self-esteem due to participation in sports, a multitude of leadership, mentoring, and school club activities (Taylor et al., 2012). Similarly, Ellison et al. (2023) found that Black girls' participation in workshops and clubs reshaped their understanding of self as a leader and increased empowerment, agency, and liberation. This seems to converge with hooks (2003) and Taylor & Brown's (1988) argument that engagement in affirming experiences representative of Black girlhood promotes self-esteem. Moreover, it is possible that participants' high reports of rewards to self can be explained by their religiosity, as suggested by King (2015) and Zinobia & Taylors' (2022) who found that Black girls' belief in God and participation in religious activities contributed to a strong sense of worthiness, despite negative media portrayals thus enhancing Black girls' self-esteem.

This study's focus on self-esteem, racial-ethnic identity and navigating media pressures is critical to the development of identity formation (Erikson, 1968) for the largest age group in this study (ages 13 and 14) because they are particularly vulnerable to media messages at a time when they are negotiating internal and external perceptions of themselves (Umana-Taylor et al., 2014). This study found perceived social support to be a statistically significant predictor of self-

esteem in Black girls. Many participants reported living in multigenerational households, which may help explain the high levels of perceived support reported, aligning with previous findings by Taylor et al. (2015). The high number of participants reported attending public schools is also essential. Seaton et al. (2011) emphasized that adolescents who attend predominantly public schools are under-resourced and are victims of state-initiated pressures for the Common Core curriculum, making identity development and support systems even more salient to healthy self-esteem. Finally, while many of the participants in this study identified as Black, a notable percentage reported identifying as biracial and multiracial. Phinney and Ong (2007) suggested that including these demographic nuances enriches research findings, illustrating how racial-ethnic identity can operate across diverse expressions of Blackness. These demographic characteristics highlight the intersectional and developmental lens within this study's findings.

Bivariate Correlations

Bivariate correlations were conducted among the predictor variables and the rewards/costs distributed to self. The correlation patterns in this study create two pathways for understanding self-esteem in Black girls: self-affirmation (rewards) and self-protection (costs). This study's path to self-affirmation (rewards distributed to self) seems to be supported by the positive relationship between perceived social support, racial-ethnic identity, and the critical motivation to be engaged in critical action. This aligns with Middleton and Owens' (2024) research that suggests that Black girls with social support have higher levels of self-esteem. Furthermore, this converges with Lafreniere et al.'s (2023) findings that a heightened awareness of racism influenced Black girls' role in the Black Lives Matter movement. Similarly, Black girls' active participation in social justice efforts such as Black Girl Magic highlights their commitment to creating their narratives (Woolston, 2024). Strengthening the path to self-

protection (costs distributed to self) may come from buffering against internalized negative stereotypes and media pressures by strengthening critical reflection. Additionally, the participants displayed higher levels of rewards distributed to self, enhancing self-esteem because of a strong sense of racial identity (Goodstein & Pointerotto, 1997), which could mean that stronger racial-ethnic identity could result in higher self-esteem, resilience, and buffering against discrimination (Umana-Taylor et al., 2004). Therefore, educational and counseling settings can use racial-ethnic identity-affirming interventions to nurture belonging and pride in cultural heritage (Rivas & Drake, 2014).

Media Exposure and Internalization

The moderate negative correlation with rewards distributed to self suggests that increased television consumption may reduce self-affirming beliefs in Black girls. This finding seems to converge with Mastro (2017), who suggests that unfavorable portrayals of racial and ethnic groups can lead to issues with self-esteem, especially considering Pew Research's (2015) claim that Black girls are especially vulnerable to media consumption because of how much time is spent consuming television. However, it should be noted that this study's population reported consuming fewer media hours than national numbers (Common Sense Media, 2022). However, the costs of consuming small amounts of television still erode self-affirmation in this study's sample. This further supports Gerber and Gross's (1976) cultivation theory that, because television is a significant source of storytelling in America, any rate of television consumption can increase internalizing stories and images. As Black girls spend more time watching television, they tend to attribute fewer rewards to themselves, which equates to lower positive self-esteem, confirming Martins & Harrison's (2012) findings that television exposure decreased self-esteem in Black girls.

The mixed results of the relationship between social media and self-esteem in Black girls introduced an interesting phenomenon. Social media use was only weakly correlated with rewards and costs to self-esteem. However, the negative directionality supports emerging literature like Baker-Bell (2017) that the prevalence of negative stereotypical representations of Black youth contributes to a sense of being devalued and marginalized. However, Black girls' engagement with social media has also been found to be a source of resistance, says Garcia (2020), who argued that digital spaces serve as a vehicle for agency, cultural expression, and identity performance, as well as a way to reject dominant discourse by using social media to represent Black girlhood positively and combat discriminatory texts (Baker-Bell, 2017). Social media and self-esteem depend more on content engagement and peer interaction than sheer exposure.

Internalization: A Reinforcement of Costs to Self-Esteem

The most notable findings were that internalized negative stereotypes and media pressures both displayed a moderate negative correlation with rewards and costs to self, indicating that the more Black girls internalize dominant beauty standards and hypersexualized stereotypes, the fewer rewards they attribute to self, and the more likely they are to engage in self-criticism. Considering Adams-Bass's (2014) findings that Black girls unconsciously internalize media representations and integrate them into their daily lives, the moderate correlation with costs and rewards found in this study confirms the self-devaluation that can be activated with internalized stereotypes. Interestingly, the moderate correlation between internalized negative stereotypes and costs distributed to self might suggest that the participants in this study reflect a protective disassociation, or minimized awareness due to stereotype internalization, which research suggests can be a coping mechanism where Black girls distance

themselves emotionally or cognitively from harmful messages (Francios-Walcott & Stokes, 2024). This is not an agreement, but it is not an active rejection either. It is a form of psychological preservation, and while this may shield them from emotional harm, it may also prevent the development of critical consciousness, which is needed for long-term resilience (Opara, 2022). Either Black girls who internalize beauty and appearance ideals promoted by the media attribute fewer rewards to themselves, having a notable impact on self-perception, or Black girls' internalization of media beauty ideals, negatively correlated with costs distributed to self, suggest that they may cope through reframing or denial. Both possibilities support Poran's (2006) findings that media pressures regarding beauty ideals have a deteriorating effect on Black girls' self-esteem.

Gendered Racial Microaggressions: A Subtle but Persistent Toll

Experiences with gendered racial microaggressions, particularly those linked to the "angry Black woman," "beauty and sexual objectification," and "strong Black woman" tropes, were negatively correlated with both self-affirmation (rewards) and self-criticism (costs). While the correlations with rewards were small, their moderate correlations with costs highlight a stronger connection between repeated microaggressions and increased self-critical thoughts. This supports Lewis and Neville's (2015) argument that gendered racial microaggressions are a chronic source of psychological distress for Black girls, damaging their self-concept, especially when accompanied by stress appraisal. Notably, despite moderate experiences across all subscales, stress appraisals were consistently high, reinforcing the cumulative emotional toll of navigating both racism and sexism. These findings reaffirm that microaggressions are not minor irritants but daily erosions of esteem and belonging, consistent with "weathering" (the cumulative psychological and physiological effect of prolonged exposure, Geronimus, 2006).

These findings support the need to distinguish between self-affirmation (rewards) and self-criticism (costs), understand self-esteem in Black girls, and predictors that can motivate, support, and affirm identity, which may contribute more strongly to positive self-esteem than to diminish self-esteem.

Discussion of Primary Results

This study empirically tested Black Feminist Thought's theoretical claims by examining whether critical consciousness, racial-ethnic identity, and perceived social support would predict Black girls' self-esteem above and beyond the internalization of negative stereotypes, media pressures, and experiences with gendered racial microaggressions. Therefore, two hierarchical multiple regressions were conducted in three blocks to explore the predictors of rewards and costs distributed to self.

Hierarchical Regression: 1-Rewards to Self-Esteem

The full model of the first hierarchical regression, focusing on rewards distributed to self, was statistically significant and explained 24% of the variance in rewards distributed to self, thereby enhancing self-esteem ($R^2 = .24$), indicating that the combination of critical consciousness, racial-ethnic identity, and perceived social support predicted rewards distributed to self above and beyond the internalization of negative stereotypes, media pressures to conform to Eurocentric beauty ideals, and gendered racial microaggressions. However, perceived social support was theoretically the only statistically significant predictor of rewards distributed to self. In other words, increased perceived support resulted in increased rewards distributed to self. This finding supports BFT's theory that support, and connection are imperative for Black girls to create and embrace a positive self-concept and overcome oppression (Collins, 2000). Similarly, the rewards distributed to self-esteem increased as daily hours spent watching television, the

pressure from media to conform, and the stress appraisal of gendered racial microaggressions decreased. This supports English et al. (2020) and Williams-Butler et al. (2022) findings that consistent exposure to negative stereotypes and gendered-racial discrimination is harmful to Black girls' self-esteem. Moreover, these findings support Apugo et al.'s (2021) findings that regular exposure to microaggressions through schooling experiences or media consumption can diminish self-esteem in Black girls. In this study, the frequency and stress of gendered racial microaggressions were statistically significantly associated with the costs that Black girls attribute to themselves, resulting in a reduction in self-esteem. This is reflective of the psychological toll that microaggressive experiences can take on Black girls (Loyd et al., 2021). When put into context that many of the girls in this study were at a key developmental stage (14 or younger), the findings related explicitly to microaggressions are even more powerful due to the impact others' have on their self-perception during this developmental time (Erikson, 1968; Porter et al., 2020). Conversely, social media use, critical reflection, critical motivation, critical action, and racial-ethnic identity did not have a unique statistically significant contribution to rewards distributed to self in the final regression model. These findings differ from previous research suggesting that critical consciousness and racial ethnic identity are essential to self-esteem in Black girls (Goodstein & Pointerro, 1997; Seider et al., 2020). For example, Jacobs' phenomenological study (2016) concluded that by obtaining an oppositional gaze, also called critical consciousness, Black girls could proclaim a self-defined standpoint. The current research slightly diverges from Jacobs' (2016) conclusion because critical consciousness was not a statistically significant predictor of self-esteem or self-defined standpoint in the Black girl participants. The results of the current study suggested that Black girls enhanced self-esteem and self-defined standpoint were directly related to their perceived social support. Seaton et al.'s

quantitative study (2010) noted that increased awareness of oppression (critical reflection) may manifest in Black girls as anger, frustration, or identity distress as opposed to higher self-esteem, which is slightly connected to the results of this study, which suggested that although Black girls were aware of oppression (critical reflection) and were motivated to make a change (critical motivation), there was no indication that awareness propelled critical action.

Furthermore, racial-ethnic identity can take on the form of survival strategies and emotional resilience in Black girls, which does not always have a linear correlation with self-esteem (Crenshaw, 1991; Thomas et al., 2011), which converges with the current study. The participants reported high levels of racial-ethnic identity, but racial-ethnic identity was not a statistically significant predictor of self-esteem in the final regression model. To understand this result, Umana-Taylor et al.'s (2014) empirical findings suggested that racial-ethnic identity is influenced by context, intersectionality, and the presence of other supports. Therefore, racial-ethnic identity alone may not directly enhance self-esteem unless it is positively affirmed, socially reinforced, and accompanied by critical consciousness (Rivas-Drake, 2014).

Hierarchical Regression 2 – Costs to Self-Esteem

The full model of the second hierarchical regression, which focused on costs distributed to self, was statistically significant and explained 15% of the variance in costs distributed to self, thereby decreasing self-esteem (R^2 = .15), indicating that the combination of critical consciousness, racial-ethnic identity and perceived social support predicted costs distributed to self above and beyond the internalization of negative stereotypes, media pressures to conform to Eurocentric beauty ideals, and gendered racial microaggressions.

Interestingly, internalized negative stereotypes (e.g., the Jezebel stereotype) were the only statistically significant predictor of costs distributed to self. This means that higher levels of

internalized negative stereotypes increase negative beliefs that Black girls hold about themselves. This finding supports BFT's (2000) theory that historical tropes of Black women and girls circulated through media, music, and culture continue to erode the self-esteem of Black girls (Collins, 2000; West, 2008). On the other hand, perceived social support, critical reflection, critical motivation, critical action, and racial and ethnic identity did not have unique statistically significant variance in costs distributed to self-esteem. The following section will examine all statistically significant and non-significant variables in the rewards and costs to self-esteem and contextualize the findings within the body of research.

Television Consumption and The Internalization of Media Pressures

The findings in this study use quantitative measures of internalized media pressures to demonstrate that frequent engagement with media and the internalization of its messages are significantly associated with lower self-esteem in Black girls. These results align with empirical studies focused on media representations of Black girls. For example, Jean (2019) highlighted the psychological harm caused to Black girls by constantly seeing hypersexual, aggressive, or shallow portrayals of Black girls and women in music videos, reality television, and social media. The present study found that participants who reported higher internalization of media pressure experienced higher costs to their self-esteem, further supporting Jean's (2019) findings. Moreover, the present study's findings that Black girls with higher internalization of media scripts are more likely to report diminished self-esteem align with the empirical findings of Stephens (2003), who argued that sociohistorical scripts influence how Black girls develop a sense of self.

The Frequency and Stress Associated with Gendered Racial Microaggressions

The current study quantifies the psychological costs of gendered racial microaggressions and demonstrates that both frequency and the subjective stress they produce are critical predictors of self-esteem. In line with Blake and Epstein's (2011) work, the present study reinforces the idea that adults operating with a gendered and racial lens are prone to perpetuating gendered and racial microaggressions when they encounter Black girls. This study quantifies these experiences, offering statistical evidence that the frequency and stress associated with gendered racial microaggressions contribute to costs to self-esteem, which builds on the work of Blake & Epstein (2011) by highlighting how systemic perceptions translate into psychological burdens that are internalized. Similarly, Mayes et al. (2021) found in their qualitative study that Black girls withhold parts of themselves because of the internalization of trauma related to experiences with gendered racial microaggressions. Mayes et al. (2021) denotes that avoidance is a survival tactic. The present study extends Mayes et al.'s (2021) findings with empirical evidence that supports the claim that gendered racial microaggressions are appraised as significantly stressful and emphasizes the internal cost, such as diminished self-worth. These findings support Blake & Epstein's (2023) recommendation that educators be trained to communicate with Black girls.

Perceived Social Support

The critical theme in the literature (Collins, 2000; Middleton & Owens, 2024) that the power of meaningful connections promotes psychological well-being is supported by this study's findings that perceived social support is a statistically significant positive predictor of self-esteem in Black girls, even after accounting for the internalization of negative media messages and gendered racial microaggressions. Middleton and Owens' (2024) empirical findings,

confirming that interpersonal affirmation from key relationships (e.g., caregivers, mentors, and friends) buffers against negative internalized beliefs, align with the findings of this study. The current research extends Middleton and Owens' (2024) findings that support is a form of resistance and affirmation by quantifying perceived social support as a unique predictor of self-esteem. By contrast, Smith et al. (2020) found that support deprivation has emotional and mental health consequences for Black adolescents. However, the present study complements this by focusing on self-esteem and showing that perceived social support reduces distress and actively builds self-worth.

Social Media Use

The present study did not find that social media use had a unique predictive variance on self-esteem costs or rewards in Black girls. While a weak negative correlation was observed, social media use did not emerge as a predictive factor, which counters dominant assumptions that social media engagement can have a deleterious effect on self-esteem in Black girls. Stokes (2007) echoed this counter, showing how Black girls navigate self-definition through digital performance of identity on homepages. Additionally, Sealy-Ruiz & Haddix (2012) positioned digital spaces as sites for potential transformation for urban youth to challenge dominant narratives and engage in identity-affirming practices. The determining factor in both studies is that Black youth were supported in developing critical consciousness and media literacy. The findings in this study shift the focus from how much time is spent online to how the content is experienced, interpreted, and internalized.

The Internalization of Negative Stereotypes and Self-Esteem

The internalization of negative stereotypes (e.g., the Jezebel and Sapphira trope) did not uniquely predict rewards to self-esteem. Still, it did emerge as the unique statistically significant

predictor of costs to self-esteem. These findings suggest that internalized stereotypes may not prevent Black girls from recognizing their strengths or sources of pride (i.e., rewards), but they can cause self-doubt, shame, and internal conflict (i.e., costs). This study aligns with BFT, confirming that internalizing negative stereotypes carries emotional costs (Collins, 2000). Additionally, it reinforces BFT's claim that these internalizations do not stop with marginalization but are the culprit for self-devaluation (Collins, 2000).

In contrast, Jerald et al.'s (2017) empirical study found that Black girls' awareness of stereotypes resulted in psychological resilience. However, Jerald et al. (2017) emphasized the importance of critical consciousness to buffer against the harmful effects of stereotype exposure. In alignment with the current study, Brown et al.'s quantitative study (2017) found that stereotype endorsement among Black girls was associated with lower self-worth and higher depression, confirming that internalized stereotypes are emotionally costly. Additionally, Townsend et al.'s (2010) empirical findings on hypersexualized stereotypes in Black girls came with social consequences and were the most consistent predictor of psychological costs to self-esteem.

The current study supports BFTs' theory of internalized oppression. It contributes a critical layer that offers quantitative validation of the uniform damage that internalized negative stereotypes have on Black girls' self-esteem, increasing the internal costs to self-esteem, which fuels a sense of unworthiness. In essence, this study offers quantitative evidence to support Townsend (2010), Jerald et al. (2017), and Brown et al. (2017)'s findings that studying stereotype internalization is a specific psychological harm to Black girls.

Critical Consciousness

Godfrey et al. (2019) and McArthur (2016) theorized that critical consciousness has the potential to empower. Still, the findings in this study highlight that awareness of injustices alone

is not sufficient to enhance self-esteem in Black girls, especially when systemic inequities and racialized, gendered stereotypes shape environments. Although critical consciousness alone was not a statistically significant unique predictor of self-esteem, the complete model with critical consciousness as a variable was a statistically significant predictor of self-esteem. The findings confirm BFT's theory that combining critical consciousness with care, connection, and emotionally affirming environments is necessary to build self-esteem in Black girls (Collins, 2000). Thus, cultivating critical consciousness (i.e., media literacy, sociopolitical discussions, and participatory action research) in schools, community, and even through parenting, can serve as a protective factor against negative experiences, bolster self-esteem, and enhance civic engagement (Diemer et al., 2015; Hope et al., 2016).

Racial-Ethnic Identity

While Racial-Ethnic identity positively correlated with self-esteem, it did not contribute a unique statistically significant variance in the final regression model. However, the combination of racial-ethnic identity, critical consciousness, and perceived social support was a statistically significant predictor of self-esteem when internalized negative stereotypes, internalized media pressures, and gendered racial microaggressions were controlled. This study's findings add a critical dimension to existing Grantham & Ford (2003) research, emphasizing racial ethnic identity as central to Black girls' resilience and psychological well-being. In contrast the current study mirrors Mims & Williams (2020) findings that Black girls struggle with forming a cohesive sense of self in response to racialized messages from peers, teachers and the media, confirming that even when Black girls embrace racial-ethnic identity, racial-ethnic identity alone may not be strong enough to buffer against the internalized costs of negative social messaging.

Contribution of the Study

The contributions of this study are deeply rooted in the historical legacy of how Black women and girls have been stereotyped and silenced (Harris-Perry, 2011). Dating back to slavery and colonialism, controlling images such as the *Jezebel*, *Sapphire*, and *Mammy* have been weaponized to devalue Black women's intellect, emotional complexity, and moral worth (Collins, 2000; Stephens & Phillips, 2003). These dehumanizing narratives have not only endured but evolved through modern media, reproducing limiting scripts that distort Black girlhood and hinder healthy identity development. The current study builds on that history by empirically examining how the internalization of such stereotypes continues to shape the self-esteem in Black girls today, while illuminating protective roles of critical consciousness, racial-ethnic identity, and perceived social support. Grounded in Collins' BFT (2000), this study affirms the theory's relevance to Black girls. It emphasizes that healthy self-esteem empowers them to reject stereotypes, define themselves, and navigate systemic challenges to live sustainably. Particularly, this study centered the voices of Black girls, allowing them to quantitatively contribute to ways to disrupt systems of oppression (Agger et al., 2022). This research reframes Black girls not as problems to be fixed, but as powerful beings navigating a society that too often fails to see their full humanity. It challenges deficit narratives that erroneously conclude that because Black girls have been able to achieve at high levels, or have high levels of self-esteem, they do not require support or protection (Epstein & Blacke, 2017). The current study builds on the literature that discusses the negative stereotypes' impact on Black girls' development (Barrier et al., 2016). Ultimately, this study is a scholarly contribution and a political call to action, affirming that Black girls' self-esteem is not a luxury but a necessity for survival, thriving, and joy (Goss-Graves et al., 2014; Young, 2019). Although quantitative

methods are sometimes criticized for silencing Black girls' voices, this study demonstrates how a critical framework can enhance quantitative designs by using instruments that center the intersectional experiences of Black girls (Porter et al., 2023).

The current study has historical ties, is grounded in theory, and is informed and confirmed by data that can affect policy, prompt action, and incite change (Goss-Graves, 2014). Very few studies have assessed the difference in self-esteem in Black girls during adolescence after critically examining negative images, being exposed to a history of powerful black women in America and having an opportunity to redefine who they are outside of negative perceptions (Addington, 2021). This study contributes to the call for research that includes social identities, intersectionality, embedded racism, and sociocultural influences when understanding the experiences of Black girls. (Agger, 2022). Young et al. (2021) call for representing Black girls in educational research. The current study has answered the call.

Limitations of the Study

First, the sample consisted of a homogeneous group of girls who reported media access was less than the national average (Gerber et al., 1994; Gordon, 2008). The current study could be improved by intentionally recruiting girls representing lower socioeconomic households because research suggests that protective factors, such as extracurricular activities, are limited. Doing so might increase the generalizability of the study. Additionally, the hours spent consuming media through television and social media were self-reported, and several girls opted not to answer at all, assuming, based on my experience as a School Counselor, for fear that their parents would find out. Moreover, the questions in the instrument used to assess critical consciousness did not depict modern ways (e.g., digital spaces and sister circles) that Black girls engage in critical analysis and social activism. Fourth, convenience sampling limits

generalizability to other settings; however, considering the developmental level of students, this study will provide helpful insight into what measures can be taken to address the needs of Black girls (Whiston & Sexton, 1998). Another limitation is that girls identifying as biracial and multicultural were in the sample, and this did not account for the fact that their experiences might be different and nuanced.

Furthermore, the meaning of race and ethnicity is nuanced across different families. One way to account for this might be to select an instrument that recognizes the different meanings of race and ethnicity across households. Another recommendation would be to ensure that the younger participants clearly understood what the questions were asking in each instrument.

Implications of Results

Implications for Counselors

The practical implications of this study offer valuable guidance for counselors supporting Black girls' development. Counselors can use the findings from the current study, such as perceived social support (the strongest predictor of self-esteem) and racial-ethnic identity (moderate correlation with self-affirming beliefs), to curate a treatment plan that is empowering and culturally responsive when working with Black girls. Additionally, media exposure, particularly internalized beauty ideals, was directly related to self-critical thoughts. Counselors can use this to design discussions with Black girls about media interpretations. Counselors can also work with parents of Black girls and teach them how to have the same discussions with their daughters. Critical consciousness, particularly motivation and action, had a positive effect on rewards distributed to self in Black girls. Therefore, counselors can find digital spaces and community organizations for Black girls (e.g., Diamonds in the Rough, Precious Me, Youth Mentoring Collaborative, PACE Center for Girls, and TRIO Upward Bound) to build critical

consciousness. Some examples of curated media resources aligned with the findings of the current study include “Hair Love” by Matthew A. Cherry, which promotes positive racial identity and self-love, and supports resistance to media beauty standards; Black Girls Smile, a website that offers mental health support specifically for Black girls and fosters perceived social support; Therapy for Black Girls Podcast, a podcast that bridges culturally competent mental health care with affirming conversations and relational tools for therapists; A Black Girl’s Guide to Healing Emotional Wounds by Nijama Smalls, a culturally healing guide that addresses self-esteem and trauma; The Grapevine, a YouTube series that explores race and gender from the perspective of Black youth. These resources allow counselors to create authentic, culturally grounded connections with Black girls.

Implications for School Counselors

The findings of this study hold important implications for school counselors and educational leaders. The strong predictive role of perceived social support suggests that culturally affirming school climates, adult-student connections, and peer relationships are critical in shaping Black girls’ self-esteem. School counselors can implement programs that foster belonging and identity affirmation, including affinity groups, mentoring programs, and culturally sustaining counseling practices. Counselors and educators should advocate for learning materials and resources across all content areas that promote diversity and inclusion, address historical and ongoing harm experienced by students from racially diverse backgrounds, and critically examine the impact of white supremacy and inequitable learning (Atkins & Oglesby, 2019). To start, school counselors can utilize the Perceived School Support Scale (Karaman et al., 2019) to measure students’ perception of school counselor support.

School counselors can partner with media specialists or local librarians to layer interventions to develop critical literacy. Critical media literacy across all systems fosters agency, positive identity, activism, and resistance to negative oppressive narratives (Ellison et al., 2023; Garcia et al., 2020; Jacobs, 2016; McArthur, 2016; Pierce-Dennis, 2016). Critical media literacy can empower Black girls to disrupt dominant narratives (Robinson, 2021). School counselors can implement programs like media literacy groups that unpack stereotypical portrayals of Black girls, mentorship programs that connect students with culturally affirming role models, or group counseling that integrates themes of racial-ethnic identity and resistance. Incorporating books like "Dear Black Girl" by Tamara Winfrey-Harris or engaging in art-based reflection projects can offer students space for self-definition and resistance. Moreover, school counselors can use schoolwide data (discipline, academic tracking, climate surveys) disaggregated by race and gender to identify structural barriers and advocate for inclusive policies. Holcomb-McCoy (2022) further recommends that school counselors continuously self-reflect about their racial biases and involve families and communities as collaborative partners in building inclusive practices.

To address the pressure Black girls, feel from media to conform to beauty standards, The Dove Self-Esteem Project offers evidence-based resources to help school counselors address body image, self-esteem, and media literacy with students, particularly salient for Black girls facing internalized stereotypes. The Dove Self-Esteem lessons can be implemented in small groups or classroom settings to teach Black girls how to critically evaluate media messages, challenge unrealistic beauty standards, and facilitate discussions about identity, body positivity, and internalized biases. The suggested recommendations support ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors Mindsets M1 (belief in development of whole self) and Behavior LS9 (personal safety)

When paired with culturally responsive practices, the Dove curriculum can be a powerful tool to affirm the beauty and value of diverse identities, which can help Black girls strengthen their self-esteem and resist stereotype-driven self-doubt (Dove Self-Esteem Project, 2017).

Implications for Parents

The results of this study reveal that strength-based variables such as critical consciousness, racial-ethnic identity, and perceived social support predict self-esteem above and beyond the internalization of negative stereotypes (e.g., the Jezebel and Sapphire tropes), media pressures, and experiences with gendered racial microaggressions. Furthermore, perceived social support emerged as a statistically significant predictor of rewards distributed to self in Black girls, and the internalization of negative stereotypes emerged as statistically significant predictors of costs distributed to self-esteem in Black girls. Parents can play a transformative role by fostering home environments that affirm Black girlhood, encourage emotional expression, validate their lived experiences, and resist the urge to impose overly restrictive standards (Burnett et al., 2022). Doing so aligns with Black Feminist Thought, which emphasizes the importance of self-definition and self-valuation (Collins, 2000), and it empowers Black girls to reject internalized stereotypes and develop a more resilient and empowered sense of self.

Parents play a pivotal role in cultivating self-esteem and resilience in Black girls by serving as their first and most enduring source of social support. Research consistently shows that perceived social support, particularly from parents, is positively associated with higher self-esteem and psychological well-being in Black adolescents (Taylor et al., 2015; Bryant et al., 2017). Parents can reinforce this support by actively seeking extracurricular activities that affirm and celebrate Black girlhood (Taylor et al., 2015). Such spaces provide enrichment opportunities and serve as protective environments where Black girls can thrive socially, emotionally, and

culturally (Bryant et al., 2015). For example, programs like the Black Girls Code**,** GirlTrek**,** ROX (Ruling Our eXperiences)**,** and Brown Girls Do Ballet create empowering communities that promote leadership, cultural pride, health, and self-expression.

Additionally, arts-based initiatives such as Spelman College's Summer Art and Writing Institutes for Black Girls or community-based organizations like The Black Girl Project and Girls for A Change help foster critical consciousness and identity development. These culturally reflective activities function as counterpaces (Case & Hunter, 2012), offering refuge from stereotypes and negative media portrayals while reinforcing messages of beauty, brilliance, and belonging. Parents are encouraged to collaborate with schools, community centers, and local advocacy groups to ensure their daughters are engaged in programs that mirror their lived experiences and cultural values.

Finally, the findings of this study underscore the need for all who work with Black girls to intentionally counteract the internalization of harmful stereotypes and foster self-esteem among Black girls. For example, Holcomb-McCoy (2007, 2022) provides practical ideas for a systemic approach that challenges deficit thinking when designing comprehensive school counseling programs. In this study, internalized negative stereotypes (e.g., Jezebel and Sapphire tropes) were shown to uniquely predict *costs* to self-esteem in Black girls, revealing the psychological consequences of navigating school and media environments steeped in controlling images. Holcomb-McCoy argued that school counselors can serve as change agents by designing programs that address these issues directly through identity-affirming curriculum, small group interventions, and schoolwide initiatives that promote racial healing and critical consciousness (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007).

Implications for Counselor Educators

The current study highlights the role of embracing multicultural and social justice competencies in counselor training to disrupt oppressive messages stemming from a lack of cultural humility. When training counselors, counselor educators can ensure that cultural self-awareness and systemic understanding in working with racially and ethnically diverse students is infused in all courses, discussions, and assignments (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). Some recommendations include understanding racial and ethnic identity development using models, such as Cross's Nigrescence Theory or Phinney's Ethnic Identity Model, engaging in personal reflection to assess one's biases and assumptions through cultural genograms and identity narratives, teaching trainees to conduct equity-centered needs assessments within school communities to tailor interventions to the lived realities of students and practicing broaching with trainees to reduce anxiousness associated with saying the wrong things with working with diverse populations and enhancing supervisee multicultural competence prior to field placement by helping supervisees explore and examine biases and how those biases are reinforced by media, peer groups, and pop culture (Days-Vines, 2018). For example, Glosoff and Durham (2010) recommend reflective questioning in supervision to help supervisees recognize power dynamics. A great question might be "how do your personal beliefs about Black women/girls influence your proposed treatment plan, and actions in empowering or advocating?"

Basic skill development should include evidence-based, culturally relevant interventions when working with Black girls. Multicultural courses must include the results of this research. Studies show that school counselors and mental health therapists are overwhelmingly White; however, their clients or students will be of color, based on the latest consensus report (ASCA, 2020). Counselor educators can teach counselors in training how to engage in consistent and

ongoing broaching to maintain an attitude of openness and a continuous commitment to exploring diversity issues. However, the therapeutic relationship is key in building trust with clients. Trust does not happen without mutual respect, and mutual respect is impossible if perceptions are laden with biases and stereotypes. Infuse creative activities to break through racial and gender barriers, like creating a playlist with the client or student you are working with, and design questions related to getting to know the person through their choice of songs.

The Racial Healing Handbook (Singh, 2019) is a powerful resource for counselor education settings, providing structure for promoting racial self-awareness, empathy, and social justice competencies. Examples might include assigning reflective journaling exercises to deepen understanding of racial identity and intersectionality, using group dialogues to unpack privilege, oppression, and healing practices. These activities can be aligned with the ACA Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCC), particularly in the 'Self-Awareness' and 'Client Worldview' domains (Ratts et al., 2014). By incorporating these exercises into supervision or multicultural counseling courses, educators prepare future counselors to support racially marginalized youth with insight and cultural humility. These practices support the MSJCC's emphasis on ongoing self-awareness and systemic advocacy (Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018). These principles can be integrated into practicum preparation, supervision, and ethics instruction.

Furthermore, Counselor educators should train all counselors to be symbolic leaders (articulate a vision of healthy and resilient students via symbols and framing experiences in meaningful ways that will rally support and unite stakeholders) and political leaders (understanding the barrier to student learning that power dynamics create in the school system and working to change the status quo). Collaborating, negotiating, and building relationships

with the community, family, and other stakeholders on behalf of their students/clients is imperative to creating multi-level support systems.

Implications for Theory and Practice

The findings of this study in the context of past research have significant implications for the provision of working with Black girls. The results of this study indicate that critical consciousness, racial-ethnic identity, and perceived social support are important for developing healthy self-esteem in Black girls. Historically negative stereotypes (e.g., Jezebel, Sapphire and Mammy tropes, and more recently loud, confrontational, assertive, and provocative) and messages from the media (e.g., unrealistic beauty standards and assumptions of criminality) have eroded the self-esteem in Black women for centuries and are eroding the self-esteem of Black girls, contributing to an increase in anxiety, depression, poor decision-making, and suicidal ideation. Furthermore, media messages about Black girls have become a cultural scheme that informs the perceptions of educators, policymakers, and those in place to support Black girls.

This study was grounded in Collins' (2000) Black Feminist Thought, a critical empowerment theory for Black women, which purports that healthy self-esteem is imperative to empower Black girls to reject negative stereotypical messages, take a self-defined standpoint, and engage in critical reflection. An action needed to not only counter-narrate but also navigate the socioeconomic challenges the Black girls face, as well as live healthy and sustainable lives. Previous researchers have highlighted the importance of self-esteem in Black girls (hooks, 2003; Rivas-Drake, 2014). Accordingly, self-esteem provides a strong sense of worth (Rosenberg, 1971), impacts mental health and suicidal prevention (Taha et al., 2019), is necessary for academic success and motivation (Sharma & Agarwala, 2015), and fosters healthy relationship

choices and emotional well-being (Galeotti, 2015). Furthermore, higher self-esteem reduces engagement in risky behaviors and protection against negative influences (Joseph et al., 2023).

As noted in Agger et al. (2022), to truly understand the development of Black girls, researchers must take an asset-based approach that includes intersecting identities, racial/ethnic identity, and a variety of research designs, which will serve to eliminate the perpetuation of white supremacy. The current study extends research by identifying predictors of self-esteem in Black girls. Additionally, this study confirms previous research suggesting that the internalization of negative stereotypes (Stanton et al., 2017), as well as experiences with gender and racial microaggressions (Brown et al., 2016), have damaging psychological effects on Black girls (To et al., 2023). Moreover, the current study highlights the transformative power that perceived social support (Middleton & Owens, 2023) and racial-ethnic identity can have on the self-esteem of Black girls (Umana-Taylor, 2011).

Practitioners, counselors, and educators are uniquely positioned to further the discussion and create interventions and lessons that bring awareness to combating internalized messages. Practitioners, counselors, educators, and parents should take care first to become aware of their own messages that have been internalized and serve to shape their attitudes and behaviors toward Black girls. Likewise, care should be given to assess racial and gender attitudes and socialized experiences of the Black girls they are counseling, educating, parenting, and serving.

Counselors should encourage Black girls to examine and explore how self-beliefs and self-esteem are molded by experiences with adults and messages from the media. Counselor Educators should infuse identity exploration in all basic skills counseling courses, use theories, such as the Phenomenological Variants of Ecological Systems, as a guide for understanding how

Black girls develop identity with special consideration for the unique development of Black girls, which includes attention to racial, gender, and socioeconomic biases and stereotypes.

Black girls' identity development cannot be accurately understood through traditional developmental theories that fail to incorporate the vital influences of cultural socialization, systemic oppression, and relational connection (Porter et al., 2023). Conventional frameworks such as Erikson's (1968) psychosocial stages or Piaget's (1952) cognitive development theory often reflect white, male, and middle-class norms that render Black girls lived experiences invisible or pathologized (Fordham, 1993; Sellers et al., 1998). These models neglect the unique ways racism, gendered stereotypes, and societal messaging intersect to shape Black girls' sense of self.

In contrast, Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000) and Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST) (Spencer, 1995) highlight the need to examine identity within cultural and contextual realities, acknowledging both structural barriers and culturally rooted resilience. Similarly, Relational-Cultural Theory (RCT) further underscores the importance of mutual, growth-fostering relationships in identity development, which is especially critical for Black girls, which the results of this study confirm, often rely on meaningful connections to resist internalized oppression and affirm their worth (Jordan, 2004; Comstock et al., 2008).

To move beyond the limitations of traditional models, Porter's (2017) Black Girl Identity Development model offers a culturally responsive framework that centers Black girls' agency, self-definition, resistance to controlling images, and the healing power of cultural and community connection. By integrating relational, ecological, and intersectional perspectives, researchers and practitioners can more accurately and affirmatively support the identity

development of Black girls. Fostering integrated approaches when teaching theory allows for a more holistic conceptualization. The multifaceted experiences of Black girls and many people of color must be addressed with a multifaceted frame of reference. Traditional approaches are monolithic. The use of theoretical integration allows for the use of diverse models. For example, integrating a social justice theory helps to honor the multiple identities that play a role in the development of Black girls (e.g., race, class, gender, and sexual orientation, as well as power influences, the role of privilege and inequality), which increases the opportunity for counselors to understand the barriers influencing the health and wellness of Black girls (Williams-Butler et al., 2022).

Recommendations for Future Research

Black Feminist Thought encourages researchers to gain a deeper understanding of Black girls' experiences through dialogue, honor how Black girls choose to express themselves, move away from labeling, and seek to understand. Researchers could embrace culturally responsive and participatory approaches that allow Black girls to articulate their experiences, define their identities, and co-create knowledge (Toliver, 2020; Winn, 2011). Answering the call to protect Black girls requires expanding documentation of harm to transformative scholarship that partners with Black girls to reimagine systems of care, representation, and empowerment.

Collins suggests that researchers are accountable for the knowledge attained, thus using this knowledge to continue to combat devaluation, silencing, and marginalization (Porter, 2023). This might include future research that deepens the inquiry into how negative stereotypes (Collins, 2000), stereotype awareness (Jerald et al., 2017), and racial-gendered stressors (Thomas et al., 2020) affect both short/long-term outcomes for Black girls in various contexts, including academic, social, and emotional. Mixed-methods and longitudinal studies are particularly needed

to examine how protective factors like community support, cultural affirmation, and school-based interventions buffer against identity harm.

Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) offer transformative methodologies for continuing the research on Black girls. PAR and CBPR shift power dynamics by engaging participants as co-researchers, which centers Black girls' experiences and empowers them by allowing them to co-create solutions (Cahill, 2007). Researchers can reframe how critical action is understood and nurtured by developing instruments more reflective of current Black girls' experiences and how they engage in activism. This requires a paradigm shift: rather than seeing critical action only through protest or political participation, research can validate the diverse, everyday resistances Black girls perform digitally (McArthur, 2016; Baker-Bell, 2017).

A longitudinal follow-up would help determine whether the effects of critical consciousness, racial-ethnic identity, and social support on self-esteem persist over time. Incorporating teacher or counselor observations or behavioral indicators of self-esteem could provide additional validation of findings. Including a comparison group (e.g., Black girls without high levels of protective factors) in this study would enhance the ability to draw causal inferences. The use of a qualitative design like Critical Qualitative Inquiry (CRIT QUAL), a methodology that engages with critical theories to analyze how systemic forces like gendered racism shape lived experiences (Denzin, 2018). CRIT QUAL will allow researchers to engage in relational (e.g., dialogue interviews, narrative inquiry, and storytelling circles), reflexive, and transformative inquiry while conducting research rooted in justice and liberation.

Conclusion

The findings provide compelling support for Black Feminist Thought. Critical consciousness, racial-ethnic identity, and perceived social support explained 33% of the variance in rewards distributed to self, affirming that these protective factors significantly enhance self-esteem by reinforcing self-affirming beliefs, cultural pride, and agency. These same variables accounted for 26% of the variance in costs distributed to self, suggesting they also reduce self-blame, internalized oppression, and the psychological harms associated with devaluation and stereotype exposure. Importantly, these relationships remained statistically significant even after controlling for internalized negative messages and media exposure, highlighting the enduring power of identity, awareness, and community in buffering the psychological toll of systemic oppression.

Additionally, these results affirm that self-esteem among Black girls is not merely an individual trait; social, cultural, and structural conditions profoundly shape it. Moreover, they demonstrate that when Black girls are equipped with tools for critical reflection, supported in their identity development, and surrounded by affirming relationships, they are more likely to experience the kind of self-esteem that supports academic persistence, emotional resilience, and liberatory decision-making in their lives.

In conclusion, the main findings of this study supported Black Feminist Thought's (Collins, 2000) theory that perceived social support, racial-ethnic identity, and critical consciousness can enhance Black girls' self-esteem, beyond the internalization of negative stereotypes, media pressures, and experiences with microaggressions. Embarking on a project with a strength-based lens has reframed my approach to how I can contribute to the sustainability of Black girls and disrupt factors creating roadblocks to Black girls 'self-actualization.

Specifically, understanding that rigid beliefs about what is appropriate or inappropriate for Black girls can be limiting and send unintentional messages that Black girls' authentic selves are not enough.

This study has illuminated that Black girls' self-esteem benefits from holistic, intentional, strengths-based approaches that prioritize community, connection, affirm cultural identity, and nurture critical awareness of inequities. School counselors, educators, and mental health professionals must co-create environments where Black girls are empowered, feel seen, supported, and valued, which includes celebrating counter-narratives and elevating the stories of Black women and girls who have historically defied oppressive norms, providing what Tatum (2017) describes as "an empowering reflection in a societal mirror" (p. 107).

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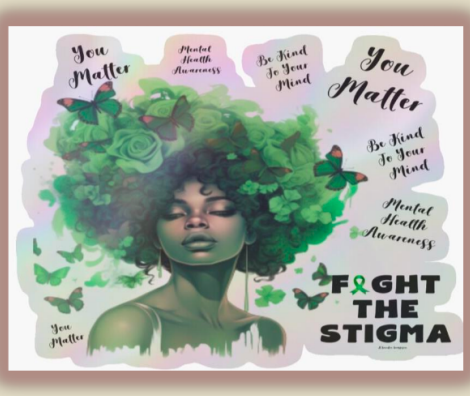
APPENDICES

RECRUITMENT FLYER

RESEARCH STUDY PARTICIPANTS NEEDED

This study examines how gendered racial microaggressions, internalized stereotypes, and negative societal messages impact the mental health, self-worth, and overall well-being of Black adolescent girls, contributing to a critical mental health crisis. The goal of this study is to provide empirical evidence to empower Black girls, foster resilience, validate their experiences, begin the healing process, and enhance self-esteem.



WHO IS ELIGIBLE?

- Black girls
- Ages 11-17
- Born in the United States
- Access to mass media (e.g., social media, cinema, television, music, music videos, advertisements, magazines, etc.).

DESCRIPTION OF STUDY

- Complete demographic survey
- Complete surveys assessing experiences with microaggressions, stereotypes, and negative societal messages.
- Complete surveys exploring self-esteem, racial-ethnic identity, critical consciousness, and perceived social support.
- Participation is voluntary.

INTERESTED?

If you are interested, please scan the QR code for the parent consent form or click the below links:

Parent Consent
Bringing Out the Brilliance Surveys

Mary Frances Early College of Education
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Dear Parents/Guardians, with the approval of UGA IRB and under the direction of Dr. Missy Moore, University of Georgia Chair, I, Denise Hawkins (doctoral candidate and professional school counselor), am asking for your help in completing my dissertation "Bringing Out the Brilliance in Black Girls, A Research Study to explore factors that enhance the self-esteem of Black girls.

Bringing Out the Brilliance in Black Girls is a strength-based study. As a Professional School Counselor who has worked with Black adolescent girls for the past 18 years and a mother of a Black girl, it is important to me to explore factors that enhance self-esteem in Black girls despite the internalization of negative controlling messages such as gendered racial microaggressions received in daily in interactions with the mass media and environmental systems. By examining how harmful societal messages impact the mental health, self-worth, and overall well-being of Black adolescent girls that contribute to the critical mental wellness crisis, we can learn ways to reject these messages.

Why This Study is Needed

Negative controlling images of Black women portrayed in the media (e.g., television, movies, social media, music lyrics, and music videos) are eroding the self-esteem of Black girls and contributing to poor mental health outcomes. The increase in major depressive episodes evidenced this as increases in anxiety, and the CDC data reported 94,000 suicide attempts by Black girls since 2017.

The Impact of Self-Esteem in Black Girls

Historical icons such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X., Audre Lorde, bell hooks, and Patricia Hills Collins wrote about the importance of building self-esteem, self-worth, hope and courage in Black people. Self-esteem holistically and comprehensively impacts the following in Black girls:

Mental Health & Suicide Prevention

1. Self-esteem acts as a protective factor against suicidal thoughts and attempts by fostering resilience (*Emergency Task Force on Black Youth Suicide and Mental Health*).
2. Protective factors—such as coping skills, support systems, and strengths—help Black girls navigate hardship.
3. Culturally informed interventions that enhance self-esteem can reduce suicide risk in African American females (*Taha et al., 2015*).

Academic Success & Motivation

1. Higher self-esteem positively affects academic achievement, especially for gifted African American students (*Graham & Ford, 2003*).

2. It influences self-perception and motivation, increasing the likelihood of tackling challenges rather than fearing failure (*Sharma & Agarwala, 2015*).
3. A strong sense of self-worth encourages school engagement and belonging (*Perry & Lavins-Merillat, 2019*).

Social and Emotional Well-Being

1. Self-esteem fosters confidence in healthy relationship choices and maintains a positive outlook (*Galeotti, 2015*).
2. It promotes personal empowerment, encouraging Black girls to celebrate themselves and others.
3. A strong self-concept supports overall adjustment and success in society.

Protection Against Negative Influences

1. Higher self-esteem reduces engagement in risky behaviors, such as violence and substance use (*Christens & Peterson, 2012*).
2. It strengthens resilience against online racial attacks, which have been linked to increased suicide risk among Black females (*Joseph et al., 2023*).
3. Enhancing self-esteem empowers women in abusive relationships to change their circumstances (*Taha et al., 2015*).

Therefore, this study aims to provide empirical evidence to empower Black girls, foster resilience, validate their experiences, begin the healing process, and enhance their self-esteem. The results of this study will uncover ways to reject negative and controlling messages and inform school counseling interventions in schools.

Description of Bringing Out the Brilliance Research Study

The study includes the following scales and will take approximately 15- 20 minutes for girls ages 11-17 to complete electronically:

1. The Modern Jezebel Scale
2. The Taylor Self-Esteem Scale
3. The Multidimensional Media Influence Scale
4. The Gendered Racial Microaggression Scale
5. The Short Critical Consciousness Scale
6. The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measurement
7. Perceived Social Support Scale

How To Participate

Yours and your daughters' voices are important!

To participate, please click the parent consent link here and check off your consent.

Upon consent, your daughter can complete the research surveys linked here from your computer, or you can forward the link to your daughter's email address.

Once all data is analyzed, all findings will be shared with participants and their parents.

Should you have any questions, I can be reached at denise.hawkins@uga.edu.
My university chair can be reached at missy.moore@uga.edu.

INFORMED CONSENT

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

CONSENT LETTER
Bringing Out the Brilliance in Black Girls

We are doing a research study to explore factors that enhance the self-esteem of Black girls even though messages received from teachers or media may be emotionally harmful. We ask you to be in the study because you identify as a Black or African American girl between the ages of 11 and 17. If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to complete questionnaires about your experiences. You will also be asked to complete questionnaires measuring your self-esteem, racial-ethnic identity, critical consciousness, and perceived social support. All questionnaires will be administered in person. Being in the study may improve our understanding of how to empower Black girls to reject negative messages. We also hope that by learning to reject negative messages, Black girls' self-esteem will be enhanced, as well as their mental health.

You do not have to say "yes" if you don't want to. No one, including your parents, will be mad at you if you say "no" or change your mind later. We have also asked your parent's permission to do this. Even if your parent says "yes," you can still say "no." Remember, you can ask us to stop at any time. Your grades in school will not be affected whether you say "yes" or "no."

For your participation, you will be entered into a drawing for a $25 Amazon gift card. You do not have to be in the study to enter the drawing. You or your parents/guardians can send an email to Denise.hawkins@uga.edu to enter the drawing if you do not want to be in the study. Your name will be provided to the investigator's departmental business office for tracking purposes if you win.

The findings could help school counselors, educators, and therapists understand how to build up Black girls. We will not use your name on any papers that we write about this project. We will only use a number so others cannot tell who you are.

You can ask any questions that you have about this study. If you have a question later that you didn't think of now, you can contact Denise Hawkins at denise.hawkins@uga.edu.

Name of Child: _____ **Parental Permission on File:** ☐ Yes ☐ No**

***(If "No," do not proceed with assent or research procedures.)*

(For Written Assent) **Signing here means that you have read this paper or had it read and are willing to be in this study. If you don't want to be in the study, don't sign.**

Signature of Child: _____ **Date:** _____

(For Verbal Assent) **Indicate Child's Voluntary Response to Participation:** ☐ Yes ☐ No

Signature of Researcher: _____ **Date:** _____

INFORMED ASSENT

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

ASSENT LETTER
Bringing Out the Brilliance in Black Girls

We are doing a research study to explore factors that enhance the self-esteem of Black girls even though messages received from teachers or media may be emotionally harmful. We ask you to be in the study because you identify as a Black or African American girl between the ages of 11 and 17. If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to complete questionnaires about your experiences. You will also be asked to complete questionnaires measuring your self-esteem, racial-ethnic identity, critical consciousness, and perceived social support. All questionnaires will be administered in person. Being in the study may improve our understanding of how to empower Black girls to reject negative messages. We also hope that by learning to reject negative messages, Black girls' self-esteem will be enhanced, as well as their mental health.

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You can ask any questions that you have about this study. If you have a question later that you didn't think of now, you can contact Denise Hawkins at denise.hawkins@uga.edu.

Name of Child: _____ **Parental Permission on File:** ☐ Yes ☐ No**

***(If "No," do not proceed with assent or research procedures.)*

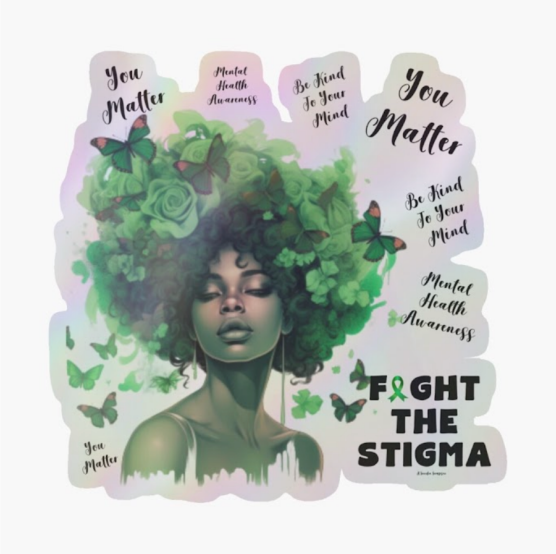
(For Written Assent) **Signing here means that you have read this paper or had it read and are willing to be in this study. If you don't want to be in the study, don't sign.**

Signature of Child: _____ **Date:** _____

(For Verbal Assent) **Indicate Child's Voluntary Response to Participation:** ☐ Yes ☐ No

Signature of Researcher: _____ **Date:** _____

DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY



2. By completing the following, you give your assent to participate in the Bringing Out The Brilliance in Black Girls Research study.

Check all that apply.

- [ ] Yes, I consent to participate (Move on to the next question)
- [ ] No I am not interested (STOP HERE)

Demographic Questionnaire

Tell us all about you:

3. What is your race?

Check all that apply.

- [ ] African American/Black
- [ ] Asian American/Pacific Islander
- [ ] Latino/Hispanic
- [ ] Caucasian/White
- [ ] Middle Eastern
- [ ] Biracial
- [ ] Multiracial
- [ ] Native American
- [ ] Other (Please explain)

4. What is your age?

_____

5. What is your grade level?

_____

6. What is your gender/sex?

Check all that apply.

- [ ] Male
- [ ] Female
- [ ] Transgender
- [ ] Non-Binary/Gender Non-Conforming
- [ ] Prefer to self-describe (Please explain) _____

7. Who do you live with?

Check all that apply.

- [ ] Mom and Dad
- [ ] Mom only
- [ ] Dad only
- [ ] Grandparents
- [ ] Extended family (aunt, uncle, cousins)
- [ ] Adopted family
- [ ] Foster care parents
- [ ] Other (Please explain) _____
- [ ] Other: _____

8. What type of school do you attend?

Check all that apply.

- [ ] Public School
- [ ] Private School
- [ ] Charter School
- [ ] Home School
- [ ] Other (Please explain) _____

9. Do you take honors classes?

Check all that apply.

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

10. Do you have:

Check all that apply.

- [ ] A personal phone
- [ ] A personal computer
- [ ] A personal tablet

11. Do you watch television?

Check all that apply.

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

12. How many hours a day do you watch television?

_____

13. If yes, do you watch on…..

Check all that apply.

- [ ] Personal TV
- [ ] IPad
- [ ] Computer
- [ ] Phone

14. What are your preferred social media platforms?

_____

15. What other type of media do you use? (Check all that apply)

Check all that apply.

- [ ] streaming
- [ ] music
- [ ] music videos
- [ ] print media
- [ ] online content
- [ ] websites
- [ ] advertisements

16. How many hours a day do you use social media (e.g., YouTube, TikTok, X, Instagram, Snapchat, and others)?

_____

17. When using social media, do you (Check all that apply)?

Check all that apply.

- [ ] post
- [ ] scroll
- [ ] communicate with friends
- [ ] play games

18. Are there any parental controls on media use? If so, please describe.

_____

19. Are you involved in extracurricular activities outside school (i.e., sports, cheer, clubs, leadership)?

Check all that apply.

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

20. Please list all extracurricular activities below……

_____

21. Do you identify with any particular religious or spiritual group? If so, which one?

_____

22. How often do you participate in religious or spiritual activities (e.g., attending services, prayer, meditation)?

Check all that apply.

- [ ] daily
- [ ] weekly
- [ ] monthly
- [ ] occasionally
- [ ] rarely
- [ ] never

23. What types of religious activities do you engage in?

24. How important is religion or spirituality in your daily life?

Check all that apply.

- [ ] Very important
- [ ] Somewhat important
- [ ] Not very important
- [ ] Not at all important

25. Does your family influence your religious or spiritual beliefs?

Check all that apply.

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

26. Do your friends share similar religious or spiritual beliefs?

Check all that apply.

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

TAYLOR SELF-ESTEEM INVENTORY

27. I am satisfied with the kind of person I am.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Nev Always

28. I later regret things I've said.

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Nev Always

29. I feel happy inside.

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Nev Always

30. My behavior is inconsistent with my values.

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Nev Always

31. I tackle my problems head on.

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Nev Always

32. I criticize myself over the least little things.

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Nev Always

33. I defend my opinions.

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Nev Always

34. I feel ashamed of the things I do.

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Nev Always

Modern Jesapel Scale (MJS)

The purpose of MJS is to measure Black girls' identification with stereotypes that have been constructed about Black girls and women.

35. I never a sense of purpose.

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Never	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	Always

40. I worry.

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Never	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	Always

41. I follow through on decisions I make.

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Never	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	Always

42. I dwell on my faults.

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Never	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	Always

37. I feel proud of the way I do things.

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Never	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	Always

38. I qiestrst my judgement.

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Never	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	Always

39. I think about things I've done well.

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Never	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	Always

36. My proplems det the pest of me.

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Never	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	Always

MODERN JEZEBEL SCALE

43. Black girls are loud and have an attitude.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Stro ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ Strongly Agree

44. Black girls always want to have sex.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Stro ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ Strongly Agree

45. Black girls use sex to get what they want.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Stro ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ Strongly Agree

46. Black girls are always mad and ready to fight.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Stro ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ Strongly Agree

47. Black girls will steal your boyfriend.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Stro ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ Strongly Agree

48. Black girls are gold-diggers.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Stro ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ Strongly Agree

49. Black girls always want their way.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Stro ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ Strongly Agree

Multidimensional Media Influence Scale (MMIS)

The purpose of the MMIS scale is to measure the influence of media on standards of attractiveness and pressures to emulates looks promoted in the media.

MULTIDIMENSIONAL MEDIA INFLUENCE SCALE

50. People who are in good shape are better looking than people who are not in good shape.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	
Disa	◯	◯	◯	Agree

51. Watching TV or reading magazines makes me want to diet or lose weight.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	
Disa	◯	◯	◯	Agree

52. Clothes look better on people who are thin.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	
Disa	◯	◯	◯	Agree

53. Watching movies makes me want to diet.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	
Disa	◯	◯	◯	Agree

54. Clothes look better on people who are in good shape.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	
Disa	◯	◯	◯	Agree

55. I try to look like the models in magazines or on social media.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	
Disa	◯	◯	◯	Agree

56. I learn how to look attractive by looking at models in magazines or on social media.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	
Disa	◯	◯	◯	Agree

57. I compare my body to movie stars.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	
Disa	◯	◯	◯	Agree

58. I would like my body to look like the models in magazines or on social media.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	
Disa	◯	◯	◯	Agree

59. I would like my body to look like people who are on TV.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	
Disa	◯	◯	◯	Agree

60. I try to look like the actors and actresses in movies.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	
Disa	◯	◯	◯	Agree

GENDERED RACIAL MICROAGGRESSION SCALE

Gendered Racial Microaggressions Scale (GRMS)

The purpose of GRMS is to measure how often microaggressions have been experienced by Black girls and how stressful these events were for Black girls.

Directions. Please follow the table below.

Please think about your experiences as a Black girl.

Please read each item and think of how often each event has happened to you in your lifetime.

In addition, please rate how stressful each experience was for you. Stressful can include feeling upset, bothered, offended, or annoyed by the event.

Frequency

0	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*
Never	Less than once a year	A few times a year	About once a month	A few times a month	Once a week or more

Appraisal

0	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*
This has never happened to me	Not at all Stressful	Slightly stressful	Moderately Stressful	Very stressful	Extremely stressful

61. 1.a. Someone accused me of being angry when I was speaking in a calm manner *(**When did this happen**-Frequency?)*

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	
Nev	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Once or more a week

62. 1.b. Someone accused me of being angry when I was speaking in a calm manner ***(How stressful was this**-Appraisal?)*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

This ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ This is extremely stressful.

63. 2.a. Someone assumed that I did not have much to contribute to the conversation. ***(When did this happen**-Frequency?)*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

Nev ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ Once or more a week

64. 2.b. Someone assumed that I did not have much to contribute to the conversation. ***(How stressful was this**-Appraisal?)*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

This ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ This is extremely stressful.

65. 3.a. I have been told that I am too independent. ***(When did this happen-**Frequency?)*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

Nev ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ Once or more a week

66. 3.b. I have been told that I am too independent. ***(How stressful was this**-Appraisal?)*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

This ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ This is extremely stressful.

67. 4.a. Someone has made me feel unattractive because I am a Black girl. ***(When did this happen**-Frequency?)*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

Nev ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ Once or more a week

68. 4.b. Someone has made me feel unattractive because I am a Black girl. ***(How stressful was this**-Appraisal?)*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

This ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ This is extremely stressful.

69. 5.a. In talking with others, someone has told me to calm down. ***(When did this happen**-Frequency?)*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

Nev ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ Once or more a week

70. 5.b. In talking with others, someone has told me to calm down. ***(How stressful was this**-Appraisal?)*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

This ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ This is extremely stressful.

71. 6.a. My comments have been ignored in discussions at school, work, or another professional setting. ***(When did this happen**-Frequency?)*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

Nev ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ Once or more a week

72. 6.b. My comments have been ignored in discussions at school, work, or another professional setting. ***(How stressful was this**-Appraisal?)*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

This ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ This is extremely stressful.

73. 7.a. I have been told that I am too assertive. ***(When did this happen-**Frequency?)*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

Nev ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ Once or more a week

74. 7.b. I have been told that I am too assertive. ***(How stressful was this**-Appraisal?)*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

This ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ This is extremely stressful.

75. 8.a. Someone has made a sexually inappropriate comment about my butt, hips, or thighs. ***(When did this happen**-Frequency?)*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

This ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ Once or more a week.

76. 8.b. Someone has made a sexually inappropriate comment about my butt, hips, or thighs. ***(How stressful was this**-Appraisal?)*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

This ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ This is extremely stressful.

77. 9.a. I have been perceived to be an "angry black girl." ***(When did this happen**-Frequency?)*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

This ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ Once or more a week.

78. 9.b. I have been perceived to be an "angry black girl." ***(How stressful was this**-Appraisal?)*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

This ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ This is extremely stressful.

79. 10.a. Someone has challenged me or my authority at school or in a work or other professional setting. ***(When did this happen**-Frequency?)*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

This ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ Once or more a week.

80. 10.b. Someone has challenged me or my authority at school or in a work or other professional setting. ***(How stressful was this**-Appraisal?)*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

This ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ This is extremely stressful.

81. 11.a. I have received negative comments about my hair when I wear it in a natural hairstyle. ***(When did this happen**-Frequency?)*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

This ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ Once or more a week.

82. 11.b. I have received negative comments about my hair when I wear it in a natural hairstyle. ***(How stressful was** this-Appraisal?)*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

This ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ This is extremely stressful.

83. 12.a. Someone made a negative comment to me about my skin color/skin tone. ***(When did this happen**-Frequency?)*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

This ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ Once or more a week.

84. 12.b. Someone made a negative comment to me about my skin color/skin tone. ***(How stressful was this**-Appraisal?)*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

This ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ This is extremely stressful.

85. 13.a. Someone made me feel exotic (different, strange or unusual) as a Black girl. ***(When did this happen**-Frequency?)*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

This ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ Once or more a week.

86. 13.b. Someone made me feel exotic (different, strange or unusual) as a Black girl. ***(How stressful was this**-Appraisal?)*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

This ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ This is extremely stressful.

87. 14.a. Someone has imitated the way they think Black girls/women speak in front of me (for example, "g-i-r-l-f-r-i-e-n-d"). ***(When did this happen**-Frequency?)*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

This ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ Once or more a week.

88. 14.b. Someone has imitated the way they think Black girls/women speak in front of me (for example, "g-i-r-l-f-r-i-e-n-d"). ***(How stressful was this**-Appraisal?)*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

This ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ This is extremely stressful.

89. 15.a. I have been disrespected by people in a school, work, or other professional setting. ***(When did this happen**-Frequency?)*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

This ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ Once or more a week.

90. 15.b. I have been disrespected by people in a school, work, or other professional setting. ***(How stressful was this-**Appraisal?)*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

This ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ This is extremely stressful.

91. 16.a. Someone made me feel unattractive because of the size of my butt, hips, or thighs. ***(When did this happen**-Frequency?)*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

This ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ Once or more a week.

92. 16.b. Someone made me feel unattractive because of the size of my butt, hips, or thighs. ***(How stressful was this**-Appraisal?)*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

This ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ This is extremely stressful.

93. 17.a. I have been assumed to be a strong Black girl. ***(When did this happen**-Frequency?)*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

This ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ Once or more a week.

94. 17.b. I have been assumed to be a strong Black girl. ***(How stressful was this**-Appraisal?)*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

This ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ This is extremely stressful.

95. 18.a. Someone has assumed that I should have a certain body type because I am a Black girl. ***(When did this happen**-Frequency?)*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

This ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ Once or more a week.

96. 18.b. Someone has assumed that I should have a certain body type because I am a Black girl. ***(How stressful was this**-Appraisal?)*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

This ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ This is extremely stressful.

97. 19.a. I have felt unheard/ignored at school, work, or other professional setting. ***(When did this happen**-Frequency?)*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

This ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ Once or more a week.

98. 19.b. I have felt unheard/ignored at school, work, or other professional setting. ***(How stressful was this**-Appraisal?)*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

This ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ This is extremely stressful.

99. 20.a. I have been told that I am sassy/disrespectful and/or straightforward. ***(When did this happen**-Frequency?)*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

This ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ Once or more a week.

100. 20.b. I have been told that I am sassy/disrespectful and/or straightforward. ***(How stressful was this**-Appraisal?)*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

This ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ This is extremely stressful.

101. 21.a. Someone objectified me based on my physical features as a Black girl. ***(When did this happen**-Frequency?)*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

This ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ Once or more a week.

102. 21.b. Someone objectified me based on my physical features as a Black girl. ***(How stressful was this**-Appraisal?)*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

This ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ This is extremely stressful.

103. 22.a. I have felt someone has tried to "put me in my place" in a work, school, or other professional setting. ***(When did this happen**-Frequency?)*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

This ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ Once or more a week.

104. 22.b. I have felt someone has tried to "put me in my place" in a work, school, or other professional setting. *(**How stressful was this**-Appraisal?)*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

This ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ This is extremely stressful.

105. 23.a. Someone assumed I speak a certain way because I am a Black girl. ***(When did this happen**-Frequency?)*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

This ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ Once or more a week.

106. 23.b. Someone assumed I speak a certain way because I am a Black girl. ***(How stressful was this**-Appraisal?)*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

This ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ This is extremely stressful.

107. 24.a. I have felt excluded from networking opportunities or leadership opportunities by White students/peers/teachers/counselors or co-workers. ***(When did this happen**-Frequency?)*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

This ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ Once or more a week.

108. 24.b. I have felt excluded from networking opportunities or leadership opportunities by White students/peers/teachers/counselors or co-workers.

***(How stressful was this**-Appraisal?)*

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

This ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ This is extremely stressful.

109. 25.a. I have received negative comments about the size of my facial features. ***(When did this happen**-Frequency?)*

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	
This	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Once or more a week.

110. 25.b. I have received negative comments about the size of my facial features. ***(How stressful was this**-Appraisal?)*

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	
This	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	This is extremely stressful.

111. 26.a. Someone perceived me to be sexually promiscuous (sexually loose). (**When did this happen**-Frequency?)

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	
This	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Once or more a week.

112. 26.b. Someone perceived me to be sexually promiscuous (sexually loose). ***(How stressful was this-Appraisal?)***

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	
This	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	This is extremely stressful.

MULTIGROUP ETHNIC IDENTITY MEASURE

Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM)

The purpose of MEIM is to assess Black girls' sense of affirmation, belonging, and commitment to their race and/or and ethnicity.

113. I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as its history, traditions, and customs.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	
Stro	◯	◯	◯	◯	Strongly Agree

114. I am active in organizations or social groups that include mostly members of my own ethnic group.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	
Stro	◯	◯	◯	◯	Strongly Agree

115. I have a clear sense of my ethnic background and what it means for me.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	
Stro	◯	◯	◯	◯	Strongly Agree

116. I think a lot about how my life will be affected by my ethnic group membership.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4

Stro ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ Strongly Agree

117. I am happy that I am a member of the group I belong to.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4

Stro ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ Strongly Agree

118. I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4

Stro ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ Strongly Agree

119. I understand pretty well what my ethnic group membership means to me.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4

Stro ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ Strongly Agree

120. In order to learn more about my ethnic background, I have often talked to other people about my ethnic group.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4

Stro ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ Strongly Agree

121. I have a lot of pride in my ethnic group.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4

Stro ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ Strongly Agree

122. I participate in cultural practices of my own group, such as special food, music, or customs.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4

Stro ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ Strongly Agree

123. I feel a strong attachment towards my own ethnic group.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4

Stro ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ Strongly Agree

124. I feel good about my cultural or ethnic background.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4

Stro ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ Strongly Agree

125. My ethnicity is

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Asian or Asian American, including Chinese, Japanese, and others
- ☐ Black or African American
- ☐ Hispanic or Latino, including Mexican American, Central American, and others
- ☐ White Caucasian, Anglo, European American; not Hispanic
- ☐ American Indian/Native American
- ☐ Mixed; Parents are from two different groups
- ☐ Other: _____

126. My father's ethnicity is

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Asian or Asian American, including Chinese, Japanese, and others
- ☐ Black or African American
- ☐ Hispanic or Latino, including Mexican American, Central American, and others
- ☐ White Caucasian, Anglo, European American; not Hispanic
- ☐ American Indian/Native American
- ☐ Mixed; Parents are from two different groups
- ☐ Other: _____

SHORT CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS SCALE

Short Critical Consciousness Scale (CCS)

The purpose of CCS is to measure Back girls' critical analysis, motivation and action toward socioeconomic, racial/ethnic and gendered inequalities.

Instructions: Please respond to the following statements by circling how much you agree or disagree with each statement. For each statement, choose "1 - Strongly Disagree," "2 - Mostly Disagree," "3 - Slightly Disagree," "4 - Slightly Agree," "5 - Mostly Agree," or "6 - Strongly Agree."

128. Certain racial or ethnic groups have fewer chances to get good jobs

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Stro	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Strongly Agree

129. Certain racial or ethnic groups have fewer chances to get ahead

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Stro	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Strongly Agree

130. Women have fewer chances to get ahead

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Stro	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Strongly Agree

131. Poor people have fewer chances to get ahead

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Stro	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Strongly Agree

132. It is important for young people to know what is going on in the world

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Stro	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Strongly Agree

133. It is important to correct social and economic inequality

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Stro	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Strongly Agree

134. It is my responsibility to get involved and make things better for society

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Stro	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Strongly Agree

135. People like me should participate in the political activity and decision making of our country

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Stro	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Strongly Agree

Short Critical Consciousness Scale Part II

Instructions: Please respond to the following statements by circling how often you were involved in each activity in the last year. For each statement, choose "1 - Never did this," "2 - Once or twice last year," "3 - Once every few months," "4 - At least once a month," or "5 - At least once a week."

136. Participated in a civil rights group or organization

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Nev	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	At least once a week

137. Participated in a political party, club, or organization

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Nev	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	At least once a week

138. Contacted a public official by phone, mail, or email to tell him/her how you felt about a particular social or political issue

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Nev	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	At least once a week

139. Joined in a protest march, political demonstration, or political meeting

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Nev	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	At least once a week

140. Participated in a human rights, gay rights, or women's rights organization or grou

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Nev	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	At least once a week

MULTIDIMENSIONAL SCALE FOR PERCEIVED SOCIAL SUPPORT

137. Participated in a political party, club, or organization

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Nev	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	At least once a week

138. Contacted a public official by phone, mail, or email to tell him/her how you felt about a particular social or political issue

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Nev	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	At least once a week

139. Joined in a protest march, political demonstration, or political meeting

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Nev	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	At least once a week

140. Participated in a human rights, gay rights, or women's rights organization or group

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Nev	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	At least once a week

142. There is a special person with whom I can share joys and sorrow

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Very ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ Very Strongly Agree

143. My family really tries to help me.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Very ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ Very Strongly Agree

144. I get the emotional help & support I need from my family.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Very ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ Very Strongly Agree

145. I have a special person who is a real source of comfort to me.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Very ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ Very Strongly Agree

146. My friends really try to help me.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Very ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ Very Strongly Agree

147. I can count on my friends when things go wrong.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Very ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ Very Strongly Agree

148. I can talk about my problems with my family.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Very ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ Very Strongly Agree

149. I have friends with whom I can share my joys and sorrows.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Very ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ Very Strongly Agree

150. There is a special person in my life who cares about my feelings.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Very ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ Very Strongly Agree

151. My family is willing to help me make decisions.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Very ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ Very Strongly Agree

152. I can talk about my problems with my friends.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Very ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ Very Strongly Agree

153. Some of the questions in these surveys may bring up strong emotions or difficult thoughts related to self-esteem, identity, and experiences with negative messages. If you find yourself feeling overwhelmed or distressed, please consider reaching out for support. *

You are not alone, and help is available:
Talk to a trusted adult, such as a parent, mentor, school counselor, or therapist.
Crisis Text Line: Text **HOME** to **741741** for free, confidential support 24/7.
988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: Dial **988** for support available 24/7.
The Loveland Foundation: Provides free or low-cost therapy support for Black girls and women. Visit www.thelovelandfoundation.org.
Therapy for Black Girls: A directory of culturally competent therapists and mental health resources. Visit www.therapyforblackgirls.com.

Your feelings are valid, and your well-being matters. If you need support, please don't hesitate to reach out.

Check all that apply.

☐ I have read this statement.