

Abianda's statement in response to the Child Q case

Trigger warning

Over recent weeks the Abianda team have been fortunate to have training from [Listen Up](#) on intersectionality and safeguarding and, most recently, adultification. The wisdom and expertise of [Jahnine Davis](#), [Nick Marsh](#) and their team couldn't have been more timely.

Adultification, for those who aren't familiar, can be described as,

“A form of gendered racial bias against Black girls. This bias is a stereotype in which adults view Black girls as less innocent and more adult-like than their white peers, devoid of any individualized context. In other words, adultification bias is not an evaluation of maturity based on observation of an individual girl's behaviour, but instead is a presumption — a typology applied generally to Black girls”.

[Listening to Black Women and Girls: Lived Experiences of Adultification Bias](#) (JAMILIA J. BLAKE, PH.D. REBECCA EPSTEIN, J.D) 2019

The horrific treatment of a Black girl at the hands of police and education professionals in a Hackney school has been detailed in the [Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review of Child Q](#). Racism and adultification have been cited as the lenses through which adult decision making 'may' have been conducted. As a result, abuse and significant harm were caused.

Sadly the Abianda team is confronted by adultification and its impact on girls on a daily basis. We see Black young women's vulnerability and right to protection being overlooked by those in positions of power and in the services that are meant to support all citizens. We see Black girls being labelled and judged as more aggressive and more problematic than their white counterparts. We see Black girls and young women being seen as complicit in their own abuse and being profiled as perpetrators, reducing the likelihood of them receiving the welfare and safeguarding response that is proportionate and appropriate to their age, maturity and context. We also see a lack of cultural sensitivity or “[cultural competence](#)”, as highlighted by the team at [Power the Fight](#).

The traumatic impact of the case of Child Q has rippled through our team, from frontline practitioners, back office staff, all the way to our board. Our team, particularly our Black colleagues, are facing yet more rage, trauma and a sense of powerlessness - from which they have to collect themselves from and continue their daily lives.

Our work has such close proximity to trauma. Trauma that typically is a symptom of systemic inequality and failure of services to protect and support young women and girls sufficiently. Our team is confronted by the violation of human rights daily. Last year, one of our incredible practitioners explained to me that she was stepping back from 'frontline' work. She explained that complex case work has a 'shelf life'. There is only so long anyone can do this work for, before it becomes harmful, and there is only so much you can do to protect yourself despite your own, or the organisation's, wellbeing measures that are in place.



Parents in the team can't imagine what it would feel like to have their child return from school, so extremely distressed and traumatised, explaining their experiences at the hands of professionals (who are charged with protecting children). As a white mother of small children living in Hackney, it's not lost on me that my children are much less likely to live with the threat and fear of invasive and abusive treatment at the hands of the police, particularly in what should be a safe and protective environment of their school.

Supporting our team to be skilled and confident to challenge other professionals when they encounter the violation of the rights of children is one way we can channel our efforts and hold hope. Abianda's model of practice is rooted in principles of youth work and participation - an approach that forefronts the expertise of young people and focuses on tipping the balance of power in their favour. We are occupied with balancing a child's right to protection and their right to participate in decisions that affect their lives - this being a fundamental right of citizenship. We are rooted in a contextual safeguarding approach that recognises the different social spheres that young women and girls move in and between - within which they experience varying and volatile risks and varying degrees of power and agency. In all contexts we see policy and practise either helping or exacerbating their adverse experiences - often the latter.

In our support of young women, we regularly draw on the advocacy and legal support of [Just for Kids Law](#). We are comforted to know that they have been providing legal and advocacy support to Child Q and her family, and that they will fight with integrity for systemic change through their litigation.

We have many questions at Abianda. Not least:

- Why was there encouragement "to think carefully" about whether a decision should be made to carry out a local child safeguarding practice review (LCSPP)?
- Who was on the panel of decision makers to suggest that this case was not notifiable and did not meet the criteria for an LCSPP?
- Can racism be referred to as non-deliberate?
- Are we over policing our schools and the children in them? Should police presence be replaced by [social work](#) or youth work presence?
- Do schools have appropriate training in order that all staff understand the rights of children and concepts of adultification?
- To what extent are leaders in schools taking up their responsibility to ensure all staff are equipped and confident to support the rights of children, even in the face of law enforcement decision making?
- How do we want to use our voice at Abianda to influence and further address the normalised inequality and harm that young women and girls experience on a daily basis?

We know at Abianda, we have a lot more to do to recognise and respond appropriately to the different intersections of young people's identity in our own work.

For now, I speak for my team in sending love and solidarity to Child Q and her family. To all Black girls whose rights to protection are overridden on a daily basis with no one noticing, we will keep working to highlight this injustice and to use our voice to influence systems change in support of you.

