

A Multimodal Approach to Exploring the Adultification of Black Girls and Its Impact on Physical and Mental Health Outcomes

Statement of Problem

Childhood is a time of opportunity—to learn, grow, and benefit from developmentally appropriate missteps. Yet this opportunity is not afforded to all youth.

Adultification is the process by which youth are perceived as less innocent and more adult-like. [Research](#) has shown that Black youth in particular are not provided the same understanding and leniency to make mistakes as their non-Black peers leading to disproportionate [disciplinary outcomes](#).

The differences in treatment of Black youth are further compounded by sexism that creates a unique experience for Black girls and young Black women. Most existing literature on adultification comes from legal context and/or has consisted of largely survey data. It is important to better understand the lived experiences of adolescents who identify as Black and female and explore the ways in which adultification affects their interactions within institutions such as health care systems and schools and leads to their emotional and cognitive needs remaining unmet.

A better understanding of youth and caregiver perspectives on adultification will be critical to developing strategies for individual and family level support as well as policy change.

Description

We aim to explore the experiences and impact of adultification on the health and well-being of Black girls and young Black women.

Our study team includes Dr. [Tawanna Jones](#), executive director of we REIGN (Rooting, Empowering, Inspiring a Girls Nation), a community-based organization for Black girls in Philadelphia, and youth members of the organization (youth advisory board). Members of we REIGN's youth advisory board received education from the principal investigators about the conduct of research and co-led the study design.

To explore how Black girls and caregivers view themselves, we asked youth to share a photo of themselves that was shown to their caregiver in the photo-elicitation exercise where both the youth and caregiver were asked to reflect on the chosen photo and describe what they see to their interviewer.

Following this reflection, youth and their caregivers participated in a semi-structured interview to share their thoughts and experiences navigating the world and balancing challenges that result from the intersectionality of their racial and gender identity.

Next Steps

Our team's next steps include utilizing the study results to inform policy changes, as recommended by the youth advisory group, to promote the well-being of young Black girls and their caregivers.

In review of study data, the youth advisory board met to inform the following recommendations: (1) establishing inclusive learning environments, (2) expanding sex education programs tailored to Black girls, (3) offering accessible youth therapy and parenting classes, (4) creating a dedicated mental health center for Black girls, and (5) allocating funding for kid-friendly spaces in efforts to enhance individual and family-level support, mitigating the effects of adultification on their health and well-being, and reducing treatment disparities.

Currently, our team is creating a mural as an innovative strategy to disseminate findings to and with the community led by a local West Philadelphia muralist and the youth advisory board.

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PolicyLab Leads

Daniela Brissett MD

Faculty Scholar

Daniela Brissett is a faculty scholar at PolicyLab at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) and an assistant professor of pediatrics, public health, and clinical translation medicine at the UPMC Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh and University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine.

Dr. Brissett's research focuses on the intersectionality of racism and sexism, particularly examining the adultification of Black girls and its implications for medical and mental health outcomes. Her work aligns closely with her expertise in positive youth development, which encompasses research on juvenile detention reform, substance use and community partnerships.

Dr. Brissett earned her undergraduate degree in molecular and cell biology from the University of California, Berkeley, and her medical degree from the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF). Following her medical training, she completed her residency in pediatrics through the Pediatric Leadership for the Underserved (PLUS) Residency Program at the University of California, San Francisco Pediatric Residency Program. Dr. Brissett completed her adolescent medicine fellowship at CHOP and was an affiliate trainee at PolicyLab.

In addition to her academic pursuits, Dr. Brissett is actively engaged in clinical practice, specializing in pediatric and adolescent medicine with a focus on addressing health disparities among underserved populations. She is committed to advancing both research and clinical care to promote the well-being of marginalized youth and their families.



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Faculty Member

Nadia Dowshen (she/her) is a faculty member at PolicyLab at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) and serves as Director of Adolescent HIV Services in the Craig Dalsimer Division of Adolescent Medicine at CHOP. She is also an associate professor of pediatrics and the Associate Director of the Masters of Health Policy Research at the Perelman School of Medicine at University of Pennsylvania and a Stoneleigh fellow.

In addition to specialized care for youth living with HIV/AIDS, Dr. Dowshen also provides general adolescent medical care at CHOP and Covenant House, PA, a youth shelter located in Philadelphia. She recently co-founded the CHOP Sexuality and Gender Development Clinic which now provides medical and psychosocial support to more than 2,000 gender variant children and adolescents. Dr. Dowshen's research focuses on using youth-friendly technology to improve adherence to antiretroviral therapy and improve other health outcomes for adolescents living with HIV/AIDS. She is also interested more broadly in research around issues of STD and HIV prevention and treatment as well as achieving health equity for other marginalized youth including LGBT and homeless adolescents.

Dr. Dowshen received the 2010 Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine New Investigator Award for her research identifying protective factors against HIV infection among transgender youth. She was recently named an NIH Adolescent Trials Network (ATN) Scholar and a Best Young Investigator by the National Centers for AIDS Research (CFAR). Dr. Dowshen also serves on the Board of Directors of the Sexual Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS), a national non-profit which promotes comprehensive education about sexuality, and advocates for the right of individuals to make responsible sexual choices. Dr. Dowshen received both her M.D. and Masters of Science in Health Policy Research from the University of Pennsylvania.



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Related Tools & Publications

- [Adultification of Young Black Females on Their Health and Well-being: A Qualitative Study Article](#)
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