

Healthy racial identity important for adolescent African-American girls

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The education impact can be traced to adolescence: African-American girls with strong racial identity are more likely to be academically curious and persistent in school, according to a recent study from Washington University in St. Louis.

The findings could have implications for the physical and emotional health of children reaching into adulthood, according to Sheretta Butler-Barnes, assistant professor at the Brown School and lead author of the study published in the journal *Child Development*, "Promoting Resilience Among African American Girls: Racial Identity as a Protective Factor."

"Persons of color who have unhealthy [racial identity](#) beliefs tend to perform lower in [school](#) and have more symptoms of depression," Butler-Barnes said. "There is a link between education and health-related outcomes. The next step is to examine how these contexts contribute to risky behavior taking in black girls."

Researchers surveyed 733 adolescent black girls who were recruited from a longitudinal study when they were ages 12 to 16. They came from middle and high schools across three socio-economically diverse school districts in the Midwest, during academic years ranging from 2010–13. The study found that racial identity and positive perceptions of school climate were associated with greater academic motivation. Moreover, the researchers learned that racial identity acted as a protective factor in hostile or negative school climates.

"In our study, we found that feeling positive about being black, and feeling support and belonging at school may be especially important for African-American girls' classroom engagement and curiosity," said Butler-Barnes, whose co-authors were from the University of Michigan, the University of California, Santa Cruz, and California Polytechnic State University. "Given the ways in which private regard buffered against the negative effects of a lower sense of belonging, feeling connected to the school may also work together with racial [identity](#) attitudes to improve academic outcomes."

More information: Sheretta T. Butler-Barnes et al. Promoting Resilience Among African American Girls: Racial Identity as a Protective Factor, *Child Development* (2017). DOI: [10.1111/cdev.12995](https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12995)

Provided by Washington University in St. Louis

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