



# Promoting Sisterhood: The Impact of a Culturally Focused Program to Address Verbally Aggressive Behaviors in Black Girls

## 1. What is the research about?

Black girls experience many barriers in the education system, which is still heavily influenced by Eurocentric paradigms. Compared to white girls, they are more likely to be stigmatized, and suspended for more ambiguous infractions. These disproportionate disciplinary practices are attributed to gender and racial biases among educators, who misinterpret Black girls' assertive behaviour as aggressive and confrontational. Research suggests that the development of a strong racial identity can combat negative stereotypes of Black women, and improve self-esteem and self-acceptance among Black girls.

This article introduces a school-based Africentric program called Sisters of Nia, which focuses on promoting Black culture and developing positive racial identity in Black girls. The study examines whether participation in the program is associated with a reduction in verbally-aggressive behaviours.

## 2. Where did the research take place?

The research took place at an urban charter school in a low-income area in the United States. At this school, the majority of students are Black, while the majority of teachers identified as white.

## 3. Who is this research about?

This research is about Black girls aged 13-15 who are experiencing social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties.

## 4. How was the research done?

Twelve students were selected to participate in the eight-week Sisters of Nia program. Students participated in one 35-minute group session every week, where they learned about Africentrism, Nguzo Saba (seven principles honouring African heritage), and African proverbs. The main purpose of the program was to support the development of a positive

racial identity and self-concept for each participant, and to improve school-based outcomes.

Over the course of the intervention, researchers observed student behaviour to determine whether there was a reduction in verbal aggression, such as arguing, teasing, threatening or speaking in a hostile tone. Researchers counted the number of times participants expressed verbal aggression; observations lasted 20 minutes and were conducted one or two days after the weekly session. Four participants were randomly selected for a detailed week-to-week analysis of aggressive verbalization over time.

## 5. What are the key findings?

Participation in the Sisters of Nia program led to **a significant reduction in verbally-aggressive behaviour**. The program provided a safe space that allowed participants to process their feelings, which led to a reduction in anger. By reframing negative images of Black women, the program also exposed participants to **alternate narratives of Black female identity**. The development of a positive racial identity promoted positive behaviour change.

## 6. Why does it matter for youth work?

This research suggests that Africentric interventions, such as the Sisters of Nia program, can support school engagement and lead to a reduction in aggressive behaviour. Youth workers may want to advocate for the development of similar programs that centre culture and race. Organizations can better support Black youth by integrating Black culture, history, and identity in their programs, and creating safe spaces to facilitate discussions of race.

**“Given the fact that Black students are often faced with threats to their racial identity in school settings, there remains a critical need for school-based culturally focused intervention options for students of color” (p. 52).**



Aston, C., Graves Jr., S. L., McGoey, K., Lovelace, T., & Townsend, T. (2017). Promoting sisterhood: The impact of a culturally focused program to address verbally aggressive behaviors in Black girls. *Psychology in the Schools*, 55(1), 50–62.