



Student Services
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Black Girlhood *in Europe*

SYMPOSIUM
2026



**Black Girlhood at the
Intersections: Health,
Disability & Neurodivergence**

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Black Girl Streams C.I.C. Associate Founding Members for being part of the foundation of this flagship infrastructure, Centre for Social Change and Justice, and Student Life at the University of East London for supporting the process of symposium planning and the School of Childhood and Social Care for being a source of support.

Special thanks to the University of East London for funding and co-hosting this inaugural symposium and company launch event.

Co-hosts

*Black European Girlhood Studies Association
Centre of Social Change and Justice*

Funders

*School of Childhood and Social Care
Centre of Social Change and Justice
Student Life*



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WELCOME TO THE

Black Girlhood *in* *Europe*

SYMPOSIUM 2026



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This symposium is curated, crafted and convened around a conceptual, methodological, and pedagogical framing developed by Dr Silhouette Bushay centring Black British girlhood and on this occasion in relation to health, disability, neurodivergence, care, and embodiment. Invited workshops, panels, and conversations engage this framing from diverse positionalities and practices.

On behalf of the symposium committee, it gives us great pleasure to welcome you to the first Black Girlhood in Europe symposium entitled Black Girlhood at the Intersections: Health, Disability and Neurodivergence.

This overarching theme brings together academics, scholars, practitioners, and creatives to share knowledge, wisdoms, insights, and perspectives to cultivate collaboration and action.

We have come together to explore the specificity of health, disability and neurodivergence in Black British Girlhood Studies with the view to have dialogue, inspire and build intellectual momentum.

Throughout the event you will hear from colleagues through discussion, workshop, roundtable, and spoken word poetry whose work are contributing towards shaping the future of the field.



Black Girl Streams C.I.C.



This is the launch of Black Girl Streams C.I.C., Black European Girlhood Association Studies, and the Black British Girlhood – Health, Disability & Neurodivergence Special Interest Stream (SIS).

Black Girlhood in Europe Symposium is an interdisciplinary intellectual exploration of Black Girlhood Studies that forms part of a wider field-building infrastructure at Black Girl Stream C.I.C.



Black European Girlhood Studies Association (BEGSA)



BEGSA is a Black Girl Streams C.I.C. intervention stream where special interest streams (SIS) are created and facilitated by and for advancing Black Girlhood Studies, and Black women and girls' intellectual pursuits, critical mass building, capacity building/sharpening, collaborations and more.

Stay in touch at: info@blackgirlstreams.com



About the Symposium

The Black Girlhood in Europe Symposium: Black Girlhood at the Intersections: Health, Disability and Neurodivergence correlates with the launch of the Black British Girlhood – Health, Disability and Neurodivergence SIS.

“Black British Girlhood studies is an emerging field of study which seldom addresses or explicitly focuses on Black girls with health issues, disability/ies and/or neurodivergence – instead, Black Girlhood Studies predominately engages abled bodied, and neurotypical lenses, with the exception of mental health and wellbeing. There has been little attention and/or sources to address the breadth and depth of some of the wider interconnected social and related considerations. As such, Black Girlhood in Europe Symposium: Black Girlhood at the Intersections: Health, Disability and Neurodivergence is paradigm shifting work that addresses this under-served and invisibilised area of enquiry to invigorate, interrogate and advance the field” (Bushay, 2026).

Speakers



Taylor Carty

PhD Candidate, University of Glasgow

Taylor Carty is a history PhD researcher at the University of Glasgow. Her research explores the lives and experiences of enslaved and apprenticed Black girls in Barbados from 1750-1838. Combining two methodologies of a body-centred approach and 'reading along the bias's grain her research examines girlhood through a different lens producing a broader narrative of girlhood and gender in Barbadian Slave Society. She is passionate about education and museums and has worked as a consultant and curator at various heritage sites in the UK.

Abstract: *An Age Capable of Being Useful: The Ambiguity of Enslaved Black Girlhood, Archival Invisibility and Contemporary Connections*

The experiences, perceptions and maltreatment of Black European girls is a burgeoning area of interest within academia, with educators and activists continuing to highlight their mistreatment, pain and exclusion within the public sphere. To supplement such work, it is important to acknowledge that the understandings and contemporary experiences of Black European girlhood have a deep-rooted connection within Britain's colonial history. This paper explores the lives, resistance and definitions of enslaved Black girlhood within the nineteenth-century British Caribbean context. Through analysis of colonial travel narratives and newspaper advertisements, it illustrates the ambiguity and malleability of enslaved Black girlhood and the subsequent unique dangers it posed within their lives as a result. In doing so, this paper also considers the ways in which the historical (re)presentations of, and violence inflicted upon, Black girls may manifest within contemporary Black European Girlhood.

**Jade LB**

*Academic Mentor,
London Metropolitan University*

Jade LB has recently completed her Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education (PGCertHE). As an Academic Mentor, she's passionate about developing students' academic skills through formal teaching, interactive content creation, and collaborative engagement strategies. With experience in executive production for TV and Audio, she produced "The Noughties Podcast" for Amazon Music in 2022, exploring the journeys of pioneers like Lethal B, Chipmunk, Jocelyn Essien, and Tinchy Stryder. Additionally, Jade authored "Keisha the Sket," winner of the 2022 British Book Awards in the Discover Book of the Year category.

**Rianna Raymond-Williams**

PhD Candidate, Glasgow Caledonian University

Rianna Raymond-Williams is completing her PhD at Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) London. Motivated by a desire to address healthcare disparities, her research explores how Black Caribbean women experience sexual and reproductive healthcare (SRH) services in the UK. Rianna is a freelance journalist who has published content for Black Ballad, The Voice Newspaper, The Independent, and Galdem. Her work has sparked crucial conversations and influenced policy changes, demonstrating her commitment to advancing racial equity and health justice. Moving forward, Rianna aims to continue using her platform to amplify the voices of Black women and other marginalised voices

Abstract: *Reading Keisha Differently: Embodiment, Care, and Black British Girlhood*

This in-conversation segment uses Keisha the Sket as a critical and cultural lens to reframe Black girlhood, within Black British contexts. Keisha the Sket offers a rare archive of Black girlhood that sits outside respectability politics and mainstream narratives of victimhood or hypersexualisation. Our conversation argues that Keisha's story is not simply about sexual behaviour, but about how Black girls come to know, manage, and survive within their bodies under conditions of racialised surveillance, misogynoir, and structural neglect. Keisha's bodily choices, risk-taking, and self-narration can be read as responses to unmet emotional needs, constrained care systems, and a lack of safe spaces for vulnerability. Through this lens, embodiment becomes a site where mental health, trauma, desire, intersect, even when they are unnamed or pathologised by external observers. For Black Britishness, Keisha the Sket exposes how Black girls are shaped by distinctly British institutions such as schools, social services, youth culture, and media moral panics. It reveals how Black British identity is formed not only through culture and belonging, but through exclusion, misrecognition, and survival strategies that are often criminalised or erased. We ask what it means to centre Black girls as knowers of their own bodies and experiences, rather than objects of intervention. Ultimately, this conversation invites a reframing of Black girlhood that recognises embodiment as complex, adaptive, and deeply political. By listening differently to stories like Keisha's, we open up more expansive understandings of care, health, and Black British futures that are rooted in honesty rather than control.





Dr Silhouette Bushay

*Founder and Director, Black Girl Streams C.I.C.
Senior Lecturer and Course Lead, University of
East London*

Dr Silhouette Bushay is the Founder, Executive Director and Lead Scholar/Lead Researcher at Black Girl Streams C.I.C. an interdisciplinary field-building infrastructure, and home to the Black European Girlhood Studies Association (BEGSA).

Silhouette is an invited speaker who thrives in interdisciplinarity, and her research explores Black British girlhood in relation to the social sciences, education, health and wellbeing, music and culture, and various forms of pedagogies. Her doctoral work produced the core methodological and analytical frameworks/tools that continue to influence and/or inform her field-building infrastructure that she is creating, and doctoral research developments that are now being prepared for publication.

As an award-winning Senior Lecturer, and Course Leader at the University of East London, besides leading courses and modules, and contributing towards research culture through undergraduate and doctoral supervision, Dr Bushay has led and contributed towards race equity, decolonial and inclusion initiatives and programming across various institutions.

Abstract: *Rendered Invisible: Black British Girlhood, ME/CFS and Neurodivergence*

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME) (otherwise known as Myalgic Encephalomyelitis/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (ME/CFS)) is a devastating multisystem chronic illness that affects the lives of a sizable amount of people in the UK – it is also a misunderstood, misrepresented and underfunded area of research. Black girls with (BgwME) are missing from health and disability justice, racial justice, Black health and Black girlhood spaces and discourse. Therefore, this workshop employs composite storytelling and a reflexive analytical approach engaging with BgwME and differences, especially neurodivergence to bring to the fore structural absences for advocacy, policy, practice and research.

Participants will identify gaps, priorities and intersections across health, disability, education and social care and other considerations to collectively generate insights regarding BgwME including consideration to those who may also be neurodivergent (and have other differences) through guided and structured reflections. This collective reflexive session will contribute towards ongoing research and public engagement with this under-researched, underfunded, silenced, and neglected social group and area of research.



Abíódún 'Abbey' Abdul, SFHEA

*Academic English Skills Lecturer, Doctoral Researcher, Creative Writer, Performance Poet
University of Nottingham / Yorùbá Yonder*

Abíódún Abdul is an Academic English Skills Lecturer, Training Professional for Dyslexia Support, and Critical Creative PhD Researcher writing a memoir-polemic/autoethnographical series 'Stained Glass Eyes: Race, Family and Multiculturalism' capturing how racism affects Black lives in low-diversity regions, encompassing her schooling across Yorùbá-Nigeria, Scots-Britain and Japan (through a Japanese Government secondary-school scholarship). Book 1 is nearing publication and Book 2 comprises her doctorate funded by a UoN Faculty of Arts Scholarship. A regularly commissioned creative writer and performer of narrative non-fiction, short stories and poems, Abíódún was voted UNESCO Global Poetry Slam Champion 2022 by international panellists, going on to judge the 2023 global competition.

Abstract: *1st Day's Lesson*

1st Day's Lesson tells of a young child's yet unknown struggles with systemic bias in education, navigating prejudice school cultures also reflected in the wider school community. The poem takes us on the child's journey starting her first ever day of school, passing by evidence of the bigger societal problems that result from hostile learning environments beyond her young perception. The poetic journey ends as the child climbs the school steps which will determine her future prospects according to how she 'expands' her mind.

Abstract: *Horizon*

Horizon tells of a child's unexpected struggles with identity between her family's Yorùbá home and the wider British community. Loving and respecting all God's children is mismatched with the racist attitudes beyond her home causing deep distress, and eventually provoking unapologetic pushback. The poem then navigates to her realignment of identity, recalibrating her sense of belonging, and rediscovering God's love within her roots beyond the horizon.



Dr Tiffany Nelson

*Child, Community and Educational Psychologist
and Organisational Consultant, Marie Li
Psychology Ltd*

Dr Tiffany Nelson is a child, community, and educational psychologist and a proud neurodivergent practitioner. With neurodivergent children herself, she passionately advocates for social justice, neuro-affirming approaches, environments, and support within educational settings and organisations.

Her published research explores the lived experiences of Black autistic girls and the intersection of masking, race, and gender in UK education. Dr Nelson has contributed to a book on race and neurodiversity and other published articles. Alongside this, she works for local authorities, guest lectures, and serves as a research fellow at a university. She also engages in public speaking and podcasts.

Abstract: *Autistic Masking and Intersectionality: Black Autistic Girlhood in UK Schools*

Black autistic girls often navigate school spaces where their identities are misunderstood. This presentation presents published research that explores how autistic masking intersects with race and gender in the lives of Black girls within UK education. Autistic masking (strategies to hide neurodivergent traits) often becomes a survival mechanism in environments shaped by racism, ableism, and misogyny.

Through an intersectional lens informed by Disability Critical Race Theory and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, this research centres the voices of Black autistic girls, revealing how systemic biases and cultural expectations fracture belonging and misinterpret difference using negative stereotypes. These narratives challenge dominant discourses that pathologise Black girlhood and expose the mental health toll of masking. The session will share lived experiences and offer practical recommendations for educators and psychologists to create environments where Black autistic girls are accepted as they are, valued as holistically, without pressure to mask or change themselves to survive. These recommendations focus on culturally responsive, neuro-affirming practices that foster belonging and empower Black autistic girls to thrive authentically.



Eloise Ofori

Founder and Chief Executive, Anima Youth

Eloise Ofori is the Founder and Chief Executive of Anima Youth, a Black-led organisation she established over ten years ago to support girls and young women at risk of violence, exploitation, and abuse. Anima Youth delivers specialist community-based and residential services and works in partnership with Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services to support girls who do not meet statutory CAMHS thresholds. Under Eloise's leadership, Anima Youth opened the UK's first specialist supported accommodation for Black looked-after girls and care leavers and is recognised as a specialist provider commissioned by local authorities across social care, youth justice, and violence reduction services.

Abstract: *Seen as Risk, Not Need: Neurodivergence and Black Girls in Care*

This presentation reflects on the tension of working within safeguarding systems that prioritise risk management while attempting to meet the complex needs of Black girls experiencing neurodivergence, trauma, violence, and exploitation. Drawing on over ten years of commissioned practice, including leading the UK's first specialist supported accommodation for Black looked-after girls and care leavers, the presentation explores how girls are often seen primarily as "risk" rather than as young people with unmet regulation and mental health needs. While specialist, trauma-informed services strive to offer care and containment, legal and structural limits within supported accommodation can mean

that escalating need cannot always be safely held. The presentation introduces masked neurodivergence as a safeguarding blind spot and invites dialogue on how systems might better bridge the gap between care, capacity, and protection for Black girls.



Jumoke Abdullahi

Co-Founder, The Triple Cripples and Our Living Archives

Jumoke is a Nigerian-born British force of nature and co-founder of Our Living Archives and The Triple Cripples. These organisations exemplify her passion for social justice and focus on the impact that the media, and wider systems, have on multiply marginalised people, especially those racialised as Black. Jumoke is a writer and speaker, as well as a two-time fellow with the SFSU Emerge and AFRE Fellowships. She recently graduated from a Masters programme and has a wealth of advisory experience. When not busy speaking, writing, studying and advising, Jumoke is a professional baby girl, a Yorubaddie, if you will.

Abstract: *The Oracles at The Centre of A Universe: A Disabled Black Girl's Understanding of Media Representation of Disabled Black Womanhood, Self-Making and Community*

As a stereotypical 90s kid, I grew up in front of the television screen. My early fondness of and curiosity about the characters and their relationships did not stop me from being keenly aware that there always seemed to be something missing, or rather, someone. The focus of this presentation will be to explore and determine the impact that media representations of Black disabled womanhood have had on UK-based Black disabled women and gender-marginalised people. My research examines whether UK-based Black disabled women think there is a lack of media representation of Black disabled womanhood. Furthermore, if there is thought to be a lack, how this lack informs their sense of self and community. Through the exploration of gender, disability and race, it will be shown how Black disabled girlhood and Black disabled womanhood is represented through the media and experienced from either side of the screen.



Mackayla Ford

*LISS-DTP PhD Candidate, Queen Mary,
University of London*

Consultant, Poetic Inquiry in Decolonial Research

Mackayla Forde, aka 'RED MEDUSA' is a poetic-academic and researcher making unique contributions to academia, poetry, and public health. She is a LISS-DTP PhD candidate at Queen Mary University of London's Global Public Health Unit within the Wolfson Institute of Population Health. She also holds an MSc

in Global Health Law and Governance from Queen Mary University and a BSc (Hons) in Public Health and Health Promotion. Mackayla sits on the board of editors for the International Journal of Poetry Therapy, is an advisor on the board for the Black Arts Hub CIC in Medway, Kent, and sits on the steering committee for the UK's first Black Womens Health Manifesto. Her groundbreaking research is the first of its kind in British history, combining poetic inquiry with 'traditional' qualitative methods to explore Black women's relationship with poetry in managing anxiety and depression, particularly during the first wave of lockdowns of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Her research is underpinned by decolonial and Black feminist theory and aims to centre Black women's epistemologies to assist in amplifying Black women's voices and disrupting Eurocentric qualitative research methods.

Mackayla is a passionate advocate for Black women's health which is exemplified through her work as a poet; she uses her bold voice and undeniable presence to draw public attention to intersecting inequities in healthcare, and the structured, institutional and interpersonal violence that disproportionately targets and impacts Black women and people across the Diaspora. She is a strong advocate for the use of decolonial research methods and Black feminist epistemology as a means of addressing and dismantling the ongoing harms of coloniality present in current global public health policy, research and discourse. As a consultant in poetic inquiry for decolonial research, her practice extends to assisting organisations in centring the needs of the communities they serve through utilising poetry as a vehicle for personal and collective introspection and transformation. Outside of academia, Mackayla delivers poetry workshops to students in secondary schools and for organisations in and around London, encouraging women and girls to reclaim their agency and voices through verse. She lives with her two children in south London, and enjoys playing the harp, kora and drums.

Closing Reflection

Closing the symposium, Mackayla Forde will weave together reflections on disability, neurodivergence and health in Black girlhood through a decolonial lens grounded in the collective imaginary. Drawing on what has been heard, witnessed and learned throughout the day, she will consider how Black girls' sensory, cognitive and embodied realities demand more than accommodation; they call for structural transformation. Her address will centre self-definition, community care and epistemic authority as practices of resistance and world-making. Delegates will be invited to leave not only informed, but activated and encouraged to use their power to shape systems in ways that honour their lives as Black, disabled, neurodivergent girls and women.



Symposium *Programme*

10 AM **Registration**

10:30 AM **Welcome**
Dr Silhouette Bushay

10:40 AM **An Age Capable of Being Useful: The Ambiguity of Enslaved Black Girlhood, Archival Invisibility and Contemporary Connections**
Taylor Carty

10:50 AM **Reading Keisha Differently: Embodiment, Care, and Black British Girlhood**
Jade LB and Rianna Raymond-Williams

11:30 AM **Rendered Invisible: Black British Girlhood, ME/CFS and Neurodivergence**
Dr Silhouette Bushay

12 PM **1st Day's Lesson; and Horizon**
Abíòdún 'Abbey' Abdul

12:15 PM **Lunch**

01:15
PM

**Autistic Masking and Intersectionality:
Black Autistic Girlhood in UK Schools**

Dr Tiffany Nelson

01:30
PM

**Seen as Risk, Not Need: Neurodivergence
and Black Girls in Care**

Eloise Ofori

01:45
PM

**Meeting The Oracles at The Centre
of A Universe: A Disabled Black Girl's
Understanding of Media Representation
of Disabled Black Womanhood, Self-
Making and Community**

Jumoke Abdullahi

02 PM

Q&A / Discussion

02:20
PM

Closing Reflections

Mackayla Ford (RED MEDUSA)

02:30
PM

**Final Closing Comments, Announcements,
and Expressions of Gratitude**

Dr Silhouette Bushay

02:40
PM

Networking

CC.2.01

*All presentations, round tables,
performances, In Conversation and
workshops*

CC.1.09

*Quiet Room for delegates and speakers
alike between 12:30 PM - 2:30 PM*

Getting to *University of East London* (Stratford)

Public transport

The Stratford campus is a short walk from the Stratford, Stratford International and Maryland rail stations. It's also served by the Jubilee, Central and Elizabeth Underground lines, the DLR, and a busy bus station. Bus routes calling at Stratford station include: the 25, 69, 86, 104, 108, 158, 238, 241, 257, 262, 276, 308, 425, and the D8. You can also travel between our campuses using our free bus service.

Cycling

We have bike shelters and storage facilities on all of our campuses where you can safely and securely store your bicycle.

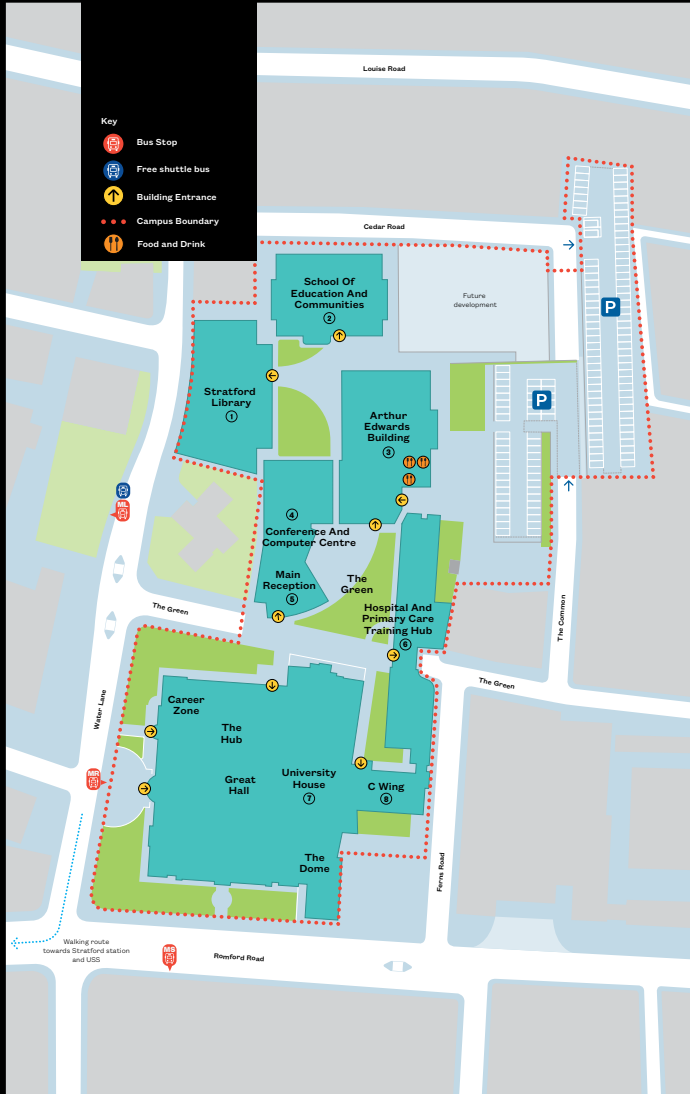
By road

The campus is accessible via the A12, A13 roads, and the A406.

Parking

Parking is not available for students during peak hours (8.00am-5.00pm, Monday-Friday), although Blue Badge holders can apply for a peak hours parking permit. All students can apply for an off-peak parking permit, allowing them to use the campus car parks at Docklands and Stratford outside these times.

UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON STRATFORD CAMPUS



BUILDING	LOCATION	BUILDING	LOCATION
Arthur Edwards Building	③	Main Reception	⑤
C Wing	⑧	School of Education and Communities	②
Conference and Computer Centre	④	Stratford Library	①
Hospital and Primary Care Training Hub	⑥	University House	⑦



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