

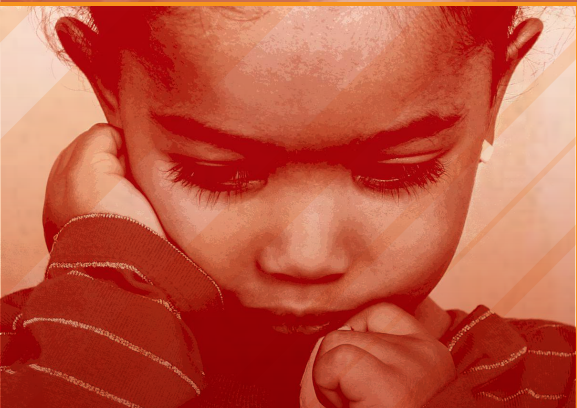


Center for Intersectionality
and Social Policy Studies



AFRICAN AMERICAN
POLICY FORUM

BLACK GIRLS MATTER: PUSHED OUT, OVERPOLICED AND UNDERPROTECTED





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For girls, as with boys, the failure to receive a high school diploma often places individuals on a pathway to low-wage work, unemployment, and incarceration. The imposition of harsh disciplinary policies in public schools is a well-known risk factor for stunted educational opportunities for Black and Latino boys. Such punishments also negatively affect their female counterparts, as do other conditions in zero-tolerance schools. Yet, the existing research, data, and public policy debates often fail to address the degree to which girls face risks that are both similar to and different from those faced by boys.

This silence about at-risk girls is multidimensional and cross-institutional. The risks that Black and other girls of color confront rarely receive the full attention of researchers, advocates, policy makers, and funders. As a result, many educators, activists, and community members remain underinformed about the consequences of punitive school policies on girls as well as the distinctly gendered dynamics of zero-tolerance environments that limit their educational achievements. *Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Overpoliced, and Underprotected* endeavors to shine a spotlight on the various factors that direct girls of color down dead-end streets while obscuring their vulnerabilities.

KEY OBSERVATIONS

Any effort to understand and intervene in the conditions confronting girls of color requires researchers, advocates, and stakeholders to listen to them and to document their stories. Moreover, data must be collected and analyzed to assess the gender disparities that exist within same-race cohorts as well as the racial disparities that exist within same-gender cohorts. If the challenges facing girls of color are to be addressed, then research and policy frameworks must move beyond the notion that all of the youth of color who are in crisis are boys, and that the concerns of white girls are indistinguishable from those of girls of color.

The research reflected in this report was designed to elevate the voices of Black girls and other girls of color affected by punitive policies so as to deepen our understanding of the ways they experience inhospitable educational environments and to produce recommendations designed to eliminate those inequities. Towards this end, the Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies (CISPS) conducted focus groups and stakeholder interviews in Boston and New York City between September 2012 and August 2013. An analysis of reported data on school discipline was undertaken by the African American Policy Forum (AAPF) with the support of analysts at UCLA Law School. A summary of observations appears below:

1

IN NEW YORK AND BOSTON, BLACK BOYS AND GIRLS WERE SUBJECT TO LARGER ACHIEVEMENT GAPS AND HARSHER FORMS OF DISCIPLINE THAN THEIR WHITE COUNTERPARTS.

On some measures, the relative magnitude of the racial disparity between girls is greater than the disparity between boys.

2

AT-RISK YOUNG WOMEN DESCRIBE ZERO-TOLERANCE SCHOOLS AS CHAOTIC ENVIRONMENTS IN WHICH DISCIPLINE IS PRIORITIZED OVER EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT.

Participants indicated that zero-tolerance environments are neither safe nor conducive to learning. On the contrary, the emphasis on discipline leads many girls to become disengaged from the learning process and from school altogether.

3

INCREASED LEVELS OF LAW ENFORCEMENT AND SECURITY PERSONNEL WITHIN SCHOOLS SOMETIMES MAKE GIRLS FEEL LESS SAFE AND LESS LIKELY TO ATTEND SCHOOL.

Some of the young women reported that their discomfort with security rituals such as passing through metal detectors was so great that they were dissuaded from coming to school at all.

4

GIRLS' ATTACHMENT AND SENSE OF BELONGING IN SCHOOL CAN BE UNDERMINED IF THEIR ACHIEVEMENTS ARE OVERLOOKED OR UNDERVALUED.

Research suggests that Black girls sometimes get less attention than their male counterparts early in their school careers because they are perceived to be more socially mature and self-reliant. The lack of attention can lead to “benign neglect” that may diminish school attachment in both high- and moderate-achieving female students.

5

PUNITIVE RATHER THAN RESTORATIVE RESPONSES TO CONFLICT CONTRIBUTES TO THE SEPARATION OF GIRLS FROM SCHOOL AND TO THEIR DISPROPORTIONATE INVOLVEMENT IN THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM.

Several participants indicated that they were suspended or expelled – and some even prosecuted – for fighting in school. Conflicts that might have been better addressed through counseling, or other conflict resolution strategies were instead referred to the juvenile justice system.

6

THE FAILURE OF SCHOOLS TO INTERVENE IN SITUATIONS INVOLVING THE SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND BULLYING OF GIRLS CONTRIBUTES TO THEIR INSECURITY AT SCHOOL.

Stakeholders and participants noted that a heavy emphasis on discipline does little to curb harassing behavior in schools. Instead zero-tolerance policies may exacerbate the vulnerability of girls to harassing behavior because it penalizes them for defending themselves against such acts.

**7****GIRLS SOMETIMES RESORT TO “ACTING OUT” WHEN THEIR COUNSELING NEEDS ARE OVERLOOKED OR DISREGARDED.**

In environments in which discipline is emphasized over counseling, girls who struggle with trauma and other unmet needs may come to the attention of school personnel only when their behavior leads to punishable offenses.

8**SCHOOL-AGE BLACK GIRLS EXPERIENCE A HIGH INCIDENCE OF INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE.**

Among the factors that disrupted some of the participants’ ability to finish school was trauma associated with sexual assault and other forms of violence.

9**BLACK AND LATINA GIRLS ARE OFTEN BURDENED WITH FAMILIAL OBLIGATIONS THAT UNDERMINE THEIR CAPACITY TO ACHIEVE THEIR ACADEMIC GOALS.**

Many stakeholders noted that girls were much more likely to be faced with caretaking responsibilities that compromised their ability to pursue their academic goals than their male counterparts.

10**PREGNANCY AND PARENTING MAKE IT DIFFICULT FOR GIRLS TO ENGAGE FULLY IN SCHOOL.**

Pregnant girls are burdened by early parenthood in ways that boys are not. They are segregated from their peers and stigmatized in a manner that may undermine their attachment to school.

RECOMMENDATION

RECOMMENDATIONS

Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Overpoliced, and Underprotected calls for the development of policies and programmatic interventions that address the challenges facing Black girls and other girls of color. Our recommendations – developed from interviews with young women directly affected by contemporary school policies and with stakeholders invested in their futures – are as follows:

- **EXPAND EXISTING OPPORTUNITIES TO ENSURE THE INCLUSION OF BLACK GIRLS AND OTHER GIRLS OF COLOR IN POLICY RESEARCH, ADVOCACY, AND PROGRAMMATIC INTERVENTIONS.**
 - **ENSURE AN EQUITABLE APPROACH TO FUNDING THAT SUPPORTS THE NEEDS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS AS WELL AS THOSE OF MEN AND BOYS.**
 - **DEVELOP WAYS TO HELP GIRLS FEEL SAFE WITHOUT AN OVERRELIANCE ON PUNITIVE INTERVENTIONS.**
 - **DEVELOP ROBUST PROTOCOLS THAT ENSURE THAT SCHOOL PERSONNEL ENFORCE ALL STUDENTS' RIGHTS TO LEARN IN AN ENVIRONMENT FREE OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND BULLYING.**
 - **REVIEW AND REVISE POLICIES THAT FUNNEL GIRLS INTO THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM.**
 - **DEVISE PROGRAMS THAT IDENTIFY THE SIGNS OF SEXUAL VICTIMIZATION IN ORDER TO SUPPORT GIRLS WHO HAVE BEEN TRAUMATIZED BY VIOLENCE.**
 - **ADVANCE AND EXPAND PROGRAMS THAT SUPPORT GIRLS WHO ARE PREGNANT, PARENTING, OR OTHERWISE ASSUMING SIGNIFICANT FAMILIAL RESPONSIBILITIES.**
 - **URGE THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND OTHER INFORMATION GATHERING INSTITUTIONS TO TAKE THE NECESSARY STEPS TO REFINE STATISTICAL REPORTING ON DISCIPLINARY MATTERS WHILE DISAGGREGATING ACHIEVEMENT DATA ALONG RACIAL AND GENDER LINES.**
 - **DEVELOP THE PUBLIC WILL TO ADDRESS THE CHALLENGES FACING BLACK GIRLS AND OTHER GIRLS OF COLOR THROUGH ELEVATING THEIR EXPERIENCES AND ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS TO BECOME ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN THEIR WELFARE.**
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