

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS AND THE INTERSECTIONAL EXPERIENCES OF BLACK-CANADIAN GIRLS

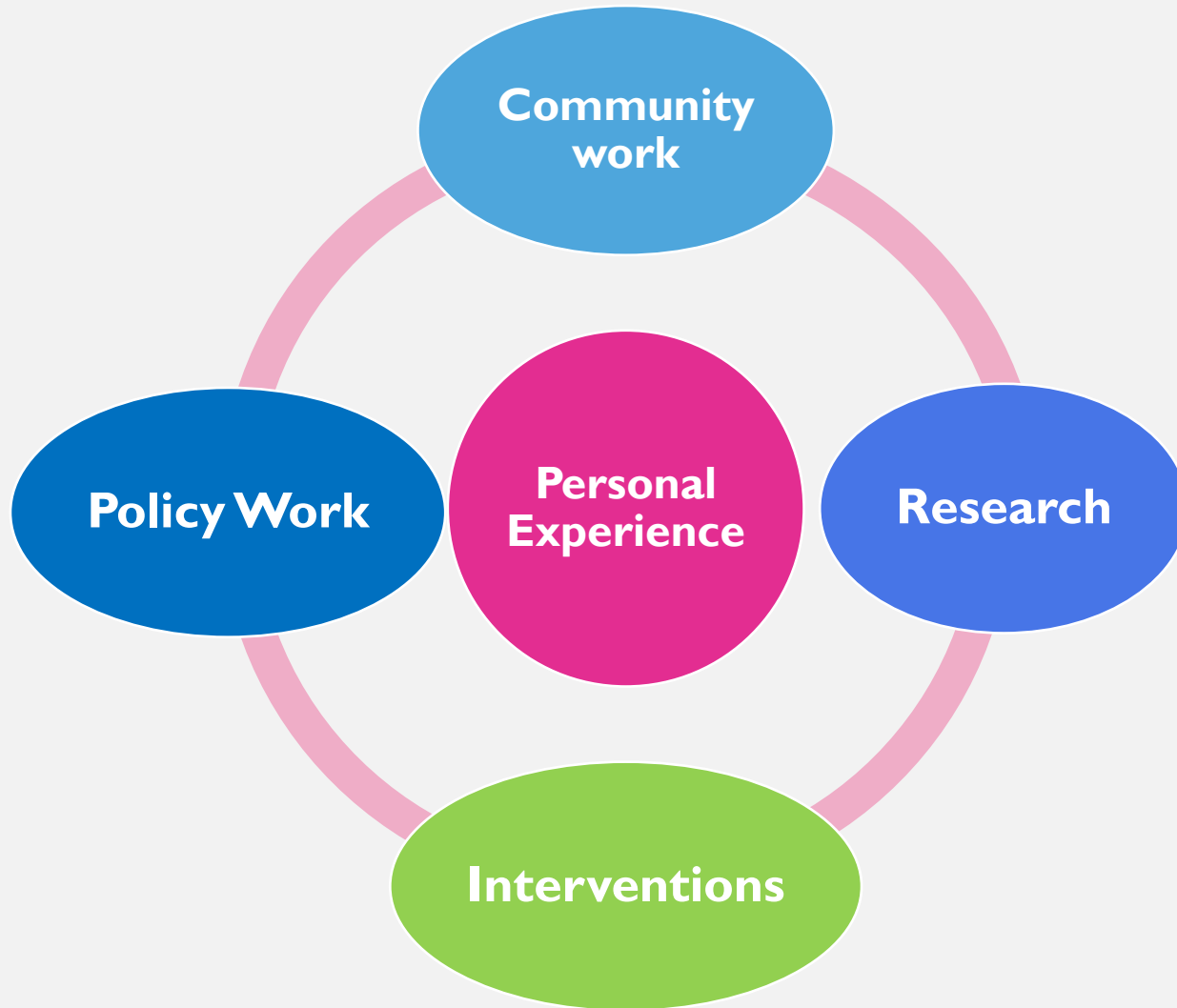
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ABOUT ME



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

My intention for this webinar is for attendees to:

1. Understand current statistics on gender-based violence in Canadian schools
2. Interrogate intersecting histories of racism and sexism in Canada and how these inform educational spaces to promote cultures of violence
3. Consider strengths-based and trauma-informed approaches to working with Black-Canadian girls impacted by gender-based violence



DEFINITIONS

- **Sexual Violence**

- “Sexual violence is a broad term that describes any violence, physical or psychological, carried out through sexual means or by targeting sexuality. This includes but is not limited to sexual abuse, sexual assault, rape, sexual harassment, cyber harassment” (Government of Ontario, 2020)

- **Cultural Violence**

- “Cultural violence' is defined here as any aspect of a culture that can be used to legitimize violence in its direct or structural form. Symbolic violence built into a culture does not kill or maim like direct violence or the violence built into the structure. However, it is used to legitimize either or both...” (Galtung, 1990)

- **Culture of violence towards women**

- “...one that is perpetuated by societal-level influences that foster a systematic tolerance of violent acts such as rape. This culture of violence is manifest at the societal level, where it undermines the status and power of women, and at the individual level, where it reinforces harmful attitudes and beliefs about women and violence towards women” (Yodanis, 2004)

CBC SURVEY ON SCHOOL VIOLENCE

- Designed in collaboration with Dr. Debra Pepler, Professor of Psychology, York University and cofounder of PREVNet and Dr. Tracy Vaillancourt, Canada Research Chair in children's mental health and violence prevention, University of Ottawa
- 4,065 online surveys
- 55% respondents were high school students
- 51% male, 48% female, 29% "visible minority" – no further disaggregation here



CBC SURVEY: SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS

- 26% of girls experienced unwanted sexual contact at school
- 3/20 girls have been sexually assaulted by another student
- One in four students experienced sexual assault or harassment before grade 7
- 50% of high school students don't report violence they've experienced or witnessed
- Girls fear they won't be believed if they report sexual assault

CULTURES OF VIOLENCE: HETEROPATRIARCHY

- Cultures of sexual violence in schools are maintained not only through the acts that are committed but through
 - lack of consequences
 - lack of explicit channels for reporting
 - victim-survivors not being believed
 - silence when cases are handled (e.g. not informing parents)
 - lack of honest conversations about sex and sexuality



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CULTURES OF VIOLENCE: JUST SAY NO

- Kitzinger & Firth (1999)
 - Women report that they find it difficult to say no to unwanted sex both before and during an encounter
 - *Liz*: You've sat there and all through it you've been thinking 'I don't want to do this, I should have said no, I should have stopped him before, and I can't stop him now, because we're half way through the swing of it all, and I'm just so stupid. Next time I'm just going to sort it all out...' [...] But you never do....

Reasons:

- People don't usually say no in every day talk. They offer explanations, apologize
- Alternatively, people usually hear refusals without hearing the word "no"

"Our analysis in this article supports the belief that the root of the problem is not that men do not understand sexual refusals, but that they do not like them." (p. 310)

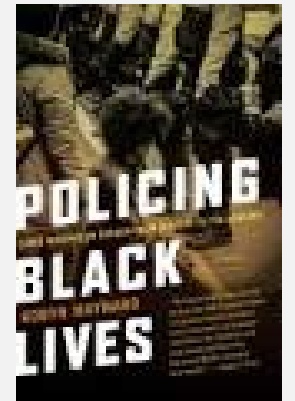
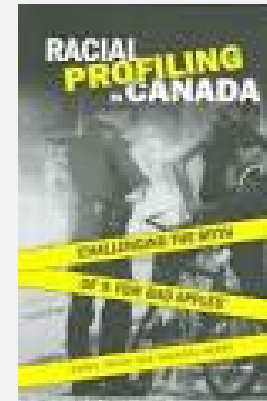
CULTURES OF VIOLENCE: COLONIALISM AND ANTI-BLACK RACISM

- **Anti-Black Racism** is prejudice, attitudes, beliefs, stereotyping and discrimination that is directed at people of African descent and is rooted in their unique history and experience of enslavement. Anti-Black racism in Canada is often subtle and is generally not accompanied by overt racial slurs or explicitly prohibitive legislation. However, it is deeply entrenched in Canadian institutions, policies and practices, such that anti-Black racism is either functionally normalized or rendered invisible to the larger white society. It can manifest as:
 - Lack of opportunities
 - Lower socio-economic status
 - Higher unemployment
 - Significant poverty rates and
 - Overrepresentation in the criminal justice system (ACLC, 2015)

CULTURE OF VIOLENCE: COLONIALISM, SLAVERY, AND ANTI-BLACK RACISM

- Enslavement of people of African descent in Canada (1689-1833)
- Black loyalist soldiers receive no or infertile land; face segregation, indentureship, starvation upon arrival in Canada (1780s)
- Razing of Africville Nova Scotia (1960s)
- Explicit immigration restrictions for people from Africa and the Caribbean (1911-1960s)
 - People of African descent deemed to be mentally physically and socially inferior and could potentially mar Canadian social fabric (Tator & Henry p. 41)
- Residential and service segregation e.g. Viola Desmond case

Public discourse on these histories is lacking, reinforcing a culture of violence towards Black Canadians

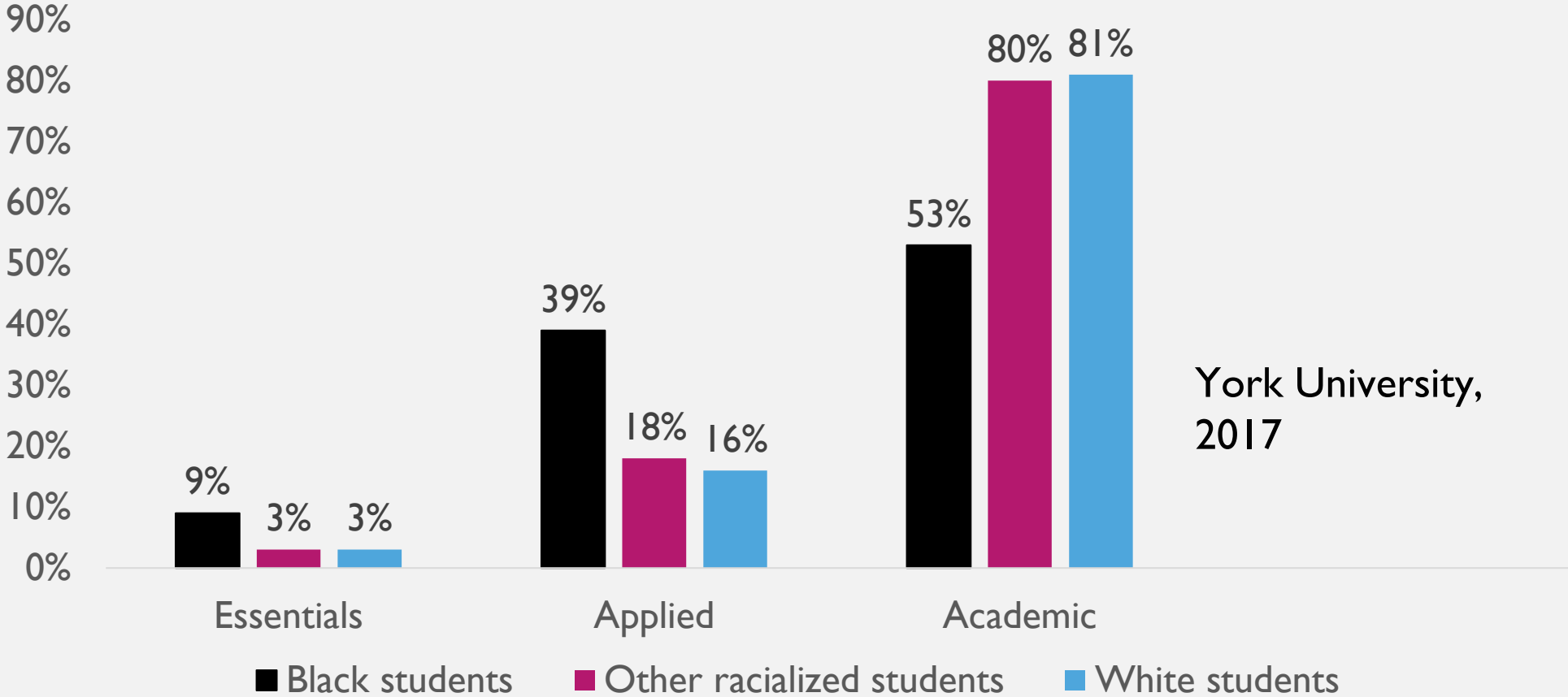


ANTI-BLACK RACISM IN CANADIAN SCHOOLS

- Students racialized as Black (of various national backgrounds) have been routinely excluded from mainstream education in Canada
 - Separate Schools Act (1850)
 - Legal segregated schools with inferior resource allocation (1800s) (Chan, 2007)
 - Multicultural Education Policies (1970s) (Chan, 2007; James & Braithwaite, 1996)
 - To integrate increasingly diverse student body (due to immigration)
 - Did not address racism
 - Race Relations policies and Programs (1980s)
 - Did not address *Systemic Racism*; racism attributed to ignorance (James & Braithwaite, 1996)
 - Racial minority achievement gaps explicitly attributed to inferior cultures and adjustment difficulties

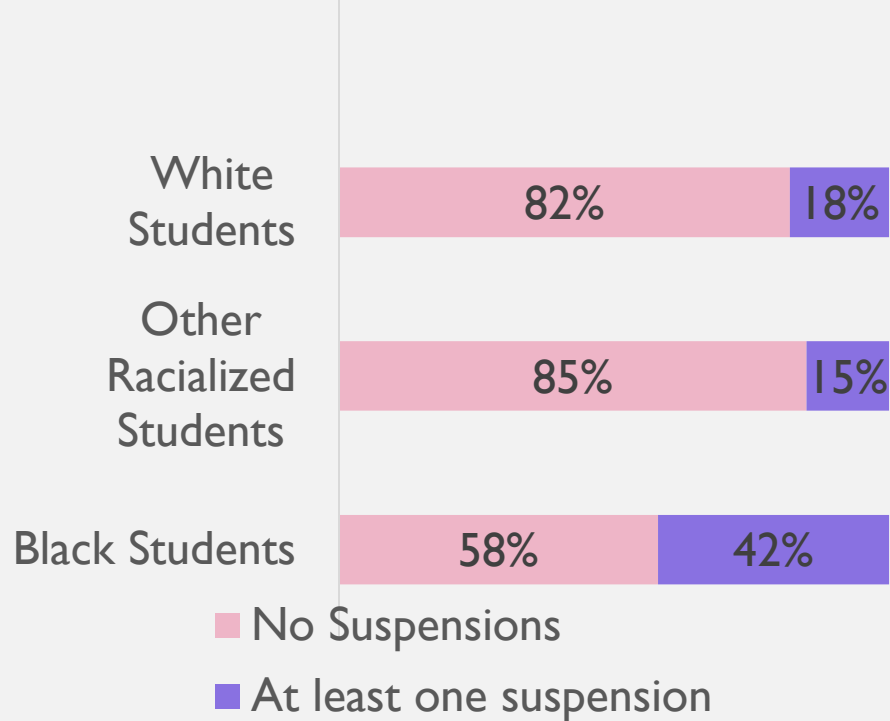
ACADEMIC OPPORTUNITY GAPS: TORONTO

Program of Study TDSB 2006-2011 Cohort

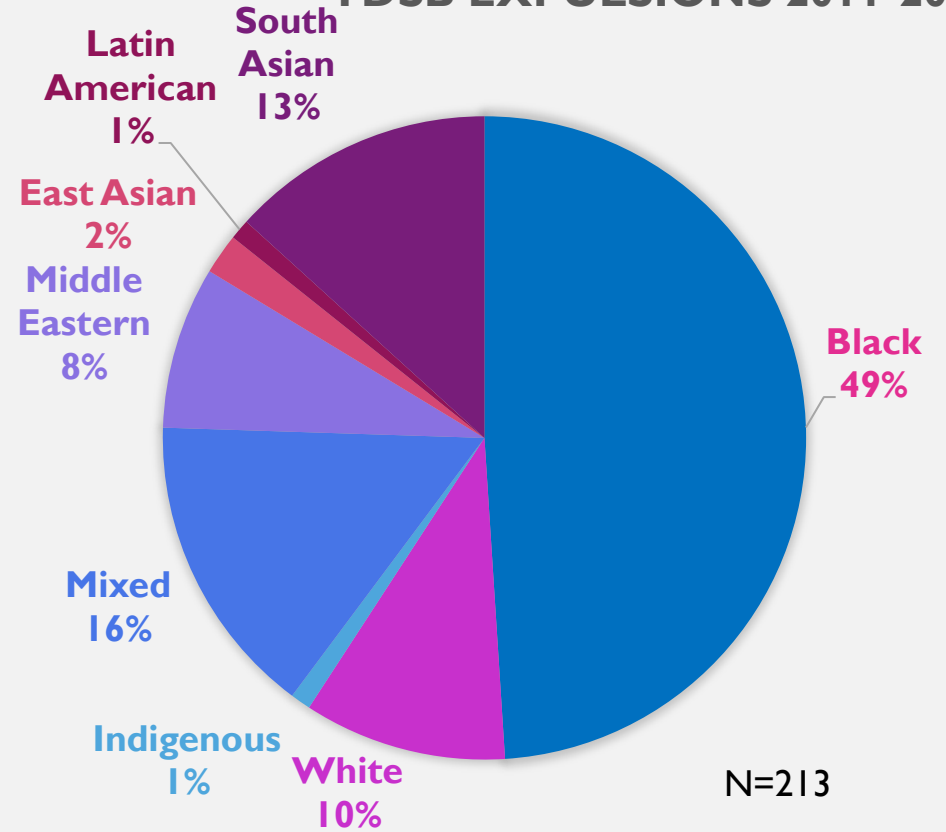


ACADEMIC OPPORTUNITY GAPS: TORONTO

TDSB Cumulative suspensions
2006-2011 cohort



TDSB EXPULSIONS 2011-2016





Kimberlee Crenshaw

INTERSECTIONALITY

INTERSECTIONALITY AND SYSTEMS OF OPPRESSION/POWER

- Intersectionality
 - “How systems of oppression tend to intersect and influence particular individuals and groups”. This leads to “unique experience of privilege or marginalization that cannot be understood by examining systems of oppression individually or in parallel”

INTERSECTIONAL DISCOURSES OF BLACK WOMEN

Black feminist researchers argue that discourses/narratives/images of Black women are formed within White supremacist systems where Whiteness is defined as “normal” and good, and Blackness is defined against this. This works to maintain systems of oppression.

- Mammie
- Matriarch
- Jezebel*
- Strong Black Woman*

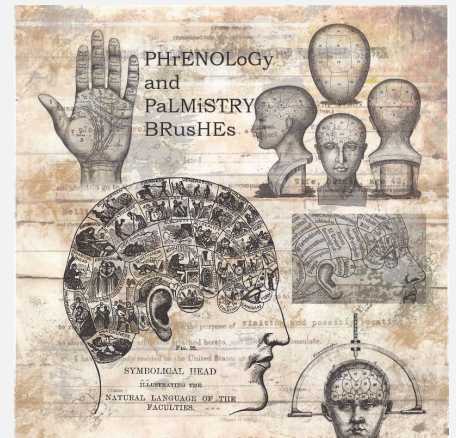
BLACK JEZEBEL

Colonial gaze

- “Under colonialism, West African people’s proximity to wild animals, especially apes, raised in **Western imaginations** the specter of “wild” sexual practices in an uncivilized, inherently violent wilderness. Through colonial eyes, the stigma of biological Blackness and the **seeming primitiveness** of African cultures marked the borders of **extreme abnormality**. For Western sciences that were mesmerized with body politics, White Western normality became constructed on the backs of Black deviance, with an imagined Black hyper-heterosexual deviance at the heart of the enterprise.” (Collins, 2005, p. 120)

Images and narratives of:

- Hypersexuality; Deviance; Unchecked fertility



BLACK JEZEBEL

Sara Baartman

- “Hottentot Venus”.
- Example of Black female body sexualized and objectified
- Removal of agency from Black woman
- Contributed to stereotypes of over sexual Black women
- Continued exploitation even after death



BLACK JEZEBEL IN HISTORICAL CANADA (Maynard, 2018)

- Accusations of rape of White women by Black men
 - Prime minister John A. McDonald justified the death penalty for rape based on the belief of the frequency of rapes committed by Black men against White women
 - 100 years of court records at the time demonstrated that such occurrences were statistically false
 - Such accusations were made in efforts to protect White settler society, not to protect White women. Working class women who were raped by their White partners did not receive legal protection

Rape of Black Women by White men

- Black women, who were raped in far greater frequency by White men, also did not receive protection under the law
- Black women were deemed to be “unrapeable” given their “natural” depravity and hypersexuality

BLACK JEZEBEL IN HISTORICAL CANADA

- Criminalization of prostitution was used to police the movement of Black and Indigenous women in the late 1800s
- Between 1864 and 1873 Black women were 3% of the Halifax population but made up 40% of the incarcerated women most likely for prostitution related charges (Maynard, 2018)

STRONG BLACK WOMAN



STRONG BLACK WOMAN

- A stereotype and necessity (Wyatt, 2008)
- Withstanding harsh labor conditions during slavery. Separation from children.
- Taking care of White families during and after slavery was abolished at the expense of their own families
- Gynecological experimentations
- Immigration to Canada as domestic workers with the requirement that they immigrate as single women, thereby leaving their families behind (Maynard, 2008)
 - Resistance: Many of these women subsequently brought their partners and children to Canada

BLACK GIRLS

- But what about Black Girls?
- Current discourses speak to Black Women
- Adultification
 - *Black girls are viewed by society to be more mature and experienced in activities than non-Black girls of similar ages (Smith 2019)*



RESEARCH ON BLACK GIRLS AND SCHOOL BASED SEXUAL VIOLENCE

- Limited research with inconsistent findings
- Majority of research conducted with White middle class female students

UNITED STATES

- African American girls and boys reported higher incidents of physical sexual assault than other groups
- These students were also more likely to report that perpetrator was older and a current romantic partner (Espleage et al. 2016)
- Ethnic/racial minority students more likely to withdraw from activities due to sexual harassment (Hill & Kearn, 2011)

CANADA

- Large scale Research disaggregated by race and gender currently unavailable

“SHE’S VERY KNOWN IN THE SCHOOL”

(Litchmore, 2021)

A young Black girl with her hair in braids is smiling and holding a book in a school hallway. The background is slightly blurred, showing other students and hallway lights.

BLACK GIRLS AT LILYFIELD HIGH SCHOOL

- Black Female students negotiation of multiple subject positions within damage/deficit discourse of Blackness;
- Post-feminist discourse of sexual responsibility (Baker, 2010; Gill, 2007)
 - Neoliberal emphasis on individual responsibility, choice, agency
 - “Self-surveillance, monitoring and discipline” (Gill, 2009; p. 148)
 - Avoidance of “victim” positioning
- Draws attention to unique challenges of Black girls
 - Gendered risk and sexual victimization

IMPLICATIONS

- Cultures of violence in schools informed by racist and sexist discourses
 - Misogynistic language and interactions
 - Rape myths
 - Systemic removal of Black students from schools under discipline policies
- Black girls consequently avoided being positioned as victims even though they had experienced or were at risk of violence

INSTITUTIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Educators and service providers must understand how white supremacy, anti-Black racism shape their outlooks and how they interact with Black students
 - Both through explicit racism and reinforcing deficit discourses
- Integrate Culturally Responsive Pedagogy into school curricula
- Hire Black educators!
- Include clear, organized and detailed discussions of Black histories and cultures into school curricula
 - This includes Canadian Black History and histories of diasporic communities
- Include students in curricular and school culture planning activities
 - Rely on student expertise and strengths, particularly in relation to technology usage

INTERPERSONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Build authentic relationships with Black girls
 - Refusing vulnerability is symptomatic of a culture that does not grant this privilege (trauma-informed)
 - Create opportunities for students to come to you
 - Girls with safe (r) (McPherson, 2020) spaces are more likely to report experiences of violence
- Normalize conversations on sexual violence in schools
 - Discuss dating norms and expectations in non-judgmental settings
 - Reject “no means no” discourse
 - Teach boys about masculinity stereotypes and how to handle rejection; do not vilify masculinity
 - Discuss the implications of image-based sexual violence in a non-punitive manner
- Create spaces for Black girls to lead