



“At Risk” Framing of Black Youth Can Fuel Anti-Blackness in Research and Practice

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Researchers and practitioners may want to engage in work combating anti-blackness, yet many operate without questioning how harmful narratives and underlying assumptions might shape what they do. As we work with Black youths, we want to challenge ourselves and others about how we view, think of, and talk about Black youth. We can also uphold the



Figure 1 Photograph by Photo by Ketut Subiyanto: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/happy-african-american-father-playing-with-children-on-bed-4545160/> CCO.

commitment to seeing Black youth fully in their humanity, better account for the role of context, and contribute to a vision for social justice on which Community Psychology and allied fields are built.

“We bring attention to four harmful narratives commonly shared in North America and within the field that are used to frame what Black youths do and set expectations for whom they will become.”

As we wrestle with it ourselves, we invite other practitioners and researchers who work with Black youth to engage with this work.

Highlights

To counteract the effects of racism, community practitioners and researchers must take intentional steps to address common expectations for Black youth.

Emphasizing Black youths and Black communities' strengths and supporting their agency are essential.

To support these efforts, our piece builds from the existing literature by describing how: a) deficit narratives blame Black youths and their communities for issues they face, b) policing narratives promote disciplining and controlling them, c) color-evasive narratives ignore their experiences, and d) essentialist narratives reinforce narrow definitions of what being Black means. These narratives are so culturally pervasive that they reinforce pressures on Black youths to conform to certain paths and certain stories.

Counteracting common expectations for Black youth can open paths toward resisting harmful narratives. First, opportunities to learn about Black histories and practices can support Black youths in exploring who they are, and what being Black

means to them. Further, opportunities to initiate projects, assert leadership, and pursue their own goals can encourage youths' aspirations for themselves and their communities. Third, opportunities to view themselves represented positively, with their strengths highlighted, can affirm Black youths. Fourth, chances to openly discuss race and inequities can develop a deeper awareness of racial dynamics and social justice. Such opportunities are also likely to foster engagement and health benefits in Black youths.

HOW DID A COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY PERSPECTIVE INFORM YOUR WORK?

Our reflections cannot solely operate at the individual level: Community Psychology and like fields must embrace these efforts. This is particularly true when training the next generation of practitioners and in examining faulty research assumptions built from anti-black narratives. Gatekeepers teaching community approaches, setting norms for the profession, and judging what will be published in the scientific literature can support Community Psychologists and allied professionals in transforming their work.

What Does This Mean For?

Research and Evaluation: When leading their own projects or when reviewing the work of others, Community Psychologists can pay more attention to the different narratives that research reinforces about Black youths. Is this research founded on or reinforcing assumptions that link Black youths with "risks" and deficits? Does it suggest that surveilling or policing them is needed? Does it invalidate their experiences being Black or their experiences with race? Does it homogenize or oversimplify

Practice: Practice that contends with harmful narratives and actively counteracts them will challenge racial hierarchies and anti-Black racism.

Social Action: Actively counteracting harmful narratives about Black youth can deeply nourish their resistance and open opportunities for them. It may also fuel further social action projects. As Black youths and their potential are appreciated more fully, their awareness is nurtured and more space is made for their own goals.

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