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# Aspirations and psychological correlates of Black females

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## ABSTRACT

This cross-sectional study aimed to explore the prevalence of personal strengths and their correlates among a sample of Black girls residing in urban settings. Specifically, the study assesses the levels of personal strengths (aspirations) and identifies other personal attributes (social responsibility, self-efficacy, emotional restraint, expectations of goals, and mother's influence) that would predict the levels of aspirations. The results revealed high levels of aspirations and statically significant correlations between aspirations, expectations, self-efficacy, and mother's influence. Results also revealed that after controlling for mother's influence, expectation of goal was the strongest significant predictor of aspirations of Black females.

## KEYWORDS

Black female; aspirations; mother's influence; positive attributes

African American adolescents have been the subjects of interest and investigation by social scientists for many years. Most of the research is specific to Black youth in general or Black males specific (Annamma et al., 2019; Morel et al., 2018). For example, of the 27 articles in a 2020 systematic review of youth conducted by Herd and Spoon, only three were specific to females (Herd & Kim-Spoon, 2021). The research conducted on Black females has centered around the deleterious effects of Black female engagement in behaviors such as aggression Morel et al. (2018), school expulsion (Saunders, 2019), promiscuous behavior (Nebbitt et al., 2014; Weser et al., 2021) and pregnancy (Moore & Chase-Lansdale, 2001). School expulsion, sexual promiscuity, and teen pregnancy are important issues to study as they have the potential to lead to more severe behaviors in later adulthood. However, Black girls have been ignored in the research about positive solutions we might implement to support them as they transition to adulthood (Saunders, 2019).

A research agenda focusing on Black females' strengths is essential to develop appropriate preventive intervention strategies specifically for this marginalized population. Enhancing personal strengths is a pragmatic approach to reducing antisocial behaviors while fostering healthy development for Black girls (Annamma et al., 2019). Alston et al. (2022) identified aspirations, social responsibility, emotional restraint, and self-efficacy as personal strengths that can contribute to positive outcomes for youth. In addition, parents are important figures who influence youth development (Lombe et al., 2021) and are from whom youth first acquire social cues. Exploring these personal strengths of Black female youth in the context of their family environment will be important to this exploration of positive and personal strengths.

## Literature review

### *Mother's influence*

There is much research on the influence the family has on youth development extant (Nebbitt, 2009). For this paper, we are only interested in the influence of mothers on youth, as youth reported that their mothers were the primary caretaker (Nebbitt, 2009). Previous research by Alston et al. (2022) found that the father's influence had no impact on positive outcomes of youth. Further, Alston et al. (2022) explored mothers' monitoring and encouragement impact on a sample of 182 youth residing in public housing. The study found statistically significant results for the impact of both monitoring and encouragement on youth. Specifically, mothers' monitoring and encouragement predicted levels of youth's emotional restraint, future aspirations, and self-efficacy. On the other hand, neither mothers' monitoring nor encouragement impacted the youth's social responsibility levels in the study.

Black parents, in particular, engage in conversations with and often have similar aspirations for educational attainment that their children possess for themselves (Hill & Roberts, 2019). Mothers' influence on youth can be seen in the work of Lombe et al. (2021). For example, Lombe et al. (2021), in a study of 375 youth in public housing, female youth reported higher levels of maternal influence than males. They further concluded significant differences among youth as it related to maternal influence. The authors stated that youth residing in households with high levels of maternal influence reported significantly less favorable attitudes toward deviant behavior (Lombe et al., 2021).

### *Future aspirations*

Smith-Maddox (1994) identified future aspirations and expectations—desired educational, career, and social goals—as one's beliefs about achieving these goals. They are indications of an individual's desire to achieve a goal. Sirin et al. (2004) asserted, "adolescence is the time when individuals are more concerned about their future (educational and career, and social goals) than any other phase of development" (p.438). Early research on future planning and aspirations suggests that youth who plan (e.g., identifying personal goals, setting and following plans, and monitoring progress) create opportunities for themselves. This planning leads to greater self-concept and suggests that aspirations are among the most significant determinants of eventual educational and occupational attainment (Marjoribanks, 1984; Nurmi, 1991; Schoon & Parsons, 2002; Sirin et al., 2004). In addition, youths' conscious and deliberate thoughts concerning career, family, and educational goals significantly influence their later adult life (Nurmi, 1989, 1991).

Moreover, educational aspirations constitute an integral intervening variable in determining opportunities in the labor market. They are likely to translate into actual high levels of educational attainment and, ultimately, levels of socioeconomic attainment (Ayalon & Yuchtman-Yaar, 1989). For example, Messersmith and Schulenberg (2008) assessed whether high school students met their educational expectations by age 26. Using a representative sample of 23,576 high school students and a logistic regression model, they found that aspirations were significant predictors of expectations for college for both males and females. They also concluded that those students who expected to graduate from college, but did not, had lower aspirations than those who expected to graduate and did.

Research also suggested that girls with higher aspirations may postpone pregnancy, i.e., after high school or college (Stewart, 2003). Other research suggested that youth with aspirations persist despite family turbulence and educational, legal, and emotional difficulty. A qualitative study revealed that despite students having trouble in their lives, their stated aspirations persist, and they continue to possess clear hope for education, careers, family relationships, civic involvement, and personal satisfaction. Specifically, youth expressed college ambitions and realistic employment goals, described themselves as future parents and partners, and foresaw themselves as positive community members (Flom & Sundal Hansen, 2006). Conversely, lower aspirations at ages 14 through 16 were predictive of delinquent behavior at age 18 (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2018).

Recent studies conclude aspirations are integral to the decisions youth make. Mahler et al. (2017) found that high aspiration was predictive of lower levels of self-reported reoffending among youth one year after the first arrest. Specifically, they reported youth who reported higher levels of aspiration engaged in less criminal behavior. Other research posited that future planning is negatively correlated with mental health problems (Kim et al., 2019). Chung et al. (2022) reported that youths' higher educational aspirations positively impacted school engagement behaviors, resulting in higher grade point averages.

### **Expectation**

Expectations are the perceived likelihood of obtaining one's future goals (Knight, 2017; Mahler et al., 2017). Previous research, for example, Chen and Vazsonyi (2011), Massey et al. (2008), and Arbona (2000), examined relationships between expectations and other variables (aspirations, impulse control, delinquency behavior). This body of work has concluded varying results on the impact expectations have on youth behavior; however, most, if not all, studies demonstrate expectations to be an integral part of youth development. For example, Sipsma et al. (2015) examined future expectations and adolescent risk behavior. They pointed out that student expectations (defined as youths' commitment to school) served as a "protective factor for engaging in a greater frequency of risk behaviors" (p. 79). Daigle and Hoffman (2018) explored future expectations among a sample of at-risk youth, and they found that youth with higher expectations reported lower levels of victimization. They further concluded that improving youths' expectations for the future can prevent them from reoffending (p.806). Similarly, youth with optimistic future expectations are less likely to engage in criminal behavior and likely to report low involvement in criminal behavior (Mahler et al., 2017).

### **Social responsibility**

Social Responsibility, a term coined by Don Hellison in 1995, refers to "one's ability to have control over one's life and engage in self-development regardless of external forces that significantly limit decision-making and options for the future and involves being sensitive to the rights, feelings, and needs of others." Research concluded youth with high levels of social responsibility are at lower risk of engaging in maladaptive behaviors such as drug use, and those with lower levels of responsibility are more likely to be heavy drug users (Laporte et al., 2022). It is argued that youth with high levels of social responsibility, for example, care about how their actions affect others. Ballard et al. (2019) asserted that youth and young

adults who participate in civic activities think critically about societal issues. According to Laporte et al. (2022), for Black youth, social responsibility is related to their awareness of inequality, experiences of oppression, and volunteering.

### ***Emotional restraint and youth***

Weinberger and Bartholomew (1996) defined emotional self-restraint as “a dimension of long-term psychological adjustment that predicts various psychosocial outcomes in older children and adults. Restraint encompasses domains related to socialization and self-control and refers to suppression of immediate desires in the interest of long-term goals and relations with others” (p. 496). Emotional restraint is one’s ability to self-regulate, control one’s impulses, and control one’s emotions, desires, or inclinations to behave in an adverse manner. This function of human behavior provides the potential for self-directed changes in one’s behavior (Bandura, 1986). According to Pajares (2002):

[T]he manner and degree to which people can self-regulate their actions and behavior involve the accuracy and consistency of their self-observation and self-monitoring, the judgments they make regarding their actions, choices and attribution, and finally, the evaluative and tangible reactions they make to their own behavior through the self-regulatory process (p.4).

Adolescents’ ability to manage their emotions is critical to their healthy development (Chervonsky & Hunt, 2018). Early research by Flowers et al. (2003) examined the effects of locus of control and other social and personal characteristics on the educational aspirations of 863 African American high school seniors. They concluded that locus of control yielded a significant positive effect on educational aspirations when controlling for all other variables. Students who felt they had control over their life had higher aspirations. Mau and Bikos (2000) also found evidence supporting the idea that locus of control is a significant predictor of both educational and occupational aspirations.

More recent studies by Vranjes et al. (2018) suggested that if youth can regulate their emotions, it will positively influence their social interactions. Morel et al. (2018) concluded that emotion regulation protects youth, particularly for developing aggression. Similarly, adolescents who can control their emotions are more likely to concentrate on the present and are more likely to care about their future goals and achievement (Mahler et al., 2017). Further, youth who exercise strong impulse control are more likely to have higher grades, better interpersonal relationships, and the ability to adjust positively to new circumstances (Tangney et al., 2004). However, Vazonyi et al. (2017) posited that those with low levels of self-regulation will have fewer positive outcomes. Clinkinbeard et al. (2018) concluded that low self-control was related to youth involvement in criminal behavior and subsequent lack of control in adulthood. Conversely, Billen et al. (2022) concluded that low self-control was not predictive of criminal behavior or low self-control in later adulthood.

### ***Self-efficacy***

Self-efficacy is one’s belief in one’s abilities to execute a course of action required to attain the desired outcome. It is assumed that unless people believe their actions can produce the desired outcome, they will have little motivation to act or persevere in the face of difficulty (Pajares, 2002). These are the beliefs that influence youth’s aspirations and strength of

commitment to them (Bandura et al., 2001). Self-efficacy is assumed to influence aspirations through three behavioral consequences: (1) approach versus avoidance behavior, (2) performance behavior, and (3) persistence behavior.

According to (Bandura, 1986), of the many self-regulatory mechanisms that influence human behavior, self-efficacy is the core of social cognitive theory. Self-efficacy affects the belief in one's ability to organize and execute a course of action required to achieve the desired goal (Bandura, 1977b). A youth's belief in his or her efficacy in managing his or her life and learning activities and conquering obstacles will affect motivation, interest, and achievement (Bandura, 1993; Zimmerman, 1995). As reported by Jonson-Reid, Davis, Saunders, Williams, and Williams (2005), "students with higher self-efficacy work harder and persist longer in school, have better learning strategies such as personal goal setting, and are less likely to engage in risky behaviors" (p. 6). Consequently, self-efficacy beliefs also shape career aspirations. Bandura et al. (1996) reported that the stronger youths believe in their efficacy, the more occupational options they consider possible and the greater their interest in them. The better they prepare themselves educationally for different career pursuits, the greater their persistence and success. In a later study, Bandura further confirmed the impact of self-efficacy, asserting that academic, social, and self-regulatory self-efficacy were all positively related to both aspirations and occupational efficacy (Bandura et al., 2001).

Other scholars have also linked self-efficacy to aspirations among youth. For example, Uwah et al. (2008) examined the relationship between educational aspirations and self-efficacy among a group of 40 African American male students obtained from a convenient sample of 70 students. They concluded that educational aspirations were significantly correlated to and a significant predictor of academic self-efficacy (Uwah et al., 2008). Ansong et al. (2019) concluded that children's academic self-efficacy shapes their educational aspirations, shaping their academic achievement. However, Dey et al. (2022) found no relationship between aspirations and self-efficacy.

### **Conceptual framework**

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), developed by Albert Bandura (1977b), is an approach to human behavior that assumes individuals act on the environment and are affected by their understanding of it. Bandura argued that cognitive process and self-reflection are central to human behavior (Monte & Sollod, 2003). In essence, how individuals process information and how they view themselves have significant implications for their behavior. According to this theory, people are viewed as active agents who can plan and predict the consequences of their actions.

Within the SCT framework, human behavior is viewed as the product of a self-motivated interplay of personal, behavioral, and environmental influences. This framework emphasizes cognition and how it plays a critical role in people's ability to construct reality, self-regulate, encode information, and perform behaviors (Pajares, 2002). The theory is reciprocal in that the individual's behavioral (e.g., academic skills), personal (e.g., self-beliefs and thinking), and environmental factors (e.g., the community in which they live) all affect and are affected by each other (Bandura, 1977a).

However, Bandura (1999) posited that certain personal and environmental factors (e.g., socioeconomic status, educational, and familial structures) do not affect human behavior

directly but indirectly and, in turn, influence youth's aspirations, self-efficacy beliefs, personal standards, and emotional states. An important aspect of SCT is the understanding that youth have certain capabilities—that is, abilities to engage in certain tasks. Four major tasks associated with this model are symbolizing, planning alternate strategies, learning vicariously, and self-regulation—all of which provide youth with the cognitive means by which they can influence and determine their future outcomes.

We seek to assess the presence of aspirations among a sample of Black females in public housing and examine relationships between cognitive processes such as self-efficacy, social responsibility, goal expectations, and emotional restraint within the context of family settings using Social Cognitive Theory. It is hypothesized that Black females will have high aspirations and that aspirations will be correlated to social responsibility, self-efficacy, and emotional restraint. The following research questions are explored.

### **Research questions**

- (1) What is the prevalence of aspirations, goal expectations, social responsibility, self-efficacy, and self-restraint among African American males living in public housing?
- (2) Is there a significant relationship between overall aspirations and goal expectations, social responsibility, self-efficacy, and emotional restraint among African American females living in public housing?
- (3) Which factors best predict Aspirations among African American females controlling for mother's influence?

### **Methodology**

This secondary analysis examined the prevalence and correlation of aspirations among 93 Black females residing in public housing developments in an urban city. The data source for this analysis is youth from the Context Matters study. The CTM is a cross-sectional research study of 401 urban youth in public housing developments in two major U.S cities. The CTM study aimed to explore how the ecological context of urban youth impacts their psychological and emotional behaviors and attitudes. For details on the CTM study, see Nebbitt (2009). The current study explores the positive attributes of Black females residing in public housing.

### **Participants**

Participants in the current study included 93 African American females ages 11-21 all of whom lived in a public housing project in New York City, NY.

### **Measurements**

The CTM study data collection utilized several validated measures. The measures utilized in this analysis include Elliott's (1996) future aspiration. The scale asks youth about a variety of family, social, occupational, and educational goals (Elliott, 1996). Jerusalem and Schwarzer's 1979 Self-Efficacy scale assessed a general sense of perceived self-efficacy. The Weinberger Adjustment Inventory Emotional-Restraint subscale assessed four dimensions

of self-restraint: impulse control, suppression of anger, consideration of others, and responsibility. Finally, Flewelling et al. (1993) Social Responsibility Scale measured civic responsibility and awareness.

### ***Mother influences***

Mothers' influence was measured by asking youth how often their mothers pushed them to think for themselves. The response ranges from 1 never to 4 always, with higher scores indicating higher levels of the mother's influence.

### ***Future aspirations scale***

Future aspirations were measured using Elliot's 1987 future aspiration success scale (Elliott, 1996). The scale asks youth about the importance of a variety of family, social, occupational, and educational goals. Responses are rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not important at all) to 5 (very important). Scores range from 10 to 50, with higher scores indicating greater importance (Elliott, 1996).

### ***Expectations scale***

Youth expectations of achieving their future goals were measured using Elliot's 1987 expectations of goals scale (Elliott, 1996). The scale asks youth how likely they expect to accomplish their family, social, occupational, and educational goals. Responses are rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very highly unlikely) to 5 (very highly likely). Scores range from 10 to 50, with higher scores indicating a higher likelihood of expectation of achieving their goals (Elliott, 1996).

### ***General self-efficacy***

The General Self-Efficacy is a self-administered 10-item scale created by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995) to assess a general sense of perceived self-efficacy in adolescents. Total scores range from 10 to 40, and higher scores indicate a greater belief in one's abilities (high self-efficacy). Cronbach's alpha scores range from .76 to .90, which are acceptable levels of reliability. Self-efficacy is operationally defined as a score on the General Self-efficacy scale.

### ***The Weinberger Adjustment Inventory Emotional-Restraint subscale***

This scale was developed in 1990 by Daniel Weinberger. It is a 30-item, five-point Likert-scale (1= false, 2 = somewhat false, 3 = not sure, 4 = somewhat true, and 5 = true) that assesses four dimensions of restraint: impulse control ("I stop and think before I act"), suppression of anger ("I lose my temper and let people have it when I am angry"- reverse coded), consideration of others ("I often go out of my way to do things for other people"), and responsibility ("I will cheat on something if I know no one will find out"). The total score ranges from 30 to 150. The measure for the entire scale is used in this study. Higher scores indicate higher levels of self-restraint. Weinberger (1997) reports an alpha coefficient of .89. Feldman and Weinberger (1994) and Jensen et al. (2004) report an acceptable level of internal reliability ( $\alpha = .87$ ). They also indicate that the emotional restraint scale has good psychometric properties and displays convergent, discriminant, and predictive validity. Emotional restraint is operationally defined as a score on the Weinberger Adjustment Inventory Emotional-Restraint total scale.

### *The social responsibility scale*

The scale by Flewelling et al. (1993) is a six-item, four-point partial reverse-coded scale that measures civic responsibility and awareness. The survey is designed for African American males ages 12 to 16 and has an internal consistency of .52. There are two limitations to this measurement instrument. First, it was designed for male participants, and the current study included both male and female participants. Second, the alpha coefficient of .52 is an unacceptable level of reliability. An item analysis procedure was conducted with the current sample, and the results revealed an alpha coefficient of .79. Social responsibility is operationally defined as a score on the social responsibility scale.

## **Results**

### *Preliminary results*

The data were assessed for the assumptions of normality and linearity and missing data, and no violations of assumptions were observed. Descriptive statistics were also conducted to assess the levels of aspirations, mother's influence, emotional restraint, self-efficacy, social responsibility, and expectations of goals, which are presented in Table 1.

### *Bivariate correlation matrix*

A correlation procedure was conducted to assess the relationship between Aspiration, Mother's influence, Self-Efficacy, Emotional Restraint, Social Responsibility, and Expectations. The results indicate that expectation goals are highly related to aspirations with a correlation coefficient .699 ( $p < .01$ ). Similarly, a positive correlation is observed between self-efficacy and aspirations with a correlation coefficient .205 ( $p < .05$ ). Mothers' influence is also positively correlated with daughters' aspirations with a correlation coefficient is .305 ( $p < .01$ ). The bivariate correlates of all variables are presented in Table 2.

### *Multivariate analyses*

A multivariate multiple regression analysis was also conducted to examine how well expectations, goals, and self-efficacy predict aspirations among African American females while controlling for the mother's influence. When mother's influence was entered alone, it significantly predicted daughter's aspirations  $F(1, 91) = 9.343$ ,  $p = .003$  adjusted  $R^2 = .083$ .

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics for age, aspiration, mother's influence self-efficacy, emotional restraint, social responsibility, and expectations goals.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Age	93	11	21	15.00	2.55
Aspirations	93	25.00	50.00	41.16	5.73
Maternal Influence	93	1.00	4.00	15.21	3.68
Self-Efficacy	93	10	40.00	26.42	10.00
Emotional Restraint	93	30.00	123.00	79.55	15.27
Social Responsibility	93	4.00	16.00	10.62	2.89
Expectation	93	25.00	50.00	41.16	5.98

For all scales, higher mean scores are indicative of more extreme responding in the direction of the constructed assessment.

**Table 2.** Correlation matrix, aspiration, expectations, self-efficacy, emotional restraint, social responsibility, age and mother's influence.

	Aspirations	Expectation goals	Self-efficacy	Social responsibility	Emotional constraint	Age	Mother pushes
Aspirations	1						
Expectation goals	.699**	1					
Self-efficacy	.205*	.195	1				
Social responsibility	.178	.074	.017	1			
Emotional restraint	.102	.147	.196	-.310*	1		
Age	.106	.092	.253*	.183	.066	1	
Mother pushes R to think for herself	.305**	.192	.342**	.034	.046	.105	1

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ .

**Table 3.** Predicting aspirations among African American females ( $n = 93$ ).

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients	SE	Beta standardized coefficients	Adjusted $R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
Step 1					
Constant	34.843	2.144			
Mother influence	1.848	.605	.305*	.083	.083
Step 2					
Constant	33.154	2.658			
Mother influence	1.611	.643	.266*	.085	.002
Self-efficacy	.095	.088	.114		
Step 3					
Constant	10.014	3.286		.503	.418
Mother influence	1.041	.478	.172*		
Self-efficacy	.014	.065	.017		
Expectation goals	.654	.075	.663***		

\*\*\* $p < .001$  \*\* $p < .01$  \* $p < .05$ .

Mother's influence accounted for 8.3% of the variance in daughter's aspirations. When mother's influence and self-efficacy were both entered, self-efficacy did not significantly contribute to the model  $F(1, 90) = 1.153$ ,  $p = .286$  adjusted  $R^2 = .085$ . When mother's influence, self-efficacy and expectations goals were entered together, expectation goals significantly improved the model  $F(1, 89) = 76.903$ ,  $p < .001$  adjusted  $R^2 = .503$ . This comprehensive model contributed 50.3% of the variance in daughter's aspirations. The final model indicates that even after controlling for mother's influence, expectations goals were the most significant predictor of daughter's aspiration with beta coefficient of .663,  $p < .001$  (Table 3).

## Discussion

This study aimed to explore the prevalence and correlates of aspirations among a sample of African American girls residing in urban settings. We wanted to assess the levels of personal strengths (aspirations) and identify other personal attributes (social responsibility, self-efficacy, emotional restraint, expectations of goals, and mother's influence) that would predict the levels of aspirations. The following research question.

- (1) What is the prevalence of aspirations, goal expectations, social responsibility, self-efficacy, and self-restraint among African American females living in public housing?

- (2) Is there a significant relationship between overall aspirations and goal expectations, social responsibility, self-efficacy, and emotional restraint among African American females living in public housing?
- (3) Which factors best predict Aspirations among African American females controlling for mother's influence?

The youth in this study reported moderate to moderately high levels of emotional restraint, self-efficacy, and extremely high levels of mother influence, aspirations, and expectations of goals. However, the youth reported low levels of social responsibility. What is important to highlight is that for aspirations, 100% ( $n = 93$ ) of the youth in this study felt that being successful at work was either important or very important, and 96% ( $n = 93$ ) of the youth felt that having a good career was either important or very important. Finally, 96% ( $n = 93$ ) of the youth felt that attending college was either important or very important. These findings are consistent with early research by Schoon and Polek, who found high aspirations among adolescent girls. Similarly, Berzin (2010) concluded that 73% of the over 11,000 low-income youth aspired to go to college.

Youth also reported high levels of expectations of goals. Specifically, 98% ( $n = 93$ ) of the youth reported they expected to be successful at work, 98% ( $n = 93$ ) expected to have a good career, and 98% ( $n = 93$ ) expected to go to college. Considering the descriptive results from aspiration and expectations together, youth who felt achieving their aspirational goals was important also expected to achieve their goals of being successful at work, having a good career or job, and going to college. These findings are significant as Black youth are less likely to graduate from high school and enter college. The youth in this study show promise for being among the youth who enter higher education institutions and the workforce.

The levels of mothers' influence were very promising, and youth felt that their mothers encouraged them to think for themselves. This finding is consistent with Lombe et al. (2021), who also concluded youth reported high levels of mothers' encouragement. Specifically, females reported a mean of 20.8 on the mother's encouragement scales. These results are also consistent with Alston et al., who concluded in their study that 182 African American youth reported a mean of 22.38 for mothers' encouragement.

Youth also reported moderately high levels of emotional restraint. For example, 73% ( $n = 93$ ) reported that they would stop and think before they acted. Similarly to Alston et al. (2022), youth also reported moderately high levels of emotional restraint. Despite living in urban settings with a high incidence of crime and violence, youth can maintain self-control. When they can control impulses, youth can suppress urges to engage in antisocial behavior and direct energy toward activities and behaviors that foster positive outcomes such as academic success and securing gainful employment.

Similar to emotional restraint, youth reported high levels of self-efficacy. Having high levels of self-efficacy implies that the youth in this study strongly believe in their ability to perform specific actions (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). Ninety-three percent ( $n = 93$ ) of the youth in the current study felt they could always manage to solve difficult problems, 93% ( $n = 93$ ) of the sample felt they were sure they could accomplish their goals, and 86% ( $n = 93$ ) of the sample felt confident they could handle unexpected events. These results are similar to Lombe et al. (2021), who reported high levels of self-efficacy among a sample of 375 Black youth. They reported a mean of 23.99 for the entire sample and 25.12 for females and 22.9 for males.

On the other hand, youth reported low levels of social responsibility. This is an interesting finding, as one would postulate that being socially responsible would facilitate achieving future goals and plans. However, for this sample, it appears that youth are not likely to be mindful of how their behavior and actions affect others. For example, 38% of the sample agreed that it was hard to get ahead without breaking the law, compared to 62% who disagreed. Forty-eight agreed that risking getting into trouble was their own business, compared to 52% who disagreed. However, 72% of the sample stated they have a responsibility to make the world a better place, and 82% stated they really cared about how their actions affect others. These contradicting findings could be related to the realities these young people face in the context of public and low-income housing. Youth in public housing face significantly more social problems, such as gang violence, drug use and abuse, and poverty. Many youths in these and similar environments must learn to navigate their environment just to survive (Lombe et al., 2021).

The bivariate analysis also revealed promising results for the relationships between the personal attributes and strengths of the youth in this study. Youths' aspirations are highly related to expectation goals with a correlation coefficient of .699 ( $p < .01$ ). This was consistent with Knight et al. (2017), who found expectations to be highly correlated with aspirations of youth. Similarly, Mahler et al. (2017) also found a significant positive relationship between youths' expectations and youth aspirations in their study of delinquent behavior. Essentially the youth in this study who believed that their future aspirational goals were important also expected to achieve their goals. This has implications for positive youth development approaches to working with youth. The results suggest that intervention focused on positive attributes of youth may be advantageous to facilitating positive outcomes for youth, particularly female youth of color.

Similarly, a positive correlation is observed between self-efficacy and aspirations with a correlation coefficient of .205 ( $p < .05$ ). Ansong et al. (2019) also found a significant correlation between self-efficacy and aspirations. The fact that youth reported both high levels of aspirations and self-efficacy is evidence for the social cognitive theory. SCT posits when youth believe in their ability to achieve goals, they are likely to persist in difficult tasks (Bandura et al., 2001). Similarly, Chow et al. (2012), Nagy et al. (2006), and Chang (2015) all concluded that achievement-related beliefs such as self-efficacy are predictive of educational aspirations.

Mothers' influence was positively correlated with daughters' aspirations with a correlation coefficient is .305 ( $p < .01$ ). This finding was also consistent with Alston et al. (2022), who reported mother influence, defined as mothers' encouragement, significantly predicted youths' levels of aspirations. Otani (2019) also reported relationships between mothers' encouragement and aspirations citing that mothers' encouragement led to higher levels of career aspirations. Sorkhabi and Middaugh (2019) also found evidence that mothers' influence was predictive of prosocial behaviors and attitudes among adolescents.

On the other hand, we did not find that emotional restraint was correlated with aspirations. This was contrary to Mahler et al. (2017), who found that youths' ability to regulate their emotions was predictive of adolescents' persistence in planning for the future. The results were also contrary to Vranjes et al. (2018) and Morel et al. (2018), who reported the protective ability of emotional restraint has on the likelihood of youth developing aggressive behaviors

Similarly to emotional restraint, social responsibility was not related to aspirations, and this was inconsistent with previous research such as Fouad et al. (2016), Lee (2001), Mau (2004), and Tao et al. (2018). They reported that societal expectations (i.e., social responsibility) influenced youth decisions for career and academic choices.

Multivariate results are evidence of the salient relationship between expectation goals and aspirations among Black female youth. Adolescence is a time when they experience changes in many aspects: physical, educational, emotional, social, and occupational. By interacting with community, family, and school, youth gradually start understanding societal norms, becoming aware of societal values, and forming their expectation goals for future life. The pipeline between expectation goals and aspirations may come from socialization processes embedded in the environmental context. By observing behaviors from others and interacting with others, youth can absorb beneficial thoughts, build confidence, and foster positive aspirations of themselves. Our research findings are consistent with an international study based on a group of high school students in Spain. By quantifying aspirations as academic achievement, researchers also found expectations are the strongest predictor of academic achievement among high school students (Veas et al., 2019).

Additionally, multivariate results reveal the protective roles of mothers' influence on their daughters. Parental involvement is vital when helping children to cultivate positive and healthy aspirations toward their future. As a multi-dimensional framework, parental involvement can influence children in many different ways: supporting their children's school activities, increasing assistance with homework and other class projects, having more engaging communication with their children to foster relationships, teaching their children coping strategies for everyday challenges, and reaffirming youth in their decisions and choices. Work by Burnett et al. (2022) indicated that Black girls in middle and high schools felt empowered because parental support enhanced positive gendered racial identity and prevented them from internalizing negative thoughts and other discriminatory experiences. What's more, mothers provided explicit coping skills in the socialization processes in families and helped children regulate their emotions in more appropriate ways (Anderson & Stevenson, 2019).

### ***Strengths and limitations***

The small sample size was a limitation of this study. The cross-sectional design was also a limitation. Further, the data is based on a non-probabilistic sample; therefore, we cannot generalize findings to other youth. Further, the data is based on self-report data, and perhaps youth may over or underestimate their behavior, thoughts, and feelings. However, the results on positive attributes of Black females in strength make a considerable positive contribution to the extant literature on Black girls. As reported early, most literature on Black girls has focused on their involvement in negative maladaptive coping and behaviors such as delinquency, promiscuity, and depression. Continued research with larger samples that perhaps explores the differences between black females may provide a more comprehensive assessment of the status of Black girls in the context of public housing

### ***Implications***

Given that the extant literature on Black adolescents specific to their developmental outcomes has focused primarily on pathological behavior such as delinquency, depression,

violence, and school failure (Cotten & Thompson, 2017; DuRant et al., 1994; Kim et al., 2018; Nebbitt et al., 2014; Voisin et al., 2011; Yeo et al., 2020), the constellation of the results from this study are encouraging. This study moves the focus and direction of research on Black youth from a deficit model to the positive youth development (PYD) model offered by Case (2017). By exploring positive attributes of Black youth in the current political and social environment (e.g., Black Live Matters, the overturning of Roe vs. Wade, racial profiling through stop and frisk policies, and COVID-19), we can illuminate the potential of Black youth and eliminate the stereotypical perceptions held by the criminal justice and the educational systems and the dominant society. Case (2017) argues that the key to PYD is enhancing important assets among Black youth that help them better navigate their social environment, decrease problem behaviors, and increase prosocial behaviors.

Further, understanding the positive pathways that lead to a successful transition to college, the workforce, and healthy social and intimate relationships for Black children is essential to their existence. The fact that Black youth are overrepresented among the nation's poorest and more likely to live in concentrated poverty, to be killed by a firearm, to be arrested and detained, be in residential placements (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2018), and to drop out of high school and less likely to be in the labor force should make Black youth a research priority (Children's Defense Fund, 2018; Koball & Jiang, 2020; National Center for Education Statistics, 2019; Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2018).

This bleak reality with which Black youth are faced calls for innovative interventions that accentuate the positive attributes of Black children. Ballard and Syme (2016) suggest offering meaningful opportunities for youth to engage with communities. Perhaps interventions that create opportunities for youth to demonstrate their skills and talents will help further illuminate Black youth's inherent strengths. For example, civic board associations where Black youth can participate in planning and decision-making could help increase their efficacious beliefs and social responsibility. Internships within the criminal justice system and leadership programs within the educational system are other examples of innovative interventions where youth can model and practice positive behaviors.

The results from this study illuminate some of the positive attributes of Black girls. Service providers can support Black children, particularly Black girls moving from surviving to thriving within the ecological context in which they live simply by accentuating and building on the positive attributes that the youth possess. If we are to truly appreciate Black children, we can no longer ignore the inherent potential that they have to make positive contributions to our society.

## Disclosure statement

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