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Dear Black Child: A Discussion on the Formation of Identity for African Diasporic Adolescents in the U.S.

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DEAR BLACK CHILD: A DISCUSSION ON THE FORMATION OF IDENTITY FOR
AFRICAN DIASPORIC ADOLESCENTS IN THE U.S.

by

SOKHNAGADE NDIAYE

A master's capstone project submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New

York

2020

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Sokhnagade Ndiaye

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the capstone project requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

Date

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ABSTRACT

Dear Black Child: A Discussion on the Formation of Identity for African Diasporic Adolescents in
the U.S.

by

Sokhnagade Ndiaye

Advisor: Carrie Hintz

In this capstone project, I am using art, photography, and music to depict the experiences of African diasporic youth in the United States. I will explore the white supremacist systems that contribute to the anxiety that comes with being a black child in America. In this project, I plan to discuss the ways in which African diasporic adolescents develop their identity and consciousness and the ways in which living in American society helps and/or hinders the development of this identity and consciousness. I argue that living in the United States forces black youth to form double and triple consciousnesses, which in turn affects the ways in which they form their identities. I am presenting a blog site that gathers photos to illustrate the black experience in the eyes of the youth. I also include poems and song lyrics that correlate with the pictures. I use art from artists living on the continent of Africa, and the United States. I wanted to include the African continent as well as various places in the diaspora because this will help me focus on black youth that were born and raised in the United States as well as youth with families that have immigrated to the U.S. and are trying to discover their American identity.

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DIGITAL MANIFEST

I. Capstone Whitepaper (PDF) provides a detailed summary of the project.

II. Project Website

The Blog site [Dear Black Child](https://sokhnan.tumblr.com/) can be accessed at the following URL address:
<https://sokhnan.tumblr.com/>

III. WARC files: archived version of the website saved using webrecorder.io

NOTE ON TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

All aspects of this project are available on my tumblr website. The links below were used to strengthen my exploration of the African diaspora through art, photography, poetry, and music.

Art

- The art pieces found in the sites linked below are used to highlight beauty across the African Diaspora, as well as tell various stories about different aspects of the black experience.

8+ black art paintings | free & premium templates. (n.d.). Retrieved April 3, 2020, from <https://www.template.net/design-templates/paintings/black-art-paintings/>

Awkward | Black women art, Darkskin tan, Natural hair art. (n.d.). Pinterest. Retrieved April 3, 2020, from <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/363384263654884361/>

Dark skin is not a crime #feminism #women #selfcare #selflove | black girl art, black women art, dark skin. (n.d.). Pinterest. Retrieved April 3, 2020, from <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/820569994586898351/>

Dont touch my hair art print by foreverestherr. (n.d.). Society6. Retrieved April 3, 2020, from https://society6.com/product/dont-touch-my-hair1291683_print

Emmett till archives. (n.d.). *The Jose Vilson*. Retrieved April 3, 2020, from <https://thejosevilson.com/tag/emmett-till/>

Freeman-Haskin, L. (n.d.). *Young, black, & female: Artists around the world you should know*. TravelNoire. Retrieved April 3, 2020, from <https://travelnoire.com/young-black-female-artists-world-should-know>

Jordan russell davis: Person, pictures and information - fold3. Com. (n.d.). Fold3. Retrieved April 3, 2020, from <https://www.fold3.com/page/641431721-jordan-russell-davis/stories>

Jordan russell davis: Person, pictures and information - fold3. Com. (n.d.). Fold3. Retrieved April 3, 2020, from <https://www.fold3.com/page/641431721-jordan-russell-davis/stories>

On the importance of creating black art in the time of trump. (n.d.). The FADER. Retrieved April 3, 2020, from <https://www.thefader.com/2017/02/10/creating-black-art-in-the-time-of-trump>

Pin on my heart dedicated to treyvon martin. (n.d.). Pinterest. Retrieved April 3, 2020, from <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/474215035734026185/>

Plugging nyc's school-to-prison pipeline. (n.d.). Retrieved April 3, 2020, from <https://indypendent.org/2019/09/plugging-nycs-school-to-prison-pipeline/>

R/frankocean—Boys dont cry—Fan art [ver. 1]. (n.d.). Reddit. Retrieved April 3, 2020, from https://www.reddit.com/r/FrankOcean/comments/4x1o9f/boys_dont_cry_fan_art_ver_1/

Samaria rice is still working to alter the future of our children. (n.d.). Retrieved April 3, 2020, from <https://clevelandmagazine.com/in-the-cle/articles/samaria-rice-is-still-working-to-alter-the-future-of-our-children>

The untold stories of black girls. (n.d.). NPR.Org. Retrieved April 3, 2020, from <https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2016/03/23/471267584/the-untold-stories-of-black-girls>

U. N. Experts seem horrified by how american schools treat black children | black power art, art for kids. (n.d.). Pinterest. Retrieved April 3, 2020, from <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/312015080416323509/>

Velvet Voodoo | African american art, Hair art, Natural hair art. (n.d.). Pinterest. Retrieved April 3, 2020, from <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/67131850672064601/>

Poetry

- Poem Used: “Ode to my Dark Skin”

Untitled. (n.d.). Retrieved April 3, 2020, from <https://theblackdetour.com/6-black-centered-poems/>

Music

- This site is used to access the music lyrics that are on the blog site.

Genius | song lyrics & knowledge. (n.d.). Genius. Retrieved April 3, 2020, from <https://genius.com/>

Photography

- The photos in the sites linked below highlight stories of young African Diasporic people.

Diaz, T. (n.d.). *Deandre arnold proudly wears his locs to the oscars after being banned from graduation.* Retrieved April 3, 2020, from <https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2020/02/9383456/deandre-arnold-oscars-dreadlocks-hair-love-2020>

Radio, S. C. P. (2017, April 28). *Latasha Harlins' death and why Korean-Americans were targets in the '92 riots.* Southern California Public Radio. <https://www.scpr.org/programs/take-two/2017/04/28/56439/latasha-harlins-death-is-why-koreans-were-targets/>

Unarmed Amadou Diallo is killed by four police officers who shot at him 41 times in 1999. (n.d.). Nydailynews.Com. Retrieved April 3, 2020, from <https://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/unarmed-amadou-diallo-shot-killed-police-1999-article-1.2095255>

I. Introduction

Capstone Project

For my capstone project, I decided to produce a Tumblr page, which can be accessed [here](#). The page should be viewed in chronological order from the oldest post to the newest post (bottom to top).

Aim of Project

The intention for this project is to bring awareness to the experiences of black youth in the U.S. as well as give the youth a sense of pride in their culture and the different attributes that make them so special. This blog intends to educate adolescents about the experiences of their fellow young people in the U.S. It also gives them the opportunity to connect with artists that they may listen to on a regular basis, while introducing them to music that they may have never heard before. There are a few specific topics I focus on for this project. They are the unjust killings of black youth, perceptions of acceptable beauty and its effects on young black girls, and the criminalization of black children in schools. Along with the music, websites and media articles I explored, I also focused on books and scholarly articles that go in depth about racism and anti-blackness in the United States and the different institutions that perpetuate this system.

Since my main audience is black adolescents between ages 12 and 19, I decided to produce this project on a platform that my audience would be able to relate to. Social media is dominant in the lives of today's youth; I felt that it would be important to connect with them in a language that would be important to them. I chose Tumblr as my social media platform because it gave me the freedom to create my own format as well as add artistic pieces from different internet platforms.

According to an article titled, “What is Tumblr: A Statistical Overview and Comparison”, “[Tumblr] is reported to be the most popular social site among [the] young generation, as half of Tumblr’s visitors are under 25 years old. Tumblr is ranked as the 16th most popular site[s] in [the] United States, which is the 2nd most dominant blogging site, the 2nd largest microblogging service, and the 5th most prevalent social site” (Chang et al., 2014, p.21). Since Tumblr is considered a very popular blogging site amongst young people, I felt that they would respond well to it because it “serves as a social network, a blogosphere and social media simultaneously. It provides high quality content with rich multimedia information, which offers unique characteristics to attract youngsters” (Chang et al, 2014, p.28). Many blog sites tend to focus more on text than photos, while others focus more on user/community engagement. With Tumblr, users are able to explore their artistic abilities by choosing different formats for their blog sites. When creating their pages, they are able to either create their own background theme, or choose from the many themes that are already provided. They can create color schemes and switch up the order of their posts at any time. Users also have the choice to engage with the larger Tumblr community, though this does not have to be a significant component of the blog.

Although my main audience is Afro-diasporic youth, I also wish for others to view my work and gain some knowledge from it. I expect audiences to ask questions about the format of my page, the different photographs, my choice of visual art, and my choice of literary art. For the Tumblr page, I focused mainly on visual art, because I felt that the paintings and drawings illustrated a language that was important to my topic. However, I felt that it was also important to incorporate a photographic element for a couple of reasons. The first is that there are a few people whose faces I wanted to specifically highlight; their stories might not have been as popular and I wanted my audience to know who they were (i.e. Amadou Diallo, Latasha Harlins, Deandre Arnold). The

second reason is, there was some photography that went with the soundtracks to a few of the songs I added to the page. My choice of literature was mainly poetry and music lyrics; this is because music and poetry are historically known as a main form of protest art for African diasporic people throughout the world, from the past to the present. In the article, “Poetry in the New Race Era,” author Korina Jocson discusses the role poetry has played in the lives of today’s youth. She states,

As we negotiate matters of identity and cultural politics in a new race era, we must remember the potential power of words in the movement toward individual and social transformation. My own research affirms the idea that poetry can be used as a form of critical literacy both inside and outside school ... It creates learning environments that allow youth to take part more fully in their own learning process. Likewise, it can give adults a way to make sense of youth’s social worlds—to enter everyday imagination and lived experience. It extends words into action for the sake of alleviating human struggle. Words as speech acts perform actions in themselves or convert to action in the process of recontextualization. In my encounters with youth poets and other emerging writers, I have discovered that the dialogue we have through writing is sometimes a necessary reflection to ease the pain of experience with courage and clarity. (Jocson, 2011)

For today’s youth, poetry is used in many different forms and it is used to convey different messages. Like Jocson says, young people use this form of literary art to express emotion that they perhaps wouldn’t want to formally express and to speak out against the injustices that they witness in their communities. The art conveys the feelings and emotions of the artist; therefore, artists who are pained and angry about the injustices that occur in society are able to let their frustrations speak through their words. Though poetry may not be considered a form of academic writing, it can definitely play a role in educating people on racial discrimination.

Impetus for Project

My studies in Urban Education and Childhood and Youth Studies at the Graduate Center had a significant influence on my decision to pursue this project. In addition, working in a predominantly black and brown school has opened my eyes to the different systems in the U.S. that are designed to culturally destroy black children. Since these forms of discrimination are systematic, people are not always able to point them out without questionings their instincts. I have also been paying

attention to the ways in which black children have been portrayed in the media, specifically the ways in which they have been criminalized.

Adolescence is an important time of life because this is when children are transforming into young adults; they are beginning to question who they truly are and their position in the larger society. During this time, children pay close attention to the ways in which those around them (i.e. family, friends, teachers, strangers, etc.) treat them. For many black youths, this is the time parents start having conversations with them on the harsh realities that come with being a black young adult in America. My main audience for this project is young African diasporic adolescents who are on the path to forming their own identity. My main objective for this blog site is to showcase society's portrayal of young black people in America and to show how these portrayals affect children's development. I am also using the art to display a sense of pride in black culture. While educating the youth on the realities they may face in American society, I also want to promote positive aspects of black culture and the black experience in the U.S.

I have been interested in the exploration of people of the African diaspora since my undergraduate career but, upon my arrival to the Graduate Center, I've decided to shift my studies to children of the African diaspora. I decided to apply for the Individualized Studies track with a specific concentration on "The Development of the Urban Child and its Educational Influences." With this track, I was able to combine my courses in the Urban Education Track and the Childhood and Youth Studies Track. A few specific courses inspired me to pursue this capstone project; they were "Critical Race Scholarship: Theories and Pedagogies" taught by Dr. Soniya Munshi and Dr. Michelle Billies and "Issues in Urban Education: Critical Introduction to Mindfulness" taught by

Dr. David Forbes. In these courses, I was given the opportunity to think critically about the systems of oppression and the ways in which they affect people of color in the U.S. and abroad.

A reading from The Critical Race Scholarship course that stuck with me was an article by Rosemarie A. Roberts titled “How Do We Quote Black and Brown Bodies? Critical Reflections on Theorizing and Analyzing Embodiments.” In this article, Roberts studies dance performances by black and brown people and how their dance movements reflect acts of inequality, whether local or systematic. She states,

The physical sensation of weight bearing down on bodies, and the sharp, staccato movements, postures, and gestures that are produced lead to nuanced understandings of how knowledges of macro level—structural injustices live and are animated in and through bodies ... An embodied analysis of dance, unlike textual or textbased analyses alone, harnesses and exposes the stagnated weight that inhibits and conceals the structural and social psychological experience of the racial inequalities and the acts of resistance to that socially constructed form of oppression. Gestures, postures, and movements performed by black and brown bodies in hip-hop dance exposes the ways in which the body gestures to speech and, by extension, language as a call to action to make legible by producing cultural, historical, and subversive knowledges (Roberts, 2013, p.285)

I was interested in the ways in which Roberts was able to express the importance of performing arts in the discussion of racial inequality. From the African dance moves that were brought to the Americas through the trans-Atlantic slave trade to the dance styles that were created by African diasporic people to respond to the social injustice in the Western world, dance has always been a way for people to reflect on the things they would witness in their communities. This article inspired me to study different art forms created by black people and discover the stories that were being told through their art. This body of work helped me determine what kind of art I wanted to present on my blog site. I quote a song by Nina Simone in my blog. Not only was she one of the world’s most talented singers/musicians, but she was also one of the prominent voices of the Civil Rights movement. She sang about the injustices of the Jim Crow South, and her music gave the African American community a sense of pride in who they were and what they represented. I

wanted to showcase aspects of performing arts that highlighted black pride, as well as pieces of art that spoke about the trauma that comes with being black in America. Art has always been a form of expression and education that aided people in coping with trauma.

In my urban education course with Dr. Forbes, we critically discussed mindfulness and ways in which its practices may or may not be able to reduce racial bias. The readings we focused on explored whether or not the practice of mindfulness would reduce racial bias in the U.S and perhaps, globally. An article titled, “Here’s Why You Need to Question Mindfulness in Classrooms” discusses mindfulness in school and its use to categorize what ‘normal’ behavior looks like in classrooms:

First off, take a moment to think about the underlying agenda of practicing mindfulness in schools: increasing “normalized” behavior, fewer emotional outbursts, teaching children to accept the frustration and hardships they endure, instead of taking a critical approach to understanding them. Essentially, mindfulness is being removed from its holistic roots in order to make sure your child behaves “normally” as the academic year progresses and decrease any stress caused by the increasing push-down of academic expectations and high-stakes assessment into the early years (Flores, 2016).

There is a danger attached to expecting children to suppress their emotions, especially when they are dealing with trauma. They should be able to express their emotions in order to be able to heal. Meditation practices alone cannot deconstruct a system whose foundation is strongly built on racism and white supremacy. Instead of teaching children to behave “normally,” which can consist of accepting false messages of positivity, and avoiding emotional outbursts, children should be taught how to identify injustices and better advocate for themselves (Flores, 2016). This article inspired me to explore the criminalization of black children in the Education system in my blog. I wanted to showcase the ways in which administrators put systems in place to police children and blame them for the lack of education they receive in schools. The use of mindful meditation not

only causes children to constantly live with the trauma they experience, but it also conceals the truth about the American education system and its lack of value for African diasporic children.

II. Theoretical Framing

“It was the last day of school, and I was walking with my dad, preparing to leave. Suddenly, he paused, looked at me intently and said, ‘Son, you’re a black male, and that’s two strikes against you.’ To the general public anything that I did would be perceived as malicious and deserving of severe punishment and I had to govern myself accordingly. I was seven years old”
- “What Black Parents Tell Their Sons about the Police” by Jasmine Hughes

What does it mean to be a young black person in America? Are African diasporic youth able to claim their rights as U.S. citizens? Or are they often treated like second and third class citizens? The formation of identity is very crucial in the lives of all adolescents and I am going to be discussing why it is especially difficult for black children to figure out who they truly are and the institutions that are put in place to hinder these adolescents from being able to form honest identities. Anti-blackness in the United States dates back to the beginning of the transatlantic slave trade. Throughout the centuries, black people in the Americas have fought tirelessly for their rights, and though some would say we have progressed, the U.S. still fails to grant its black citizens the rights and respect they deserve. This is evident in the ways in which black children are portrayed and treated in today’s American society. From the senseless killings of black youth by police officers and white civilians to the white supremacist perceptions of beauty and the criminalization of black children in schools, the United States has proven its disregard for black life, particularly black adolescent life.

Unjust Killings of Black Youth

One major part of being an adolescent is being able to make mistakes and learn from them; youth should be provided with guidance as they navigate through the world. With African diasporic

youth living in America, mistakes can quickly become fatal. Raja Staggers-Hakim has done a study that “explores how awareness of national police killings impacts the mental health and social development of young African American boys” (Staggers-Hakim, 2016, p.390). In this study, young African American men were asked about their knowledge of the black men and boys who were murdered by police officers or white civilians. They’ve proven to have known about these shootings and they were able to express how this knowledge made them feel. They were able to identify where some of the shootings took place, as well as the racial differences between the shooters and the victims and how this played a part in the consequences the shooters received (if any) (Staggers-Hakim, 2016, p.394). One recurring theme identified in these interviews is fear.

All of the interviewees expressed the fear they would feel when interacting with the police:

Although the youth indicated speaking to family about ways to be safe in encounters with police, including how they need to talk to police and interact with police, the boys continued to indicate that they were aware that police could easily assume that they were a suspect and attack them as they had other Black males in national cases. Further, the boys acknowledged that police might have the liberty to attack, even kill them, as so many officers have done and without consequence. The fear emphasized by participants suggests that exposure to violence in general traumatized boys. Although boys who were connected to local violence, unrelated to police, felt changed by violence in their immediate communities, the boys who were removed from community violence were especially traumatized by police violence and police killings. This was especially so for those who felt that were no different than the boys and young men who were killed by police in the national cases. (Staggers-Hakim, 2016, p.396-397).

These feelings mirror the feelings of many young men and women who witness these unjust murders. At young ages, these children are aware that the systems that are supposed to protect them are, in fact, are harming them. It was interesting to see that more fear came from the young men who were quite removed from community violence. They were aware that, although they were law-abiding citizens, their lives could easily be taken away from them, like Trayvon Martin and Mike Brown.

Like fear, anger is a common emotion felt by Black people when hearing about or witnessing the senseless killings of young people in their communities. Since its emergence, hip-hop music has played a significant role in reflecting these common feelings. Artists used their platform to discuss the injustices they faced and witnessed within American society. Tupac Shakur, one of the most prominent voices of hip-hop music, was known for speaking out against the unjust systems in America that were created to oppress African diasporic people. This was also reflective in his music. In his song, "I Wonder If Heaven Got A Ghetto" he raps about a teenaged girl, Latasha Harlins, who was murdered in Los Angeles:

"Here on Earth, tell me what's a black life worth?
A bottle of juice is no excuse, the truth hurts
And even when you take the shit
Move counties, get a lawyer, you can shake the shit
Ask Rodney, Latasha, and many more
It's been going on for years, there's plenty more
When they ask me, "When will the violence cease?"
When your troops stop shootin' niggas down in the street" (Shakur, 1997).

On March 16th, 1991, 15 year-old Latasha Harlins was shot and killed by a grocery store clerk, Soon Ja Du. The store clerk accused her of stealing a bottle of orange juice. Although she showed the clerk that she had money to buy the juice and made her way to the counter, Du proceeded to physically assault Harlins causing the young lady to fight back. Harlins was able to get Du to let her go, and as she was leaving the store, she threw the bottle of juice on the counter. Before she was able to fully exit the grocery store, Du pulled out a gun and shot Harlins in the back of the head, killing her instantly. During the trial, a security camera highlighted exactly what occurred, proving that Du killed Latasha. The jury later found Du guilty of voluntary manslaughter and urged that she be sentenced to a maximum of 16 years in prison. However, Judge Joyce Karlin

decided to give Du 5 years of community service and a \$500 fine (Bihm, 2017). “‘Did Mrs. Du react inappropriately,’ asked Judge Joyce Karlin at the time. ‘Absolutely. But was that reaction understandable? I think that it was. This is not a time for revenge ... and no matter what sentence this court imposes, Mrs. Du will be punished every day for the rest of her life,’ Judge Karlin stated. Karlan also stated that Du shot Harlins under extreme provocation and duress, and deemed her unlikely to commit a serious crime again” (Bihm, 2017). Judge Karlin’s decision not to sentence Du to any time in prison is reflective of the United States Justice system. Her decision to disregard Lataha’s death and, instead, focus on whether or not Du would commit the crime again depicts how she regarded Harlins’ life and how the criminal justice system views black life. Latasha’s murder was said to have been one of the contributing factors to the L.A. riots (McKennett, 2019).

There are countless other African Diasporic youth that have been unjustly killed by police officers and white civilians, including Amadou Diallo, Trayvon Martin, Tamir Rice, Jordan Davis, Mike Brown, and many more. The growing number of black people being killed by the police is said to be a result of the justice system’s failure to penalize the perpetrators. This lack of accountability highlights the country’s lack of value for black life and its continual display of anti-blackness (Staggers-Hakim, 2016, p.391). It was important for me to include this segment in my project because it proves to be one of the most prominent depictions of anti-blackness in America. The uncertainty that comes with interactions with law enforcement is traumatizing for Black people. The lack of justice for these children that were murdered and the criminal justice system’s intentional decisions to protect the police officers and white civilians vehemently proves whom the justice system was created to protect. Demanding justice for African diasporic people does not consist of fixing a damaged system; its consists of dismantling an American system that was built to preserve white supremacy.

Perceptions of Beauty & Its Effects on Young Black Girls

For centuries, when discussing beauty and desirability, people would solely discuss Eurocentric perceptions of beauty. Black women were left out of the conversation, unless they were able to conform to the European standards. When categorizing beauty standards, skin color, hair texture, body type, facial structure, etc. are taken into consideration. In chapter 5 of his book, *Blinded by the Whites: Why Race Still Matters in the 21st century*, David Ikard discusses white beauty standards in the U.S. and the ways in which it harms black girls. He states, “black girls and women’s unique and intersecting race, gender, and class subjectivities mean that they must not only contend with the debilitating and patriarchal images of ideal femininity that negatively affect all women, but also with a white (male) hegemonic discourse that tethers ideal beauty and femininity to whiteness”(Ikard, 2013, p.108). Mainstream beauty standards stem from white supremacy, meaning, the farther someone is from whiteness, the less beautiful they are deemed in society. The role of the media in perpetuating white standards of beauty can often cause conflict between black women and girls of different skin colors. Light-skinned women, at times, receive more representation because they seem physically closer to white than dark-skinned women. In the article, “Teaching and Learning Color Consciousness in Black Families: Exploring Family Processes and Women’s Experiences with Colorism,” JeffriAnne Wilder and Colleen Cain discuss colourism and the ways in which skin color affects the lives and achievements of black women.

As Hunter (2004) has stated, the social construction of beauty is “informed by other societal status characteristics including race” (p. 23). Because White racism persists in the United States, “light skin is defined as more beautiful and more desirable than dark skin, particularly in women” (p. 23). Light skin can also work as social capital for women of color; more specifically, lighter skinned African American women are more privileged in the areas of education, income, and spousal status than their darker skinned counterparts (Hunter, 1998, 2002). (Wilder & Cain, 2011, p.581).

Because of white supremacist notions of acceptability, lighter skinned black women and darker skinned black women receive different opportunities, which can affect the ways in which they view each other. Not only do dark skinned girls and women lack representation in the media, countless opportunities are taken away from them because their skin tone is not deemed desirable in American society. This can harm the confidence and capabilities of adolescent girls; fear of judgement and unfair treatment can cause them to refuse to freely express themselves.

Lack of media representation has been an issue black women faced for years. Television stations in particular have ignored black women and the talent that they had to potential to bring to TV. When they were on TV, they would be asked to play roles that were meant to degrade and immortalize black women (and black people) (Gordon, 2008, 246). One example of a black role that was created by a white person is that of 'Jezebel' which is a representation of the normalization of sexual exploitation of African diasporic women during and after slavery (Gordon, 2008, p.246). In 2004, black children were said to consume up to "6 hours of screen media in a day (i.e., TV, videos and/or DVDs, and movies), in comparison to an average of 3 hours and 47 minutes for White youth" (Gordon, 2008, p.247). Since children are easily influenced by what they see on the screen, young black girls are very likely to emulate the negative portrayals they see on screen. They are also likely to internalize the messages that are given on acceptable beauty standards (Gordon, 2008, 247).

Self-love and acknowledgement of self-worth are important aspects of life for young people. During early adolescence, many children are impressionable to their peers and the adults around them. In her book, *Layers of Blackness: Colourism in the African Diaspora*, Deborah Gabriel quotes, "Children who suffer from negative racial experiences through parenting as a consequence of their skin tone can develop psychological problems and low self-esteem, it has been suggested.

‘A child who grows up feeling hopeless, helpless and unlovable might later become a parent who feels hopeless, helpless and unlovable, thus perpetuating a discouraging cycle’” (Gabriel, 2007, p.27). The messages we give our children, whether positive or negative, follow them into adulthood and they transfer these messages to those around them. A dark skinned young woman who is constantly taught that her skin is not beautiful can internalize a sense of insecurity and hate for her physical self that follows her through her adolescent and adult years. Throughout these years, she can transmit these messages to the dark skin girls around her, which can cause them to develop low self-esteem. This form of self-hate is often passed down through generation as well. Though the media and the broader society continue to push false narratives about African diasporic women, black women continue to speak out against the media’s negative representations of them and they take charge in forming their own narratives in the media. These women serve as positive influences for adolescent girls who seek guidance from women who look like them. Black women are giving black girls the ability to write their own narratives and center themselves in these narratives; they are able to display their truths while challenging the false narratives (McArthur, 2016, p.465)

Criminalization of Black Children in Schools

According to Michael J. Dumas, in order for one to understand the racism in education discourse and education policy they have to understand the theory of anti-blackness (Dumas, 2015, p.12).

Anti-blackness interrogates the psychic and material assault on Black flesh, the constant surveillance and mutilation and murder of Black people (Alexander, 1994; Tillet, 2012). It also grapples with the position of the Black person as socially dead—that is denied humanity and thus ineligible for full citizenship and regard within the polity (Patterson, 1982). And in all the theorizing on antiblackness, there is a concern with what it means to have one’s very existence as Black constructed as problem—for white people, for the public (good), for the nation-state, and even as a problem for (the celebration of) racial difference (Gordon, 1997, 2000; Melamed, 2011). (Dumas, 2015, p.12).

The structure of the present-day education system isn't too different from that of the Jim Crow Era. School populations are still quite segregated. Schools with majority white populations are far more resourced than schools with majority black populations. Also, many schools with majority black students focus more on disciplining students and less on providing them with quality education; this can be connected to the school to prison pipeline. The school to prison pipeline is described as "a set of policies and practices in schools that make it more likely that students face criminal involvement with the juvenile courts than attain a quality education (Advancement Project et al. 2011). The evidentiary impact of these policies and disproportionate impact on many of the most at risk children and adolescents supports the use of the more harsh 'school-to-prison pipeline' terminology (Mallett 2013)" (Mallett, 2015, p.15). Meaningless suspensions (possibly leading to expulsions) significantly affect the lives and success rates of students. Police officers are often used as security guards in schools and they are not there to protect the students; in fact, they are placed in schools to police students. There have been numerous incidents circulating in the media of police officers using excessive force on young black girls and boys in schools and arresting them for things that were not considered crimes. School is supposed to be a place where children are given the opportunity to learn and grow. They should be able to make mistakes and learn from them. Children should not be policed in schools.

The theory of anti-blackness is visible through the school-to-prison pipeline. The United States Educational system was not created to educate Black children. Therefore, in order for change to be made in education policy, school administrators and district leaders need to be honest about the ways in which African diasporic children are treated in schools.

III. Methodology

The intention of my Tumblr project was to exude much pride in black culture, while being transparent enough to be honest about the aspects of blackness in America that are not so sweet. I tried not to shy away from the use of the color black. Black is usually classified with negative connotations, but I wanted to connect positivity to the color. The background color is black and I fill up the rest of the page with vibrant colors that would complement the black background. The blog starts with a question: “Hey black child, do you know who you are?” I then go into positive adjectives that I feel describe African diasporic youth; this section is used for motivational purposes. I go on to add art pieces that correlate with these adjectives. I decided to use strictly visual art in this section because I feel that this type of art represents a language that the youth understand well. The vibrant colors in these art pieces help articulate the positivity in the adjectives. The second section goes into the topics mentioned above and I use paintings, photographs, quotes, poetry, and song lyrics to implement these topics into the blog. The third segment is intended to bring hope to African diasporic adolescents who are learning about the systems that are working against them. In this section, I use song lyrics, photos, and art to try to depict what support looks like for the youth. Again, I feel that using art and artistic language is useful because it fits the concept of the social media platform and it attracts a younger audience. I use quotes from *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas and *PUSHOUT: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools* by Monique W. Morris. I felt that it was important to include books that were at the adolescent reading level that they would, perhaps, be interested in reading. *The Hate U Give* is definitely a favorite for adolescent students. This was assigned as a class reading at a middle school I worked in; students described this book as a “page turner” and they were always excited to attend their English class and discuss what they discovered in their assigned readings from the previous night. The quote I use from the book comes from Starr, the main character. “Once upon

a time there was a hazel-eyed boy with dimples. I called him Khalil. The world called him a thug. He lived, but not nearly long enough, and for the rest of my life I'll remember how he died. Fairy tale? No. But I'm not giving up on a better ending." (Thomas, 2017, p. 443). The events that occur in this book mirror many police shootings that have occurred throughout the country. Khalil, an African American teen, gets pulled over by a police officer, and when he asks what is the motivation behind the stop, the officer commands that he get out of the car and be still. When Khalil goes to open the car door to check on Starr, the officer shoots and kills him. Starr is indefinitely scarred from watching her friend being murdered. This is especially because she knew he did not deserve to die. She is even angrier when she learns that the police officer who shot her friend was not indicted. Books like *The Hate U Give* are important because they have the ability to start important conversations on police brutality, the truths about racist American society and the ways in which African American teens are viewed in the eyes of the justice system. It is also great that this book is especially written for young adult audiences; this gives them the chance to learn about these topics while being at the center of the conversation. *PUSHOUT: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools* discusses the experiences of black girls in the school system. Morris discusses how Black girls are often left out of discussions of the school to prison pipeline theory. The numbers of girls that occupy the juvenile justice system are rapidly rising and it is stemming from the ways in which young women are being criminalized in their schools. Many black girls are often judged by teachers and administrators that do not understand them and the unfortunate circumstances that they are often placed in. This, in turn, results in them being pushed out of schools, and into prisons, ultimately ruining their futures.

I use music from African diasporic artists that are relevant to this age, like Solange, Beyoncé, and Kendrick Lamar because adolescents idolize popular artists that look like them and they pay

attention to the message that these artists are spreading (Gordon, 2008, p.247). Therefore, it is important for young people to see their favorite artists, like Beyoncé, speak about revolution and the fight for freedom”. I also add music from older hip-hop artists that many of today’s youth wouldn’t know much about, like Tupac, Wyclef Jean, and Nas. I decided to incorporate the work of these artists because they have contributed so much to hip-hop music and they have been using their platform to speak out against racial injustice against black people.

In order to transition into the last portion of my project, I ask a question to my audience. “How do you continue to thrive when it feels like society is working against you?” I answer that question by stating, “Because you have a village of people behind you who are continuously rooting for you.” This is an ode to the people rallying behind black youth that encourage them to flourish. This goes for educators, positive black representatives in the media, peers, and family members. I acknowledge that not all people in these categories provide support to black youth, but there are a good number of them who serve as positive influences. I refrained from posting photos of positive adult role models because I did not want to take the attention away from my intended audience. The themes that can be found in the last section of the blog are love, motivation, inspiration, courage, and positivity. This section starts off with a quote from Nina Simone’s Song, “To Be Young, Gifted and Black.” These lyrics serve as a reminder to adolescents that there is beauty in their blackness and it is something that should always be celebrated.

I also posted lyrics to the song “Don’t Touch My Hair” by Solange. My hope is for these lyrics to give black kids the courage to tell people not to touch their hair. And when I say touch, I mean it in the physical aspect as well as the metaphoric aspect. White society should not have the freedom to tell black children how to wear their hair or deem what hair types or hairstyles are acceptable or

beautiful. Black children should be able to wear their hair however they want without being penalized. There are too many stories of black girls getting suspended from school because of the hairstyles they choose to wear. I posted a photo of a young man named Deandre Arnold and the Director of Oscar winning short film, *Hair Love*, Matthew A. Cherry. Arnold is a teen from Texas who was a victim of natural hair discrimination in his school. He was suspended from school and banned from his high school prom and graduation because he refused to cut his dreadlocks. Many celebrities heard Arnold's story and took the initiative to speak out against this discrimination. Cherry heard this story and decided to invite Arnold and his parents to the 2020 Annual Academy Awards. This is an example of someone taking a black adolescent and uplifting him in a time of hopelessness.

IV. Evaluation

Overall, I am pleased with the quality of my project. There were some aspects of the project that I expected to be different, but I am aware that the previous ideas I had would not fit this project. I realized that being as specific as possible with the issues I wanted to focus on made it easier to produce my Tumblr page. Many of the ideas and plans that I originally had for this project were not able to be executed, but I was still able to produce a meaningful project that I am proud of. In the beginning, I wanted to equally focus on youth whose families were from various parts of the diaspora, instead of just focusing on African American youth. I acknowledge that the topic of blackness is vast and there are many different experiences that come with being a black young adult in America, whether it is being from the continent, the Caribbean, or even coming from other western nations around the world. With this in mind, I did not think about how long this would make my Tumblr page. There is so much content that I wanted to add but I felt that too many posts would cause me to lose my viewer's attention. I also realized that there are so many issues that

overlap for different groups of black people living in the United States. The topics I discussed, which are police brutality, black hair, media portrayals, and inequality in schools, are issues that are occurring for young people across the diaspora. However, I was able to bring light to the story of Amadou Diallo, who was a 19 year-old West African immigrant whose life was taken from him by the police. I was also able to add art and poetry from continental African artists, like Lynette Yiadom Boakye, whose art inspired some aspects of Solange Knowles' video, "Don't Touch My Hair". I planned on ending the Tumblr page with different types of people that make it their business to lift up black children, especially in today's society (i.e. educators, families, positive celebrity influences, etc.). However, I felt that doing this would take away from the main focus of the project which is the youth. There are so many people that are behind the youth helping them strive for great things, and I felt that mentioning all of these people would shift the focus of the project.

There were a few obstacles I faced while completing this capstone project. The main thing I struggled with in the beginning stages was juggling thoughts surrounding the validity of my project. The topic I chose is near and dear to me, but there was a point in which I felt like this was a topic that could only be articulated in an academic paper. As I continued to work on my capstone, I had to realize that this topic could be handled in any manner; it all depended on how I presented my topic to my audience and how I articulated what I wanted viewers to get from this project. I read countless amounts of peer-reviewed articles, books and non-academic articles for this project. At one point, I felt that I had so much information but it was impossible for me to incorporate all that I read into my final project. Although I acknowledge the significance of all of the information I acquired, I had to understand that some of it would not be as useful to my topic. Obtaining all this information also made it difficult for me to start my project. I struggled

with organizing my thoughts and determining what information was useful for my topic and what information was not. Creating multiple outlines for my Tumblr page and for this white paper helped me organize my thoughts and it helped me further narrow my topic down.

I was not ready for the emotional toll this project would have on me. Firstly, doing research on the children and young adults who were killed was especially difficult for me. Reading the details of their killings and the lack of empathy that was put into their cases was very disheartening. Even seeing the ways in which these young people were portrayed in the media after their deaths were dehumanizing. A lot of them were described with words that disregarded their humanity, therefore allowing readers of these articles to dehumanize these young people. As a person of the African diaspora, these stories automatically made me think of myself, my family members and, of course, my students. These tragedies could have happened to anyone I love. This system continuously reminds us that we are not allowed to be fully human. We are not allowed to make mistakes without fearing that these mistakes can turn into fatalities. I was also met with great discomfort when researching the ways in which the education system does great dismay to children of color. This is a system that is supposed to uplift and educate children, instead it is endangering them. As someone who works in the education system, this also inspires me to fight against the injustices that I witness in my workplace and break the cycles of behavior we all tend to unconsciously perpetuate.

V. Continuation of my Project

As the moment, I plan to continue to work with this topic and possibly produce a project at a PhD level. This topic is very important to me; I have been writing about it, on and off, since my undergraduate career. Although I am very proud of what I accomplished with my capstone project,

I would love to be given the opportunity to conduct much more research on my topic and produce a more in depth piece of work. I would also consider taking the blog site and turning it into a bigger online project. This project can further explore the narrative experiences of young people whose families immigrated directly from the African continent and the Caribbean. Although this would be a vast exploration, it would be interesting to see the ways in which experiences overlap and/ or differ from one another. With this topic, I would also be able to explore the conflicts that occur between these young people. This would definitely have to go into history and the ways in which white supremacists have worked to position African diasporic communities against each other and the ways in which this separation strengthens the system of white supremacy.

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