

For Black girls, attitudes about being Black affect risk of depression

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A new study suggests that the messages Black girls hear at home about being Black, and about being Black women in particular, can increase or decrease their risk of exhibiting the symptoms of depression. Positive

messages—and positive feelings about being Black—were associated with a decreased likelihood of symptoms of depression; negative messages about Black women were associated with a greater risk of symptoms of depression.

"Black [teenage girls](#) are more likely to report symptoms of depression than Black boys or white teens," says McKenzie Stokes, first author of a paper on the work and a Ph.D. student at North Carolina State University. "We wanted to learn more about some of the factors that may contribute to that higher rate of depression."

"Identifying and understanding these factors is an important step in addressing depression in Black girls in a meaningful way," says Elan Hope, co-author of the paper and an associate professor of psychology at NC State.

The researchers drew on in-depth, national survey data from 287 Black girls between the ages of 13 and 17.

Specifically, the researchers were interested in aspects of racial socialization related to how Black caregivers talk to their children about taking pride in being Black and being Black women.

Study participants were asked how frequently they heard positive messages from their primary caregivers about being Black and about being Black women. Study participants were also asked how frequently they heard oppressive messages about Black women.

The survey also asked study participants about emotional symptoms associated with depression, such as apathy and sadness.

The researchers found that the more positive messages study participants received about being Black and being Black women, the more positive

they felt about being Black and the fewer depressive symptoms they reported. However, the more oppressive messages study participants heard about being Black women, the more likely they were to report symptoms of depression.

"Our findings highlight the importance of avoiding [negative stereotypes](#) about Black women," Hope says. "Because we found that those negative remarks had an effect even in households that reported positive messages about being Black and being Black [women](#)."

"For example, when people say they don't want to go into the sun, because they don't want to get any darker, what is a child with dark skin supposed to think when hearing that? These sorts of remarks, even when the speaker is referring only to herself or himself, can adversely affect the attitudes of Black girls toward their own blackness."

"This work also highlights the potential value of incorporating gender-specific messages into existing programs and interventions aimed at addressing [mental health](#) in Black youth by fostering Black pride," Stokes says.

The paper, "Black Girl Blues: The Roles of Racial Socialization, Gendered Racial Socialization, and Racial Identity on Depressive Symptoms among Black Girls," is published in the *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*.

More information: McKenzie N. Stokes et al. Black Girl Blues: The Roles of Racial Socialization, Gendered Racial Socialization, and Racial Identity on Depressive Symptoms among Black Girls, *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* (2020). [DOI: 10.1007/s10964-020-01317-8](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-020-01317-8)

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