

# I Am Who I Am, Right?

The truth of Black Girl Magic



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# more than just a hashtag

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Black Girl Magic is a mainstream declaration, a hyper-expressed bold slogan of pride both individual and collective on an ethnic and gender level. It is a movement that charges forward with chants of and for visibility, representation, innovation, resilience, and sisterhood. Over the past few years, the term has served both as an affirmation and a root of contention; a vehicle for cultural agency or commodification.

Beyond Instagram, Twitter, and BET, the daily life of Black girls in America exist in parallel universes; where they are celebrated as idols of beauty, smarts, and strength yet when in a bid to assert their magic, embrace their cultural identity, they are met with a lot of resistance, marginalization, and in severe cases, criminalization. The experience for many Black girls within independent school settings is often even more divisive, challenging and isolating.

Not unlike other terms put on young women of color, despite the empowered intent, BGM messaging is weighted with external cultural beliefs and burdens. Within the independent school community, the vision of BGM, if not cultivated on an individual basis, by the girls who choose to own it, risks reiterating another narrow story of worthiness.



# How are our Black girls and young women strategically creating a sense of self, empowerment, and worth?



Black girls, like their non-Black counterparts, are consumed with managing their pursuit of personal, academic and social excellence. They embrace the rigor of scholarship, actively flex muscles of character development, and articulate citizenship expressed through service to self, family, community, the environment, and the world. Black girls, however, are in a constant cultural stasis; caught between simply being an exceptional student and effortlessly being an exceptionally magical Black girl who needs to be twice as good as other students. How does that positioning manifest when those same girls enter independent schools, be they predominantly white, girl's only, religious-based, boarding, or multi-ethnic environments? To better serve these girls, and collaborate in their achievement, we need to better understand, value and yield to their layered process of asserting their culturally-centered identity, perspective, resources, and power.



## **How are we bringing our prejudices and bias into the classroom, our conferences with parents, collaborations with colleagues and in our pastoral care?**

For these girls, the process of defining and claiming a Black girl's magic is largely rooted in the power of shared story and experience. The Black Girl Magic mantra implies agreement on what is deemed dope, inspiring, powerful, female and Black. What happens when stories and experiences are not shared among student's, teachers, administrators, even amongst women and people of color? How does an inclusive community negotiate these differences and navigate the path of comprehensive diversity?

Even the most well-resourced and well-intentioned diverse institutions can fall short at nurturing these girls emotionally, culturally and intellectually. The implicit bias of all stakeholders (including women and those of color) is rarely acknowledged or unpacked, and therefore it goes virtually undetected.





## **“Just because we’re magic doesn’t mean we’re not real.” - Jesse Williams**

What we have is an authorship problem. Our role as educators and pastoral care providers is to let them, the Black girls in need, lead.

In this workshop, as we reflect on the tremendous positive impact of a mind, body and spirit wellness regime on Black girl self-nourishment and empowerment, we'll uncover strategies that leave room for our humanity and their journey to enter into the sustainable practice of authentic inclusion.

We will explore best practices that support Black girls through the stages of naming their non-negotiables, defining frames from which their perspective and experience evolved, integrating elements of their uniqueness, sharing from personal positioning and balancing reflection with

the courageous action that is consistent with their vision and mission for themselves.

Through varied immersive exercises, we'll begin to recognize more subtle gender and race stereotypes to avoid passing them down and share approaches to listen to our girls without prejudice. We'll also outline a learning environment that is culturally responsive and progressive and fosters raising and educating Black girls who determine their own sense of self (and magic).

This workshop will tap into the *personal*, although is not meant to be taken personally. The conceptual understandings and outcomes are sharply focused on helping girls become agents and advocates for their own destiny.