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Context/description paper

## **Introduction**

Discrimination against Black females in education is not only a matter of unfair treatment or unequal discipline. It is also a communication issue. The way Black girls and women are talked about, described, and portrayed in schools and media plays a major role in shaping how they are treated. Language, images, stereotypes, and public reactions all influence how society views Black female students and educators.

In recent years, a viral TikTok video brought national attention to this issue. The video showed a Black female teacher being recorded by students without her knowledge. The focus of the video was not her teaching ability or classroom management, but her body. Social media users commented on her curves and how her clothing fit her figure. While some people defended her, others criticized her appearance and questioned her professionalism. The incident quickly spread across platforms, sparking debates about dress codes, teacher conduct, and body image.

This event is not isolated. Instead, it reflects a long history of policing Black women's bodies and holding them to different standards. This paper examines the historical, social, and communicative context surrounding discrimination against Black females in education. It

explores how stereotypes, media framing, institutional policies, and public discourse shape the experiences of Black girls and women in schools.

## **Historical Context**

To understand modern discrimination, it is important to look at history. Black women and girls have long been subjected to harmful stereotypes. During slavery and segregation, Black women were often portrayed as overly sexual, aggressive, or unfeminine. These stereotypes included the “Jezebel,” which framed Black women as hypersexual, and the “Sapphire,” which portrayed them as loud and angry. These images were used to justify mistreatment and exclusion.

Even after segregation ended with *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, racial bias did not disappear. Black students entered previously all-white schools, but they often faced hostility and lower expectations. Black female students experienced discrimination based on both race and gender.

These stereotypes did not remain in the past. They became part of American culture through media, literature, and everyday language. Over time, these ideas shaped how teachers, administrators, and the public viewed Black girls and women. Instead of being seen as individuals, they were often viewed through the lens of stereotype.

The viral TikTok incident connects directly to this history. The intense focus on the teacher’s body echoes long-standing ideas about Black women being overly sexualized. While teachers of

all races may face scrutiny, Black women are often judged more harshly because of historical narratives that frame their bodies as inappropriate or distracting.

Coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, intersectionality explains how different forms of discrimination overlap. Black females experience both racism and sexism at the same time. Their experiences cannot be understood by looking at race or gender alone. In the TikTok case, the teacher was not just criticized as a woman or as a Black person. She was criticized as a Black woman. Her body was judged through racialized and gendered stereotypes.

### **Framing Theory**

Framing theory explains how media shapes understanding by highlighting certain aspects of a story while ignoring others. In the viral video, the focus was not on her teaching skills, education, or professionalism. Instead, the framing centered on her curves and appearance. By focusing on her body, viewers were encouraged to see her as a distraction rather than as an educator. The way the video was presented influenced how people interpreted it.

### **Adultification Bias**

Adultification bias refers to the tendency to view Black girls as older, more mature, and less innocent than their white peers. While this concept is often applied to students, similar bias can

affect Black female teachers. They may be seen as more responsible for others' reactions to them, especially regarding their bodies. In this case, instead of questioning why students recorded and shared the video, some people questioned the teacher's clothing. The responsibility shifted from student behavior to her physical appearance.

### **Current Educational Landscape**

Black girls face significant disparities in education. Studies show that they are disciplined at higher rates than white girls for similar behavior. They are more likely to be suspended, labeled as disruptive, or viewed as having attitude problems. Black female teachers also face unique challenges. They are underrepresented in many districts, yet they often serve as mentors and role models. Despite this, they may face scrutiny over their tone, appearance, or teaching style.

Dress codes in schools often reflect gender bias. Female educators are frequently policed more strictly than male educators. For Black women, natural body shape can be unfairly labeled as inappropriate, even when clothing follows school guidelines. In the viral TikTok incident, the teacher reportedly wore standard professional clothing. However, because of her body shape, the clothing was perceived differently. This highlights how "neutral" policies can have unequal effects. A dress code may not mention race, but its enforcement can reflect bias.

### **Media Representation and Public Discourse**

Social media played a major role in spreading the TikTok video. Platforms like TikTok and Twitter encourage quick reactions and strong opinions. As the video circulated, thousands of users commented on the teacher's body. Some comments defended her, arguing that she had the right to dress professionally without being shamed. Others claimed her clothing was inappropriate, even though similar outfits worn by women with different body types might not receive the same criticism.

Media framing influenced public opinion. Headlines and captions often emphasized her curves, making her body the central issue. This type of coverage reinforces the idea that Black women's bodies are public topics for debate. Visual framing also mattered. The camera angle, the repeated sharing of clips, and zoomed-in images contributed to the focus on her figure. These visual choices communicated a message, even without explicit words.

Public discourse often ignored the fact that students recorded and posted the video without consent. Instead, attention shifted to her appearance. This shift reveals how quickly blame can be redirected toward Black women. Schools often rely on written policies to guide behavior. Dress codes are typically described as neutral and professional. However, interpretation of these policies can vary. When policies lack clear guidelines, personal bias can influence enforcement. A Black female teacher's clothing may be judged more harshly because of assumptions about her body.

Institutional communication also includes how schools respond to controversy. If administrators publicly question a teacher's professionalism instead of defending her, it sends a message about

whose side the institution is on. In cases like the viral TikTok incident, the response matters as much as the event itself. Silence or weak support can reinforce harmful narratives. Strong, clear communication that addresses harassment and supports staff can challenge bias.

Many Black women have shared experiences of being told their bodies are “too much,” “distracting,” or “inappropriate.” These messages often begin in adolescence and continue into adulthood. Black girls are frequently dress-coded for clothing that would not be questioned on others. They are told to cover up or adjust their appearance. Over time, these experiences can affect self-esteem and sense of belonging. For Black female educators, this scrutiny can create added stress. Instead of focusing solely on teaching, they may feel pressure to monitor their appearance constantly.

In the TikTok case, the teacher’s voice was largely missing from the initial conversation. Others spoke about her, judged her, and debated her professionalism. When individuals lose control over their own narrative, it reflects a power imbalance. Centering Black women’s voices is essential. Their experiences provide insight into how discrimination operates in daily life.

Cultural standards of professionalism are often based on white, middle-class norms. These standards influence what is considered appropriate dress, speech, and behavior. Because Black women’s bodies have historically been sexualized, they are often viewed through a different

lens. Clothing that fits closely may be labeled provocative, even if it is not revealing. Economic factors also play a role. Teachers often purchase professional clothing within limited budgets. Expecting women to hide or reshape their natural bodies reflects unrealistic standards. Social media culture adds another layer. Viral content spreads quickly, and outrage often drives engagement. In this environment, nuance is lost. A short video clip becomes a national debate.

All these factors combine to create a context where Black women are more vulnerable to public scrutiny and misrepresentation. Understanding this context has important implications for communication professionals. Schools must review dress codes and ensure fair enforcement. Clear communication should address harassment and protect staff from public shaming.

Journalists and content creators must consider how framing affects perception. Focusing on a woman's body instead of the broader issue reinforces harmful narratives.

When controversies arise, responses should emphasize fairness, consent, and respect. Messaging should avoid blaming individuals for bias-driven reactions. Audiences must think critically about what they share and comment on. Social media users play a role in shaping discourse. Reframing narratives means shifting focus from Black women's bodies to issues of respect, consent, and professionalism.

## **Conclusion**

The viral TikTok video of a Black female teacher being criticized for her curves is more than a social media moment. It reflects a long history of discrimination shaped by stereotypes, media framing, and institutional bias. Black females in education face challenges that are both systemic and communicative. From historical narratives to modern viral content, their bodies and behaviors are often judged through unequal standards.

By examining this issue through communication theory, it becomes clear that language, images, and framing matter. They influence policy, perception, and treatment. Addressing discrimination against Black females in education requires more than policy changes. It requires changing how society talks about, represents, and responds to Black women and girls. Only by challenging harmful narratives can educational spaces become more equitable and respectful for all.

## Works Cited

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