
Socialization and Education of Young Black Girls in School

Sara Lawrence Lightfoot

Young black girls are an ignored and invisible population. One of the great struggles that arise when documenting the early experience of black girls in school is that they have not been the focus on the agenda of social science research. As one reads through the literature in search of some mention of the special identity and experience of black girls in school, one is struck by the blank slate. Classroom research does give us prototypic images of white boys, white girls, and black boys. White boys are described as aggressive, initiating, and dominant, less likely to conform to the demands of a highly structured and controlling environment than their female counterparts. White girls are likely to be described as the perfect, obedient students who adapt easily and smoothly to the social norms, psychological constraints, and cognitive demands of school. Black boys are considered hyperactive, disobedient, withdrawn, and lazy—the extreme deviants of an orderly environment. But images of black girls—no matter how distorted or ethnocentric—do not present themselves in the literature on teachers and children in classrooms.

It would be misleading indeed to focus on the young black girls' invisibility in classroom research as a peculiar methodological phenomenon. Their shadowy status in the literature is a reflection of the more general cultural orientation towards young black girls. They are a human resource which does not even deserve social and cultural imagery. As a matter of fact, they have not even been awarded the negative and pejorative stereotypes that correspond to their black brothers. The stereotypic images of black females do not become formalized until they reach maturity as women. This is a reflection of the socioeconomic and sociopsychological agenda for black women. They are the black mammies, the all-giving and nurturant beings who nurse and coddle the offspring of the aristocrats. Their social purpose—the dependency of the upper classes on their subservient and giving role—clarifies the need for cultural images and myths.

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Black girls are not even thought to be the embryonic expression of black female stereotypes nor the miniature form of their mothers. Minimal attention is given to the early stages of black female development or to the path she has had to traverse to maturity—only to the culmination of her role development, the hardened and fixed images of many generations of restrictive and prejudicial stereotyping. The cultural myths about black women in our society are obviously important in the socialization of young black girls. The myths and legends shape the young girls' identities, form important sources of identification, and provide critical barriers to the full expression of their individual and unique potentials. Historically, cultures have generally defined three images of womanhood—those who nurture, those who provide sensual pleasure, and those who convey social wisdom. The unifying element in all three images is their close identification with organic life and its perpetuation. Women, that is, have a special capacity to mediate between biology, history, and social change. It is the special role of women to provide a connection to the past and to move towards the future.¹

The black woman shares the three general identities of all women—that of nurturer, temptress, and social knower—but she also encompasses other images that reflect her special role in the social and historical development of this country. The black woman is strong, patient, and enduring. She is Mother Earth who nurtures and gives love to the children of Miss Ann and then goes home abused and tired to care for her own little black children. She is sapphire, sexy, brash, and callous with long fingernails that dig deep and leave scars. She is liberated, aggressive, and competitive. She knows too well the feeling of work and for too many years has been responsible for putting the bread on the table.

As one begins to explore the stereotypic images of black women, one recognizes some inherent contradictions of imagery. In her development, the black girl is not only faced with distorted and unrealistic stereotypes of black women, but also with stereotypes that bear no rational connection to one another. These contrary stereotypes provide confusing and conflicting sources of identity for young black girls.

Contradictory images of black women and family life pervade our social consciousness and are often rationalized and objectified in the social science literature. One of the dominant contradictory themes pictures, on the one hand, the black woman as heading a disorganized and chaotic family and on the other hand, the black woman as primary manager and competent organizer of upper-class households. Daniel Patrick Moynihan set the popular tone for the former stereotype when he asserted, "The Negro family in the urban ghetto is crumbling."

The myth is that there is no permanent male figure in the household and the numerous unkempt children all have different fathers who wander in and out of the slovenly apartment. The mother is promiscuous, on welfare, and unconcerned about her children's social, intellectual, or health needs. Child discipline is punitive, yet at

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1 Robert Jay Lifton, "Woman as 'Knower': Some Psychiatric Perspectives," in Robert Jay Lifton. *The Woman in America*. Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1964, pp. 27-51.

the same time the children are in trouble in school or with the police because their mother does not care enough about them or discipline them. She is too ignorant and culturally deprived to provide sufficient intellectual stimulation so that the children may acquire even the most basic verbal or social skills. In contrast, the black woman is also seen as a strong, competent matriarch. Her child-raising skills, her nurturant "mammy" nature are sufficient for her to be considered not only competent but highly suitable for the job of raising upper-class white children. Her domestic abilities are great enough for her to organize and clean middle and upper-class households.

Another contradiction of imagery portrays the black woman as unfeminine, lacking in fine and cultured beauty, and the black woman as a sexually provocative and exciting being. In American culture the ideal "feminine" woman is seen as dependent, submissive, incompetent, and impractical. A strong autonomous woman is considered sexually unattractive and frightening to men. While the recent feminist movement may be raising our consciousness about the meanings of femininity, the strong black woman has never met the cultural ideal of a woman. Femininity, as defined by the stereotype, was an economic and social luxury she could not afford. Yet she has also been thought of as a temptress, a sex object who was free with her favors, a complement to the image of the black stud. She may not have been a "lady," but she fulfilled the masculine image of a sexually compelling woman. It is critical that social science confront these contrary visions, for part of the task of understanding the experiences of young black girls is to disentangle the myths and realities about black women.

This paper will focus on two potential sources for discovering the educational experience of young black girls in school.² The first source is the literature on the teacher's relationship with young girls (both black and white) in the classroom and the second source will look at the teacher's characteristic interactions with black children (both boys and girls) in the classroom. There is some hope that an overview of each of these research themes might provide some information about the special experiences of young black girls in classroom settings. It would be simplistic, however, to construe the experience of black girls as being an additive combination of the documented experience of blacks and girls. The processes of socialization, learning, and growth are far too complex to make that claim.

One of the great misconceptions of social science is its view of identity formation in black women. Black women are seen as experiencing the double, additive burden of racism and sexism. There is also a notion that they must necessarily experience some sort of impaired and disjointed self-image because they are torn by the conflicting pulls of blackness and womanhood. This dichotomous, polarized vision of the black woman's identity is misleading and partial. It also leads to images of black women as conflicted and divided people rather than resourceful, strong people with

2 In this paper, I will limit my discussion to the first years of formal schooling and only refer to the earlier patterns of familial socialization or the later experiences of adolescence and young adulthood as sources of contrast and comparison.

various sources of identification. For black women, the sources of identification are multiple, the forces shaping identity complex, and the developmental patterns adaptive, continuous, and changing over time. It is important, therefore, not to construe the realities of black women in simple, additive terms, but to look at the processes of integration and elaboration among the various sources of identity.

With this in mind, my presentation of these two sources of data on blacks and girls in classroom social systems should not be considered a portrayal of the young black girls' experience, but rather a picture of the research literature that focuses on the experience of two relatively powerless groups (girls and blacks) and a presentation of what that might indicate about the socialization of black girls in their early schooling.

SEX AND SCHOOLS

Although American public schools have been coeducational for more than 100 years, they still do not prepare boys and girls equally for life. Schools are influenced by, and help to maintain, the values and norms of our total society—and one of these norms is sexism. Structures and behaviors which reinforce traditional sex roles pervade our educational system from the preschool to the post-doctoral level. In order to document the specific ways in which school systems contribute to the development of sex differences and stereotypes, it is necessary to confront a number of basic assumptions related to the nature of sex differences and the origins and consequences of these differences.

It is generally accepted by educators and scientists as well as by the general public that there exist basic differences between the sexes. These differences appear in the areas of personality, behavior, attitudes, goals, interests, and achievement. In a recent survey, Inge Broverman found that stereotypes about the differing characteristics of men and women are still pervasive and persistent among adults in our society today.³ Specifically, men are seen as possessing such personality attributes as independence, objectivity, logic, competitiveness, worldliness, self-confidence, ambition, and leadership and decision making capabilities. Women are perceived as lacking the above traits, but endowed with attributes such as gentleness, sensitivity, tact, neatness, and tenderness. These widespread beliefs are supported by a massive body of research on differences in personality and achievement between men and women. Study after study has shown that girls are more passive, conforming, suggestible, and dependent than men. Expectations about behavioral differences between men and women extend to the area of intellectual performance. Girls are believed to be more verbal than boys, and boys to be better at math and science. These beliefs are borne out by the scores of girls and boys on high school achievement tests. A fact that is generally lost, however, is that in the preschool years girls test either higher than boys (in general intelligence, verbal ability, and number ability) or the same as boys (in spatial ability, analytic ability, and creativity). However, by the middle elementary school years boys score

3 Inge Broverman et al., "Sex Role Stereotypes: A Current Appraisal," *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 28, No. 2, December 1972.

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consistently higher on all these tests than girls (with the exception of grammar, spelling, and word fluency), and this trend accelerates throughout adolescence and adulthood. What happens in this period between preschool and high school to cause these differences?

In considering the above research on sex differences, it is important to be aware of the influence of experimental bias. The observation and testing of sex differences, even when conducted under the most carefully controlled conditions, inevitably involves the whole problem of expectations. Experimenters and researchers start with certain hypotheses as to the nature of men and women, and their expectations may have a significant effect on the construction of their experiments and research and consequently on the results received or perceived. For example, aggression is a character trait traditionally linked with the male sex and measured in terms of overt physical activity. Aggression, thus defined, is perceived as the typical activity and behavior of boys. Are girls really less aggressive than boys? Or have they simply been socialized to express their aggression in more subtle, oblique, and less easily recognizable ways (e.g., through words or interpersonal manipulation)?

A second important issue is the context in which research on sex differences has been conducted and interpreted. Traditional psychologists and sociologists looking at sex differences have accepted those differences as a given and have not looked in any detailed way at the environmental influences on gender role or at possible alternative definitions for sex roles. Rather, they have used the possession of these differences as a measure of healthy social and emotional adjustment. The large amounts of research on sex differences in children include very little systematic analysis of cultural institutions as facilitators of sex roles and sex differences. This has become a subject of concern to some investigators only very recently.

Sex Discrimination in Schools

The problem of sex discrimination in schools is not a recently invented one, but rather is a problem with which educators and sociologists have been concerned for several decades. Some of the earliest research (conducted in the mid-fifties and early sixties) tended to focus on boys as the victims of discrimination, claiming that they were being emasculated by schools and penalized for their inability to conform to a feminine environment. A major proponent of this view is Patricia Sexton, who as recently as 1969 wrote a book entitled *The Feminized Male*.⁴ Sexton expressed her concern that our society has "turned education over to women and feminized males" and encouraged the development of school systems where young boys' "normal male impulses are suppressed or misshapened by overexposure to feminized males." To combat this problem, Sexton advocates a school program directly aimed at the needs and interests of boys, a "masculinized coeducational program."

I would agree with Sexton that the societal pressures on boys to be "masculine" (i.e., aggressive, ambitious, and independent), combined with the traditional school

4 Patricia Sexton. *The Feminized Male*. New York, N.Y.: Random House, 1969.

demands on boys to be conforming and obedient, create a conflicting and confusing message for boys. The socialization and adjustment difficulties resulting from this conflict are evident in the greater number of young boys than girls referred to child guidance centers, and in our adolescent delinquency rates which are notoriously higher for young men than for young women. Further evidence of the stress accompanying the demands made by the assigned male sex role was gained from a survey of eight to eleven-year-old boys by Ruth E. Hartley.⁵ Hartley solicited the feelings of these young boys as to what they had to know, what they had to be able to do, and what they were expected to do in the future. The responses clearly indicated that the boys felt they had to assume a great burden in order to fulfill the male role adequately. They viewed the female role as much more limited and easy. As a result of these pressures and rigid role demands, many young boys develop an anxiety about their adequacy in the whole area of sex-role behavior. This expresses itself in overstraining to be masculine, frequent and intense hostility toward the female sex and anything associated with femininity, and great concern about being caught doing anything defined as feminine.

Although Sexton recognizes that schools discriminate against boys, she tends to minimize the effects of the school socialization process on girls. While the demands of schools for obedience and conformity may result in a conflicting message for young boys, the result for young girls is a double-barrelled message: Both at school and at home they are trained to be docile and conforming. Seen from this point of view, schools may be judged more guilty of "feminizing" girls than "feminizing" boys. Added to this "double" training of young girls in femininity is the fact that the attributes associated with the female sex role (i.e., gentleness and passivity) are not valued in this society as highly as the traits associated with the male sex role (i.e., independence and ambition).

The enforcement of rigid sex-role behaviors in schools can lead to serious emotional and intellectual consequences for young boys and girls. While boys are too often overanxious about failing and concerned about constantly "proving" themselves, girls are too often lacking in positive self-concepts and concerned with the consequences of succeeding. These internal concerns and motivations have a subsequent effect on intellectual performance and the acquisition of differential skills in boys and girls. Eleanor Maccoby observed from a review of the literature that optimal intellectual performance is directly related to cross-sex-typing—i.e., men and women who score highest on ability tests tend to share more of the interests and traits normally characteristic of the opposite sex.⁶ It appears that a reduction of the differential treatment of boys and girls would be highly beneficial in terms of both the emotional health and the intellectual functioning of both sexes.

- 5 Ruth E. Hartley, "Sex-Role Pressures and the Socialization of the Male Child," *Psychological Reports*, Vol. 5, 1959.
- 6 Eleanor Maccoby, ed. *The Development of Sex Differences*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1966.

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The Classroom as a Social System

Although there has been a general recognition among social scientists that schools reinforce and sustain sexual differentiation, few accounts exist of the specific behavioral and interactional patterns that foster sex-role development. Sociologists describing the classroom as a social system have primarily emphasized the relative objectivity and fairness of the classroom environment. In his article "The School Class as a Social System," Parsons claims that the main structural differentiation within the classroom develops on the single main axis of achievement:

The school is the first socializing agent in the child's experience which institutionalizes a differentiation of status on a nonbiological basis. Moreover, this is not an ascribed status; it is a status "earned" by differential performance of tasks set by the teacher.⁷

Four components define the relative impartiality and objectivity of the status structure within the classroom, which is experienced by the child as strikingly different from his or her egocentric, child-centered existence before entering school: (1) Equalization of contestants by age; (2) sharp distinction between the power of teachers and children; (3) imposition of a common set of tasks; and (4) a relatively systematic process of pupil evaluation. Dreeben⁸ and Eddy⁹ emphasize the customary ordering of behavior and relationships within the school whereby one may become meaningfully related to the "public world of corporate systems." Both authors are concerned with identifying the structural characteristics of the school that define it as a *transitional* institution between family life and later participation in the occupational and political world. The roles allocated to children are evaluated primarily in terms of their contribution to some *future status* rather than reflecting full membership in the present society.

Although the Parsonian analysis recognizes the contribution of social status dimensions to teacher valuation of achievement, Parsons still regards achievement as a relatively objective, fair, equalizing measure that is the *single* status dimension in the classroom. Even though the ascriptive component is recognized, it seems to me inaccurate to consider achievement the all-encompassing determinant of school successes. That approach underestimates the need to carefully analyze the dimensions of ascription and which status characteristics the teacher regards as necessary prerequisites for successful school performance.

Parsons, therefore, thinks of the classroom as essentially liberating—a place where children can rid themselves of the shackles of sex, family, culture, and race, and prove themselves anew as achievers or nonachievers. More specifically, Parsons identifies the

7 Talcott Parsons, "The School Class as a Social System: Some of Its Functions in American Society," *Harvard Educational Review*, Vol. 29, No. 4, Fall 1959, p. 300-301.

8 Robert Dreeben. *On What is Learned in School*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1968.

9 Elizabeth Eddy. *Walk the White Line: A Profile of Urban Education*. New York, N.Y.: Anchor, 1967.

school as a transitional and preparatory environment that stratifies children on the basis of explicit and visible achievement criteria, but he never confronts the experience of boys and girls within this environment. Even when he considers the development of rules governing social interactions within classrooms, he neglects the differential socialization of boys and girls as a powerful dimension of analysis. Boys and girls are not perceived as assuming different social or political positions in the social structure of classrooms.

Social scientists have echoed the Parsonian analysis, giving more or less emphasis to the determining force of race, social class, and ethnicity to the experience of children in classrooms. They have given compelling descriptions of the classroom as a place where children learn the appropriate behavioral patterns for their future social and occupational roles. But, for the most part, they have avoided considering the status dimensions of the society into which children will enter. If teachers seek to adequately prepare children for assimilation into the mainstream culture, then it is likely that their rules of social interaction *within* the classroom will mirror the pervasive pattern of male domination and control in the larger society.

One of the most obvious ways our society categorizes people is on the basis of sex, but for the most part social scientists have ignored these sexual categories as potential determinants of child-level experience. Sociologists studying the social structure of classrooms have described the emergence of status patterns without analyzing the nature of the conditioning experienced by boys and girls and without explicit reference to the social roles that will be available to them as adults.

Methodological approaches have reflected the theoretical analysis of school as a liberating force in the lives of children. For the most part, classroom research on teacher-child interactions has ignored intraclass individual differences in teacher-child communication patterns. Classroom observational systems, which define the class as the unit of analysis, make two assumptions which are of questionable significance:

1. That teacher-child interactions are most appropriately conceptualized as interactions between the teacher and the class as a *group*, rather than as individual communications between teacher and child.
2. That the class mean on a particular aspect of teacher behavior is representative of how the teacher interacts with each of the pupils.

The first assumption is called into question when one considers the literature on classroom observations in which children differing in social status, achievement level, or sex regularly differ in the type of communications they have with their teachers.¹⁰

10 A. Davis and J. Dollard. *Children of Bondage*. Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 1940; H.S. Becker, "Social Class Variation in Teacher-Pupil Relationships," *Journal of Educational Sociology*, Vol. 25, 1952, pp. 451-465; Philip Jackson and Henriette Lahaderne, "Inequalities of Teacher-Pupil Contacts," *Psychology in the Schools*, Vol. 4, 1967, pp. 204-211; and R. Spaulding. *Achievement, Creativity, and Self-Concepts Correlates of Teacher-Pupil Transactions in Elementary Schools*. Cooperative Research Project No. 1352. Washington, D.C.: Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Office of Education, 1963.

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The evidence from this research seems to indicate that the class mean is not an accurate measure of how teachers relate to individual children or identifiable subgroups of children. Teacher warmth, teacher directedness, teacher supportiveness, teacher approval—all attributes that have been typically studied from an entire-class perspective—are variables of teacher behavior which are usually directed towards individual children rather than to the class as a group.

The dyadic method of studying teacher-child interaction patterns not only reveals individual differences, but it also allows researchers to decipher clear patterns of sex differences within classrooms. In an article entitled "Inequalities of Teacher-Pupil Contacts," Jackson and Lahaderne showed that the experience of school is clearly very different for boys than for girls.¹¹ In four sixth-grade classrooms (with two male and two female teachers) in one school, boys received more than their share of managerial interchanges (rules, regulations, routines) and prohibitory messages (misbehavior and deviance) while there seemed to be no clear pattern of sex differences in the findings on instructional messages (work-related material).

Jackson and Lahaderne's study is consonant with the few other studies that have explored sex differences in classrooms.¹² On the basis of this research, it is clear that boys receive more behavioral criticism in classrooms. They also appear to be more aggressive in general and have more interactions of any kind with teachers. When a pupil is not called on, it is more likely to be a girl and student-initiated contacts are usually in favor of boys. This evidence of differential treatment of boys and girls, however, gives us only partial information about the quality of life in classrooms because it does not consider the perceptions and perspectives of the children who are experiencing the classroom environment. This lack of interest in child-level experience is one of the prominent patterns of classroom research.

In one of my own studies (1972), the responses of children to a sociometric interview showed marked differences in the status choices received by boys and girls in two second grade classrooms.¹³ I was interested in the children's perceptions of the classroom social structure revealed through their choices of classmates along several significant status dimensions (achievement, leadership, trustworthiness, attractiveness, honesty, etc.). Children were not only asked to indicate the name of their chosen classmate but also to give the reasoning and perceptions behind their choice. The data indicate that the response patterns of children show early socialization into sex-appropriate roles.

11 Jackson and Lahaderne, *op. cit.*, p. 12. The authors claim that this fact is obvious to even the most casual observer, "but the frequency with which sex is ignored in educational research would lead one to suspect otherwise."

12 J.W. Meyer and G.G. Thompson, "Sex Differences in the Distribution of Teacher Approval and Disapproval among Sixth Grade Children," *Journal of Educational Psychology*, Vol. 47, 1956, pp. 385-396; Spaulding, *op. cit.*; J. E. Brophy and T. L. Good, "Teachers' Communication of Differential Expectations for Children's Classroom Performance: Some Behavioral Data," *Journal of Educational Psychology*, Vol. 61, No. 5, 1970, pp. 365-374.

13 Sara Lawrence Lightfoot, "An Ethnographic Study of the Status Structure of the Classroom," unpublished doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, Graduate School of Education, 1972.

It is interesting to compare responses of children in both classrooms to two questions which asked them for their choices of tutor (who would you chose to help you with your school work?) and leader (who would you choose as president of this class?).

	<i>Classroom A</i>		<i>Classroom B</i>	
	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>
Tutors	9	18	15	12
Leaders	17	10	18	9

One cannot help but suspect that children in both classrooms had already been socialized to the traditional sex-role patterns of boys as dominant, natural leaders and girls as scholarly, submissive followers. The reasons that children gave for their choices gives one insight into how a child reached the status of class leader and how he was able to maintain his superior position. It is possible to categorize these reasons into two groupings.

1. Leadership gained through teacher preference or assuming the role of surrogate teacher.
2. Leadership gained through tactics of fear, threat, and oppression of one child over his classmates.

In neither case did leadership emerge because of a child's superior honesty, intellect, or goodness, but was seen as leadership gained through making classmates submit to a greater power or authority—be it the teacher's choice of monitor or the self-selection of a tough guy.

The perspective of children offers a rich and important dimension to our understanding of the differential experiences of children in classrooms. Even though the teachers, both of whom were women, were considered to be the center of power in the classrooms and even though children perceived the leader as one who imitated the teacher behavior and mirrored her characteristics, the majority of choices were given to boys. The males were seen as dominant in a classroom controlled and supervised by a woman.

In discussing the creation of classroom social systems, researchers have, amazingly enough, avoided considering the sexuality of the central person. This is not to say that most of us have failed to notice that the great majority of teachers of young children are women. A few researchers have even pointed to the fact that boys appear to be more salient in the eyes of the teacher. But social scientists need to ask more searching questions about the impact of women taking dominant and powerful positions in the classroom social system. An analysis of these issues must include the dimension of sexuality in the teacher's interaction with boys and girls. Does her position of authority have a different impact on boys and girls? How does she use her sexuality, her powers of nurturance to accomplish her educational goals for the children? Does it seem confusing to children that the woman teacher dominates their world in the classroom while men control the teacher (i.e., the principal, her husband) in the outside world?

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The methodological strategies used by researchers have not permitted a careful and systematic analysis of the quality of life for boys and girls in the classroom. Quantitative tabulations of teacher behavior have reduced experience to those variables which are easily observed and counted and given little indication of the real message being communicated by the teacher. For the most part, researchers have documented the teacher's relationship to the class as an undifferentiated group of children rather than deciphering her communication to individual children or identifiable subgroups of children. And researchers have talked about teacher-child interaction patterns without considering the perceptions and experience of children.

Each of these methodological choices made by researchers has permitted them to ignore individual differences and differential socialization based on sex. In a sense, the strategies have assumed a kind of homogeneity of child characteristics and an equality of responses on the part of the teacher. Thus the methods are consonant with the preservation of our American Dream, the myth of equality of opportunity for all.

RACE AND SCHOOLS

Family-School Dissonance Many of the same theoretical models and methodological strategies that appear in the sex-role literature are also found in the studies on racial discrimination in classrooms. Here too, the myth of equality seems to pervade the discriminating visions of social scientists and to shape the nature of their inquiry. In the research on blacks, however, the legend of justice and opportunity is expressed somewhat differently. Instead of assuming no differentiation between subgroups *within* classrooms (as in most of the sex-role literature), researchers place the source of racial and cultural differences *outside* the school and legitimize the teacher's unequal behavior on the basis of already established patterns of deprivation and deviance found in families and communities. The teacher's behavior is explained as a rational and legitimate response to varying ability and achievement patterns reflected in black and white children.

Researchers have searched for the source of the black child's low achievement and poor acculturation in school by focusing on the dissonance between family life style and the school environment. Much of the literature on the early cultural deprivation of black children rests on unquestioned and long-standing assumptions about child development and the socialization of cognitive modes in children. Hess and Shipman's experimental work on language development and expressive styles of black children reflect these basic assumptions and is a classic example of the modes of inquiry used by social science researchers. The authors claim that lower-class black children experience irreversible cultural deprivation because there is a lack of cognitive meaning in the mother-child communication system. They distinguish between the communication styles of lower-class and middle-class mothers, asserting that middle-class mothers offer a range of alternatives for thought and action (elaborated verbal cues) while lower-class mothers give predetermined solutions and few alternatives for consideration and thought (restricted verbal cues). Hess and Shipman use these two examples

of a middle-class and lower-class mother preparing their children for the first day of school:

MIDDLE-CLASS
MOTHER:

First of all I would remind her that she was going to school to learn, that her teacher would take my place, and that she would be expected to follow instructions. Also that her time was to be spent mostly in the classroom with other children and that any questions or any problems that she might have she should consult with her teacher for assistance. To tell her anything else would probably be confusing for her at this age.

LOWER-CLASS
MOTHER:

Mind the teacher and do what she tells you to do. The first thing you have to do is be on time. Be nice and do not fight. If you are tardy or if you stay away from school your marks will go down. The teacher needs your full cooperation. She will have so many children she won't be able to pamper any youngster.¹⁴

According to Hess and Shipman these excerpts reflect a disparity in the quality and style of language and in the amount of instructional vs. imperative information. More importantly, on the basis of this early experience lower-class children are poorly prepared to approach the task of learning in school while middle-class children develop into assertive and reflective learners.

The Hess and Shipman data were gathered in a laboratory setting where black mother-child dyads were directed to engage in pre-established cognitive games and their patterns of language interaction were recorded and analyzed. Mothers and children were asked, therefore, to enter an unfamiliar and alien setting, given an experimental task of meaningless social significance, and observed and evaluated by strange adults. No observations were taken in the naturalistic settings where mothers and children usually interact with one another and the data show correlations, not causality, between child-rearing practices and achievement.¹⁵

Even if we ignore the many ideological and methodological problems connected with this study we must ask to what realities mothers are socializing their children. It would appear that both mothers are equally oriented towards the constraints and demands of school for their children. In schools, it is more likely that lower-class children

14 Robert Hess and Virginia Shipman, "Early Experience and Socialization of Cognitive Needs in Children," in Matthew B. Miles and W.W. Charters, eds. *Learning and Social Settings*. Boston, Mass.: Allyn and Bacon, 1970.

15 For an excellent critique of the developmental literature on lower-class black children, see Stephen S. Baratz and Joan C. Baratz, "Early Childhood Intervention: The Social Science Base of Institutional Racism," *Harvard Educational Review*, Vol. 40, No. 1, February 1970, pp. 29-50.

will be rewarded for passivity and compliance while middle-class children will be rewarded for being creative, resourceful, and assertive.¹⁶

The problem of language difference created by schools is intensified when one recognizes that language is not only a way of discerning intellect and communicating information; it is a medium of culture, a way of signifying one's membership in the community. In an article entitled "Illiteracy in the Ghetto," Jane Torrey makes this point by distinguishing between the *structural* aspects of language (i.e., phonology, grammar, and semantics) and the *functional* aspects of language (i.e., the personal and cultural functions of language).¹⁷ Torrey asserts that the functional aspects of language have more serious implications than the structural ones. The language of black children, therefore, is symbolic of social and cultural deviance and becomes the basis of hostility on the part of teachers and a rejection of the whole educational process by children.

The experimental models and theoretical assumptions used by Hess and Shipman have been echoed in the literature on the cognitive development and achievement patterns of black children. One of the dominant themes of this research is the abuse of mothers. They are accused of giving inadequate cognitive stimulation, creating disorderly and chaotic home environments, offering restrictive and punitive demands, and devaluing education for their children.¹⁸ No attempt is made to understand the sources of their behaviors and attitudes, nor to explore the structural and institutional forces that impinge on their lives and shape their relationships with their children. It seems much easier and less threatening to define the inadequacies of the dyadic and individualistic relationship between mother and child than to question the inequities and injustices of the society. Within the literature on family-school dissonance, therefore, we find the sexist tradition of blaming mothers for the perceived inadequacies of their children, for the perpetuation of their own poverty, and for the creation of social deviants and societal chaos.

Kenneth B. Clark's work provided an important transition from focusing on the inadequacies of ghetto life to looking at the structural and interactional patterns *within* schools that do not provide supportive, nurturant, and receptive environments for poor black children. In *Dark Ghetto*, Clark focused on the rejection and hostility that poor children suffer in white, middle-class oriented schools and proposed changes in teacher behaviors, attitudes, and competencies which would be supportive of the child's self-concept.¹⁹ Most importantly, Clark rejected the class-bound, pejorative tradition of

16 Ray C. Rist, "Student Social Class and Teacher Expectations: The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy in Ghetto Education," *Harvard Educational Review*, Vol. 40, No. 3, 1970, pp. 411-451; and Eleanor Burke Leacock. *Teaching and Learning in City Schools*. New York, N.Y.: Basic Books, 1969.

17 Jane Torrey, "Illiteracy in the Ghetto," *Harvard Educational Review*, Vol. 40, No. 2, 1970, pp. 29-50.

18 Morton Deutsch, "The Disadvantaged Child and the Learning Process," in A. Harry Passow, ed. *Education in Depressed Areas*. New York, N.Y.: Teachers College Press, 1963.

19 Kenneth Clark. *Dark Ghetto: Dilemmas of Social Power*. New York, N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1965.

social scientists and recognized the danger of thinking of lower-class life as a self-contained system which would draw our attention away from the imposition of wider society. Despite his compassionate and insightful analysis, however, Clark still did not present the Harlem Community in terms of its own social order, cultural idiom, or life style. Harlem is described less in its own right than by comparison with everything that is nonblack and nonslum.

Difference and Deviance Within the Classroom The notion of the self-fulfilling prophecy has been a resounding theme in the literature on the teacher's interactions with children from different socioeconomic and racial backgrounds. This literature has documented the strong relationship between the teacher's expectations of a pupil's academic performance and the actual performance of that pupil. More broadly, researchers have traced the powerful effect that a teacher's conscious and unconscious values, attitudes, and expectations toward students have on her classroom behavior and teaching style and subsequently on the academic and social achievement of her pupils. Although researchers have recognized the potentially positive impact of teacher expectations, much of the evidence for the self-fulfilling prophecy in education has come to have predominantly negative connotations. The teacher is seen to be the all-powerful, central figure who determines the life chances of her defenseless children, sometimes making the critical judgments in the first few hours of the school year.

Much of the research on the discriminatory behavior of teachers in classrooms looks at differences related to the social class background of children, but fails to document the racial composition of the class. Although one must not always conclude that the lower-class children referred to in these studies are from minority backgrounds, it is probably safe to infer some parallels with the majority black experience. Even though many of these studies do not refer explicitly to race, they document some of the basic sources and expressions of discrimination within classrooms. More importantly, they underscore the various layers of analysis that must be employed in order to understand the complex and subtle structural and interactional forces at work in racial discrimination.

Social scientists, asserting the asymmetric power of teachers and children, have focused on teachers as the primary judges of deviance and on the forces that shape their judgments. These judgments, in turn, influence the social and cognitive learning that is consciously or unconsciously transmitted to pupils. In his study of classroom interaction patterns, Jules Henry claimed that the significant aspect of teacher-child communications is the transmission of value orientations from teacher to child.²⁰ The learning of values does not necessarily proceed through didactic teaching but through systems of reward and punishment. The values that are transmitted depend on the

20 Jules Henry, "Attitudes Organization in Elementary School Classrooms," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, Vol. 27, 1957, pp. 117-133.

teacher's value orientation, which in turn is determined by her social class identification.

In a study based on interviews with large numbers of teachers in Chicago, Howard Becker analyzed the responses of teachers to children from different social class backgrounds. Becker claimed that the teacher's perception of the child's ability to do school work determined the differences in actual teaching technique.

The teacher expects that the amount of work and effort required of her will vary inversely with the social status of her pupils Such consequences of the teacher's differential reaction to various class groups obviously operate to further perpetuate those class-cultural characteristics to which they object in the first place.²¹

In this very perceptive study, Becker was interested in the motivations behind the discriminatory behavior of teachers. He recognized the profound impact of the teacher's self-image on her perceptions of children. Not only did middle-class teachers find it difficult to develop effective pedagogical strategies for translating the intellectual content to lower-class children; not only did teachers have a hard time disciplining these children; but they also seemed deeply offended by slum children. "In terms of physical appearance and condition lower-class children disgust and depress the middle-class teacher." On the other hand, the responsiveness and similarities of middle-class children made the teacher feel successful and rewarded in her work and increased her self-esteem as a competent professional. The actions, behaviors, and values of middle-class children were familiar, nonthreatening, and anticipatable while lower-class children were viewed as disruptive and threatening strangers to the middle-class teacher.

Becker perceived that teachers have human needs for support and reinforcement and, if they are deprived of these supports, they are likely to project their negative feelings onto the less powerful children. The teacher's feelings and perceptions about the abilities of children in her class are largely a reflection of how successful she feels at making them learn. In focusing on the *teacher* as a whole person with needs of her own, Howard Becker began to uncover some of the complexities and dynamics of teacher discrimination.

In *Pygmalion in the Classroom*, Rosenthal and Jacobson brought to light the possibility that teachers may act differently towards those students for whom they have high achievement expectations than towards those for whom they have lower expectations.²² In this experiment, teachers were given false information about their students' potentials. The students whom the teachers were led to believe would "bloom" in their academic performance actually did score higher on standardized tests than the other students. The investigators' explanation for these differences in performances was that the differences in the teachers' expectations for students presumably led to differences in the teacher's treatment of them in the classroom.

21 Becker, *op. cit.*

22 R. Rosenthal and L. Jacobson. *Pygmalion in the Classroom: Teacher Expectations and Pupils Intellectual Development*. New York, N.Y.: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968.

How are differential expectations communicated in teacher-child relationships? Brophy and Good explored differential teacher behavior within first grade classrooms.²³ The teachers were asked at the beginning of the school year to rank their students in order of their academic achievement—this constituted teacher expectancy. The six ranked highest formed the high achievement group, and the six ranked lowest formed the low achievement group. Observers recorded the dyadic interactions between the teachers and these experimental students along several variables. The data indicated several significant behavioral differences between the members of the two groups and between the actions of the teachers towards each group. It was found that high achievers sought out the teachers and initiated interactions more frequently than the low achievers; the teachers criticized the low achievers more; teachers gave feedback more frequently to the high achievers and were more persistent in eliciting responses from them; and finally, the high achievers scored better on standardized tests at the end of the year. The authors conclude that teacher expectancy predicts objective measures of classroom performance, objective achievement test scores, and rates of teacher praise and criticism.

That teachers behave differently toward students whom they perceive as differing in academic potential is a highly plausible hypothesis about real-life classroom experiences, although several investigations have failed to confirm the experimentally induced "Pygmalion effect."²⁴ A related question is how these expectations are formed by the teachers. It is not surprising that the factors so far alleged to be determinants of teacher expectancy of student ability are social class and race. Rist clearly demonstrated this relationship in his report of observations made in an all black ghetto school (the teachers were black as well).²⁵ On the eighth day of kindergarten, he observed the teacher segregating her students by tables, apparently defining the groups by social dimensions such as the children's physical appearance, interactional behavior, use of language, and family socioeconomic variables. She labelled one group as "fast learners" and the others as "slow learners" and then proceeded to discriminate systematically in favor of the first group and against the others. The fast learners received much more encouragement, praise and instruction, and privileges from her, while the slow learners were far more often controlled and ridiculed. Moreover, the children themselves internalized the teacher's invidious comparison, the fast learners adopting her tactics of belittlement and contempt toward the slow learners—the latter deflecting their resentment and shame from the aggressors onto each other. Rist demonstrated that the teacher's initial expectancies and consequent discriminating pattern of behavior not only profoundly affected the students' academic performance throughout the kinder-

23 J. E. Brophy and T. L. Good, "Teachers Communications of Differential Expectations for Children's Classroom Performance: Some Behavioral Data," *Journal of Educational Psychology*, Vol. 61, No. 5, 1968, pp. 365-374.

24 See Elyse Fleming and R. G. Anttonen. *Teacher Expectancy as Related to the Academic and Personal Growth of Primary-Aged Children*. Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago, Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development, Serial No. 145, Vol. 36, No. 5, 1971.

25 Rist, *op. cit.*

garten year, but—worse than that—it provided teachers in the later grades with “objective” evidence which became the basis for further discrimination. It is not far-fetched to conclude that these children’s chances for academic and occupational success were substantially determined in the first eight days of school.

The Rist study made a significant contribution to the research literature because it provided an analysis of the factors that are critical in the teacher’s development of expectations for her pupils and the documentation of the process by which such expectations influence the classroom experience of teachers and children. Another important contribution of Rist’s observations underscored the need to consider the expectations that children have of one another. Rist’s teachers established discriminatory patterns that were mirrored and magnified by the behavior and attitudes of children in the classroom. Low status children even began to reflect attitudes of self-degradation and violence within their own group. It is also entirely conceivable that children might not imitate patterns initiated by the teacher, but engage in behaviors that conflict with those of the teacher. If one is to understand the impact of expectancies initiated by the teacher, therefore, one must also explore the complicated network of relationships among children.

In *Teaching and Learning in City Schools*, Leacock was interested in exploring the teachers’ assumptions about desirable patterns of socialization for children of different backgrounds.²⁶ She observed fifth grade classrooms in middle and low income white schools and in middle and low income black schools, and contrasted the teacher attitudes and behavior within these schools. In comparing the white and black schools, Leacock found a marked difference between teacher attitudes and behavior with regard to organizing the classroom for leadership and responsibility. The teacher in the middle income white school placed a strong emphasis on student independence and self-reliance (although the responsibility given was clearly nominal and often superficial). In the low income black school, Leacock found a more relaxed and cooperative atmosphere, but also found an emphasis on discipline and obedience and a lack of explicit learning goals.

In examining the differences in teacher attitudes and aspirations for children in schools with contrasting student populations, Leacock raised the important issue of the effects of the school and community environments on the teacher. In the anthropological tradition, Leacock asserted that we must not view the teacher discriminatory behavior as an isolated phenomenon that relates only to interactions between the teacher and the child:

... the way the teacher structures both her relations with the children and their relations with each other sets up a behavioral model for them, the implications of which extend far beyond the classroom. To some extent the goals she states for children and those she implies through her management techniques relate to her

26 Leacock, *op. cit.*

individual style, but for the most part they must conform to school patterns which, in turn, relate to general social expectations.²⁷

Expectations pervade the entire school population and researchers must seek to identify the role of social and behavioral norms found in schools that greatly influence the individual teacher's conception of the ideal and successful student.

All of these researchers look at the teacher's differential behaviors through different methodological filters—attempting to document the multidimensionality of the phenomenon. However, they are limited to some extent by the behaviorist traditions of social science. In my own work I have tried to respond to the fact that most research on sex and race discrimination in classrooms is not concerned with analyzing the *origins* of teacher behavior or the impact of environmental variables and social context on life inside the classroom.²⁸ For a long time, clinicians and practitioners have been very interested in understanding the motivational roots of human behavior. In the psychoanalytic tradition, they have probed the personal histories of people in an attempt to better interpret their present behaviors.

Ironically, most educational researchers have neglected to recognize and document the psychodynamic origins of behavior but have followed the behaviorist model of looking at visible and countable behaviors. They have been content to represent life by describing actions and interactions and in the process they have often ignored the character, motivations, attitudes, and values of the people who are acting. Using the behaviorist model, actors are thought of as one-dimensional human beings whose behavior is controlled and modulated by patterned rewards and punishment.

More specifically, teachers are viewed by educational researchers as empty vessels, technicians who perform specific and deliberate behaviors. Children are seen as essentially passive beings to be shaped and controlled by their more thoroughly socialized teachers. For the most part, the literature on teacher discrimination is no exception to the general behaviorist orientation of educational research. Even those who have been interested in documenting the interactional behaviors within classrooms have not sought to describe and analyze the forces *within* and *surrounding* the teacher that shape the way she differentially responds to children.

I have been interested in describing how the teacher's world—her personal, cultural, and educational history, her values, attitudes, beliefs and goals, her professional skills and experience—influence the pedagogical and procedural decisions, the dynamic patterns of interaction and social structure that develop in the classroom. A central theme of my work has been the analysis of discriminatory patterns of teacher behavior in the use of authority, power, evaluation, and cognitive stimulation. When the teacher

27 *Ibid.*, p. 117.

28 Lightfoot, *op cit.*; Sara Lawrence Lightfoot, "Politics and Reasoning: Through the Eyes of Teachers and Children," *Harvard Educational Review*, Vol. 43, No. 2, May 1973, pp. 197-244; and Sara Lawrence Lightfoot, "Sociology of Education: Perspectives on Women," in Marcia Millman and Rosebeth Kanter, eds. *Another Voice: Feminist Perspectives on Social Life and Social Science*. New York, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1975, pp. 106-143.

responds to a child's behavior, she necessarily perceives this behavior through the filter of pre-established social categories. The *same* child behavior may be given a different interpretation depending on who the child is and what he represents to the teacher. A black boy racing across the classroom may be seen as aggressive and hyperactive, while a blond, willowy girl doing the same thing may be seen as gliding across the classroom space in a creative and expressive dance. The teacher communicates her differential judgments and perceptions of children through audible and visible interactions as well as covert, imperceptible messages that have a powerful impact on the lives of children in the classroom. A primary challenge of my work, therefore, has been to develop various methods of documenting teacher values and feelings that are silently and ritualistically communicated to children. Thus, in order to gain a comprehensive picture of the dynamics of racism and sexism in the classroom, future research will have to analyze more than interactions. We will also have to focus on the psychodynamic, sociocultural, and structural forces that shape the values and behaviors of teachers and children.

In the literature I have reviewed we find no explicit attention given to the experience of black girls. As a matter of fact, the literature portrays the experience of a narrow range of children. Almost automatically, sexism becomes synonymous with the experience of white middle-class girls. (The ERIC files of 1974 have sixty articles on sex differences and black children are involved in only three of them. Of the seventy-five articles about sex discrimination, blacks are referred to in only two of them.) The lack of interest in documenting the sexism experienced by poor and minority groups reflects the general focus of the feminist movement on the lives of white middle-class women. Implicit in this exclusive orientation is the notion that only the affluent can afford the luxury of sexual identification—a black girl cannot expect to linger on the subtleties of how she is perceived as a *female* when she is scrapping to respond to the more blatant inequities of racism.

Most of the literature on racism in schools shows the same narrow stereotyped vision, but the focus is on the inadequacies and deviance of lower-class black children. The success and accommodation of middle-class black children is usually given minimal attention. The range and variety of human values, attitudes, and behaviors within black culture is neglected by focusing on the poor and by defining their behaviors in individualistic and motivational terms. In his book, *Culture of Poverty*, Charles A. Valentine talks about the tendency for social science researchers to enmesh cultural difference with poverty and deviance.²⁹ Culture begins to take on a pejorative connotation as it becomes linked with poverty and race and the whole essence of inequality. By attributing a distinctive cultural system to the poor, researchers have tended to isolate poverty cultures and focus on the alleged motivational peculiarities of the poor (self-indulgence, inability to defer gratification), rather than consider the various responses of people to the structural characteristics of the stratified social system as a whole.

29 Charles A. Valentine. *Culture and Poverty*. Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1968.

THE BLACK GIRL AS CHILD

The young black girl suffers from being unchildlike in middle-class terms. Childhood, as it is known in Western society, is a relatively modern invention, only a few hundred years old.³⁰ Childhood has come to be seen as more than the biological fact that human beings are born small, helpless, and inexperienced, and then grow slowly in size and competence. By the Victorian era, it had become fashionable to view children as innocent, incompetent, irresponsible, and dependent. But this was a view which only the middle and upper classes could afford to put into practice, since it called for the separation of children from the general life of the community and for constant care, protection, and supervision to enforce this separation—nannies, servants, schools, and large houses. The poor children could not afford these expressions of childhood, just as their mothers could not afford to be stereotypically feminine and submissive. The women were then thought of as being poor mothers, as providing unsuitable homes for their children, and the children were thought of as being unnatural, unchildlike, deviant, and deprived of cultural, social, and intellectual advantages—deprived in fact, of their childhood.

Middle-class twentieth-century parents are not as sentimental about the innocence of children, but as children have become less economically advantageous to the middle class (in fact, have become a major economic and emotional burden), they have developed another use, as "love object."³¹ In our culture, middle-class children, especially girls who are supposed to be more affectionate, learn to respond as love objects, to repress their own dignity and autonomy. The middle-class ideal of a little girl, the perfect love object, is an affectionate, cuddly little blond-blue-eyed angel; there was a reason why Shirley Temple won the hearts of middle America. The upper-middle-class ideal of the 1970s is more sophisticated, perhaps more along the lines of Tatum O'Neill, who is sharp enough to fulfill her parents' dreams of getting her into Radcliffe, but still awfully cute. Like Shirley Temple, she can sing and dance, but she is also more masculine in the traditional sense—her hair is short, and she often dresses like a boy—no frilly dresses, curls or hair bows. In *Paper Moon* she was independent, swore, smoked tobacco, and devised con games—a touch of the juvenile delinquent, except that you knew she wasn't *really* bad. As the middle class begins to want their daughters to achieve what they once desired only for their sons—a good education, a well-paying career, happiness in the room at the top—they have begun to appreciate some of the so-called masculine qualities in their daughters, such as independence. But the Tatum O'Neill character would be too threatening in their own daughters, whom they still appreciate crawling into their laps, cuddling, and achieving in a *quiet* purposeful way.

30 For further discussion, see Philippe Aries. *Centuries of Childhood*, trans. Robert Baldick. New York, N.Y.: Vintage Press, 1962.

31 In John Holt. *Escape from Childhood*. New York, N.Y.: E.P. Dutton, 1974. Holt claims that "love object" corresponds with the better known term "sex object." People use children as love objects when they "think they have the right, or even the duty, to bestow on them 'love', visible and tangible signs of affection whenever (they) want, however (they) want, and whether (the children) like it or not."

Tatum O'Neill might be outrageous, fun to watch, and a physically attractive child, but most parents prefer to go home and tuck their own love objects into bed.

How does a black girl compare with the mainstream images of an ideal little girl? And how will white (male) researchers perceive the style and behaviors of black girls? Obviously they do not meet the aesthetic criterion of being blond and blue-eyed. But what is more important, assuming that the more enlightened social science researchers can get beyond looks and skin color, the young black girl may not behave the way her middle-class white counterpart does. If she does behave the way Tatum O'Neill did in *Paper Moon*, she simply is a juvenile delinquent. But without the extreme of a delinquent label, she is likely to be more competent, more aggressive, and more adept at organization. Lower-class black girls are likely to have more practical experience in taking care of younger siblings and in taking over household responsibilities. In short, they are more apt to be seen as assertive and bossy, rather than submissive and cuddly.

But instead of finding the black girls' independence and responsibilities as interesting proof of childhood competence and ability, they are usually seen as further evidence of the black child's deprivation and deviance. The activities, appearance, and attitudes of young black girls are so different, so alien to that of the little girls that most researchers are used to, that it may have become easier for them not to deal with black girls at all. They do not provide the satisfactions of dealing with a child love object, and they have not yet reached sexual maturity and so cannot provide the unconscious (or conscious) satisfactions that a man can obtain from dealing with a woman. If a woman has no social importance or does not happen to be considered physically attractive, she tends to be overlooked in our male-dominated society. This is true of white women too, but black women suffer the invisibility more—an invisibility which extends to and envelops black girls.

CONCLUSION

Young black girls face the discriminatory threat of racism, sexism, and childism. These oppressive and negative forces reflect our cultural obsessions and our cultural fears. They are part of the very fabric of our history and social thought. They are institutionalized into our major social institutions and shape the dynamics of our interactions. A review of the literature on sexual and racial discrimination in schools illustrates the noncritical, ethnocentric vision of most social science. Most of the research seems to rationalize and "objectify" our prejudicial visions rather than to critically respond to the origins of injustice and discrimination in this society. The neglect of the black girls' experience does not force us to face the dissonance between our patriotic legends of equality and freedom and the realities of oppression and racism.

How can we begin to record the lives and experiences of young black girls? How can we begin to attack the contradiction and distortions that have encumbered our clear vision of them? First of all we must decide that black girls are precious people whose experiences are worthy of study. We must also decide that their social, intellectual, and psychological growth and development are of critical importance to this

society. Our research agendas, therefore, must reflect their prominence, their potential, and their strengths. This means that social science must not remain preoccupied with their deprivation, their deviance, and their strangeness, but rather seek to understand the social meaning of their cultural perspective. This is a sensitive research task that requires liberated minds. Minority women researchers, who are closest to the experience of young black girls, have the greatest potential for accomplishing this inquiry. But we too must rid ourselves of some of the preconceptions and biases of our academic training in order to do an authentic piece of work.

Social scientists interested in documenting the experience of black girls in schools must not rely on simplistic, behavioral accounts of teacher behavior in the classroom, nor resort to political pleas for a new humanity in education.³² In the first case, life in classrooms is reduced to those discrete variables that are easily quantifiable, but we learn very little about the holistic, qualitative experience of children. In the second case, the inquiry is reduced to passion and rhetoric, often inspirational but rarely empirical.

Methodological strategies for documenting classroom life must include systematic and subtle observations of the social, cognitive, and psychological messages that are transmitted among children and between teachers and children. These strategies must be designed to record:

1. The *characteristics* and *structure* of the classroom environment in which children and teachers find themselves.
2. The *roles* and *relationships* of the people involved in the educational process.
3. The *activities* people engage in including the *social* and *cognitive* meaning of these interactions.³³

The observations of classroom life must be longitudinal in scope, documenting the patterns and constellations of behaviors that evolve over time. It is misleading, therefore, for an observer to evaluate the social meaning of an isolated behavior in the classroom. One cannot, for instance, judge a teacher to be cold and heartless just because she is observed harshly scolding a child for leaving his chair. Neither can we view her goals as positive and nurturant just because her verbalizations seem *immediately* rewarding to children. Education is a cumulative, changing, and transforming process that cannot be captured in a static picture.

In order to interpret responsibly a specific teacher behavior, the observer needs to know more about the history of interactions that preceded the behavior, the cognitive and social needs of the child with whom the teacher is communicating, and the teacher's perceptions of the social structure of the classroom. Unfortunately, research

32 Jonathan Kozol. *Death At An Early Age*. Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin, 1967; Nat Hentoff. *Our Children Are Dying*. New York, N.Y.: Viking, 1966; Jerry Farber. *The Student as Nigger*. New York, N.Y.: Pocket Books, 1970; and Ivan Illich. *Deschooling Society*. New York, N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1970.

33 These dimensions of analysis correspond closely with Urie Bronfenbrenner's conceptualization of child ecology, a study of the enduring environment in which the child lives.

explorations of teacher discrimination have relied too heavily on minimal evidence that has not recorded patterns and evolution of behavior over time, has not considered the nature and norms of the classroom social system, and has not attended to the dynamics and communications that may have no behavioral representation.

Our picture of classroom life has also been distorted by its neglect of children. For the most part, observational research has focused exclusively on the teacher's interactions with children and ignored the child's initiating or active role. Firstly, the saliency of the teacher's presence is not only related to how much contact the teacher initiates but also related to how the child shapes her world, whom she chooses to communicate with, and whom she chooses to exclude. The idea of the child as creator of her own environment is a relatively alien concept in the sociological and social psychological literature on teacher expectations and classroom behavior. But people studying the early developmental patterns of children have been able to identify the child's role in defining her own experience and determining her own fate, and they point to the critical need to consider the role of children in the classroom—a role that is more than responsive. The child's role can also be aggressive, assertive, and initiatory.

It is also true that a great deal of teaching and learning goes on among peers, without teacher direction or intervention. This is especially true of lower-class children who are more accustomed to seeking help, support, and nurturance from age-mates and less likely to focus their attention on a single, dominant adult.³⁴ If one documents only the responses of children to teacher communications, therefore, one neglects the child's active role in the environment and ignores the dynamics of learning among children.

The various observational strategies that I have proposed would be effective for documenting the experience of any child in the classroom. These methods would seem especially important for recording the experience of black girls because they are not likely to follow dominant patterns of behavior nor be exclusively attuned to the teacher's centrality. Their unique styles of behavior and patterns of interaction will only be recognized within a comprehensive, longitudinal research design.

Finally, it is important to recognize that school is only one institution in the life of a child—one that may have minimal saliency and meaning to her development. Social scientists interested in documenting the educational experience of black girls, therefore, must move beyond the boundaries of formalized schooling and observe their behaviors in a variety of settings. It is likely that many of the competencies and skills of black girls will not emerge in the classroom environment, but will be revealed within families, on the playground, in the church. Each of these social settings brings out a different set of behaviors and interactions that are all part of the educational agenda of children. In *Beyond Black and White*, James Comer gives a beautiful description of the black church as a place where people experience dignity and strength after a work-week of indignities and injustice.

34 Beatrice Whiting. *Six Cultures*. New York, N.Y.: John Wiley, 1963.

The black church was a place for participation and belonging. The deacons, trustees, and ushers were ten feet tall on Sunday. This was not Inland Steel, Miss Ann's kitchen nor the bank. This—the church—was theirs. In retrospect, the trustees were like the city board of finance and the deacons were like the city council. There was a little bit of respect for everybody.³⁵

Recently a reading program for black children was begun in Boston that recognizes the family as the most promising source of learning, and works with parents and children in a dynamic and compelling reading method. The creators of the program decided to operate out of churches (rather than schools, social welfare agencies, or office buildings) because historically churches have been major institutions for solace, safety, social action, and social change within the black community. More importantly, churches have been safe places for expressing one's mind, soul, and spirit. Within this setting, black children who were consistent failures in school were able to read quickly and expressively, and children who were passive and withdrawn at school were able to challenge and ask questions. If we want to document the learning and growth of black girls, therefore, we must follow them to their parts of the world—to the places where they feel comfortable and competent as well as to the settings where they experience powerlessness and deprivation.³⁶

35 James P. Comer. *Beyond Black and White*. New York, N.Y.: Quadrangle Books, 1972., p. 17.

36 I want to express my thanks to Margot Priest who gave generously of her energy and skills in the preparation of this article, I greatly appreciate her diligence and creativity. I am also indebted to The National Institute of Education, who commissioned and sponsored this paper for a conference on the Educational and Occupational Needs of Black Women, Washington, D.C., December 1975.