SEE HER SUCCEED: FOSTERING INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENTS FOR GIRLS OF COLOR IN SCHOOLS

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Presenter Information
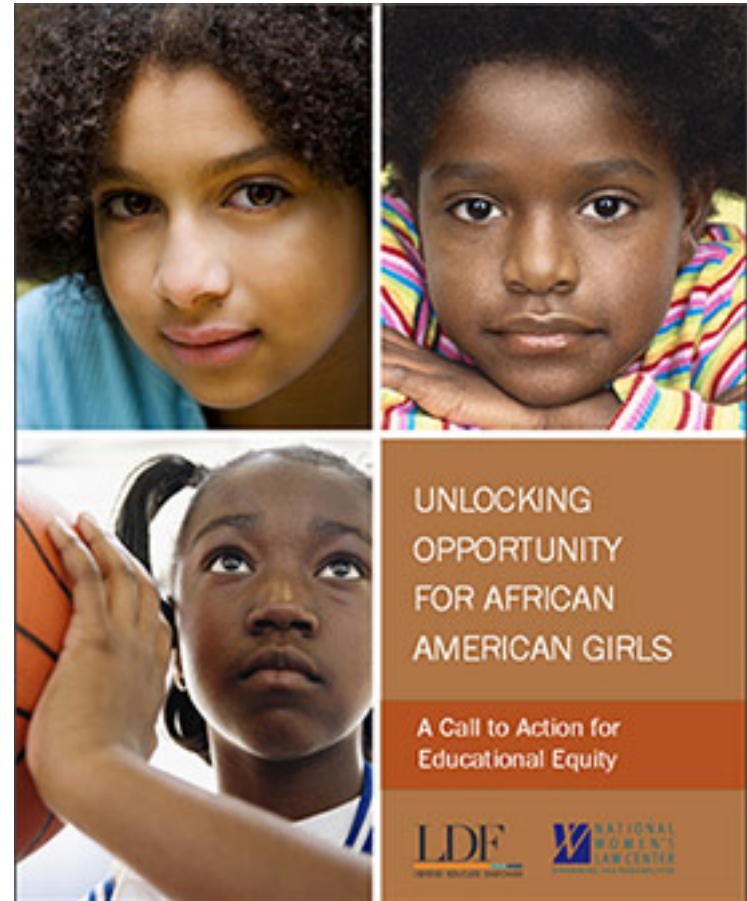
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Why Focus on Black Girls?

- African American girls are faring worse than the national average for girls on almost every measure of academic achievement.

- But many assume that they're doing just fine.

- Significant race- and gender-based barriers keep African American girls from achieving successful educational and economic outcomes.

Why Focus on Black Girls?

- These barriers play out in lower graduation rates in high school and college.

- Educational barriers leave many African American girls stuck in the "School-to-Poverty Pathway."

  - Poor educational opportunities result in limited job prospects, concentration in low-wage work, and disproportionate representation among those in poverty.

Outline for Today's Webinar

- Race and Gender Stereotypes

- Disproportionate Discipline & School Push Out

- Pervasive sexual harassment and violence

- Discrimination against pregnant and parenting students

- Limited access to STEM, athletics and other extracurricular activities

- Read more at nwlc.org/unlockingopportunity.

Stereotypes

How Race + Gender Affects Self-Esteem and the Perception of African American Girls

Race & Gender Stereotypes

- There's a strong link between positive self-esteem and better educational outcomes.
  - E.g., in a recent New York study, girls who described themselves as "Afrocentric" or had strong ties to their racial identity were more likely to be happy and get good grades.

- However, studies like the Doll Test show that negative racial stereotypes begin affecting African American children from a young age.

Race & Gender Stereotypes

- Race and gender stereotypes not only hurt self-esteem, but also affect how Black female students are perceived.
  - E.g., stereotypical images of Black and Latina women as loud, confrontational, assertive, and provocative contrast with "traditional" notions of femininity, which require girls to be passive and modest.

- These negative perceptions can lead to assumptions that African American girls need greater social correction and increased discipline.
  - African American girls are at greater risk than other girls of being disciplined for dress code violations or talking back to teachers, as well as for less severe behaviors, like chewing gum or defiance.

- African American girls that are assertive are at greater risk for inequitable discipline.

Combatting the Effect of Stereotypes on Self-Esteem: Support Leadership Development

□ Develop programs to promote leadership, so that African American girls know they can achieve their goals and grow to be successful women.
  - ◻ Mentoring programs
  - ◻ Field trips
  - ◻ Guest speakers

□ Provide training in conflict resolution, healthy communication, and problem-solving skills.

□ Create meaningful leadership opportunities for African American girls.

□ Develop culturally-inclusive curricula.

Discipline

How Disproportionate and Subjective Disciplinary Practices Exclude African American Girls from School

Unfair & Excessive Discipline

- African American girls are suspended from school at a rate six times the rate of white girls and higher than the rate of most boys.

- African American girls are also routinely punished more harshly than white girls for the same, minor subjective offenses, like "disobedience" or "disruptive behavior."

Discipline Sanction Rates per 100 Female Students

Source: Jamilia J. Blake, Bettie Ray Butler & Charlotte Danielle Smith, *Challenging Middle Class Notions of Femininity: The Cause for Black Females' Disproportionate Suspension Rates*, in CLOSING THE SCHOOL DISCIPLINE GAP: RESEARCH TO PRACTICE (Daniel Losen ed., forthcoming).
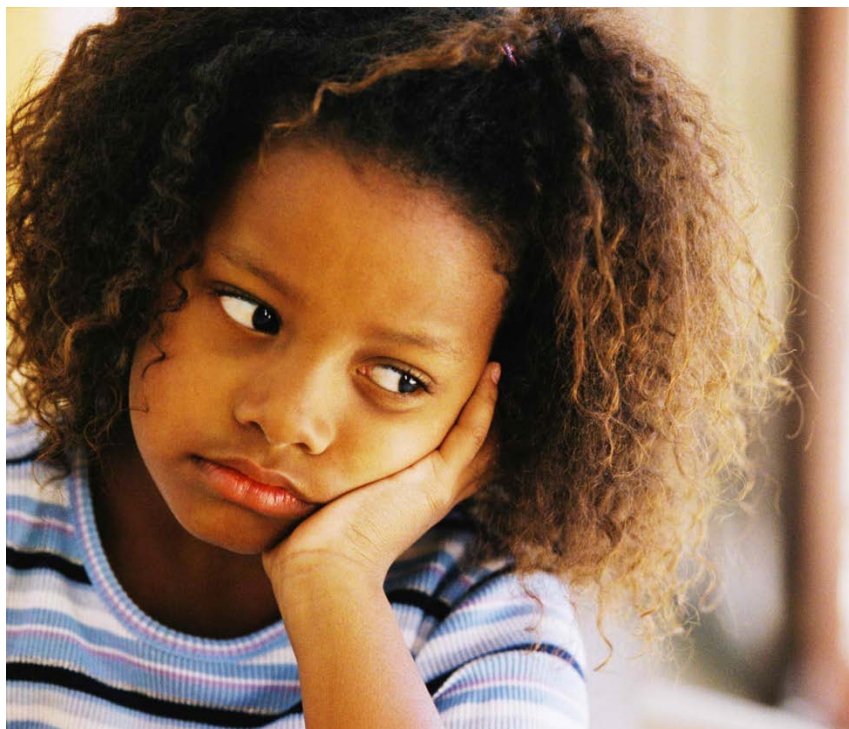
Unfair & Excessive Discipline

- Stereotypes that African American women are aggressive may lead to implicit bias in how Black female students are viewed
    - School personnel may be unaware that they are more likely to penalize African American girls for conduct that defies stereotypes about what is appropriate "feminine" behavior.

- Overly harsh responses to "defiant" behavior fails to consider the underlying causes of the conduct, which for many girls include exposure to trauma, violence, abuse, or other toxic stress.

Reducing Unfair & Excessive Discipline

- Teachers and administrators need implicit gender and racial bias training to root out discipline practices that may be based on stereotypes.

- Ensure that training includes recognizing signs of trauma that may be underlying perceived "defiant" or "disrespectful" behavior.

- Collect and report data segmented by race and sex on disciplinary referrals (including specific reasons for discipline).

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Sexual Violence & Trauma

How Pervasive Harassment Undermines Positive Educational Experiences

Sexual Harassment & Violence

- □ African American & Latina women and girls:
  - ▫ Experience higher rates of sexual violence and intimate partner violence than white women and girls;
  - ▫ Report higher rates of sexual harassment at school; and
  - ▫ Are disproportionately likely to be victims of sex trafficking—especially in areas of concentrated poverty.
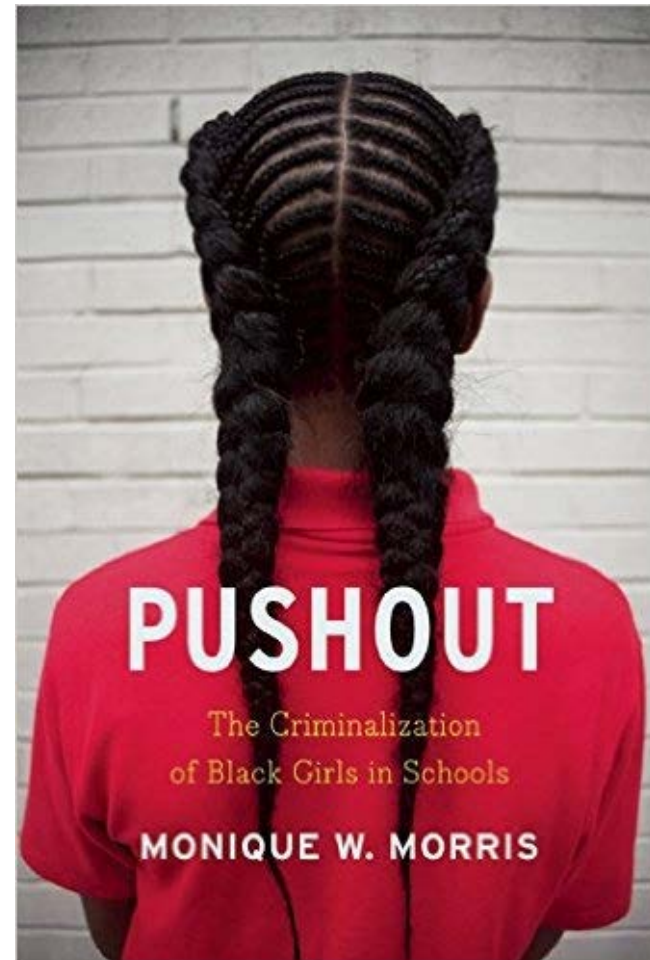
- □ These higher incidences of sexual harassment and trauma have a significant impact on educational outcomes, especially when assaults or harassment take place at school.

- □ Unfortunately, girls who seek help often encounter unsupportive responses, such as:
  - ▫ Blame for the harassment,
  - ▫ Failing to consider how the school climate contributes to harassment, and
  - ▫ Punishment for fighting back against their harassers.

A Real Life Scenario

"I was in the 5th grade, and this boy, he kept spitting spitballs through a straw at me while we was [sic] taking a test. I told the teacher, and he told him to stop; but of course, he didn't. He kept doing it. So, I got up and I yelled at him, and he punched me in my face, like in my eye…My eye was swollen and everything…I don't even remember if I fought him, 'cause that's just how it ended, I think. But I remember that we both got suspended, and I was like, why did I get suspended? I was like, a victim…"

Reducing Gender-based Bullying, Harassment & Violence

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EXPANDING THE POSSIBILITIES

□ Adopt strong anti-harassment policies and provide everyone with mandatory, age-appropriate training on harassment, violence & healthy relationships.

□ Collect data on incidents of harassment and violence (while maintaining student privacy).

□ Connect victims with counseling and other trauma-informed supports.

Case Studies: Oakland & Northern Virginia Sex Trafficking Prevention Programs

- The Oakland Unified School District offers a curriculum and mentoring program to help prevent sex trafficking starting in 7th grade, which focuses on:
  - Self-esteem,
  - Dangers of running away from home,
  - Sexual abuse, and
  - Healthy relationships.

- Educators at Herndon High School in VA hosted a forum on child sex trafficking in a suburb where gang members lure high school girls into the sex trade.
  - The event also highlighted how traffickers use social media to lure girls.

Pregnant & Parenting Students

How Pregnant and Parenting Teens Are Often Pushed Out of School

Discrimination against Pregnant & Parenting Teens

- About 4 in 10 African American women & one-third of Latinas will become pregnant before they turn 20.
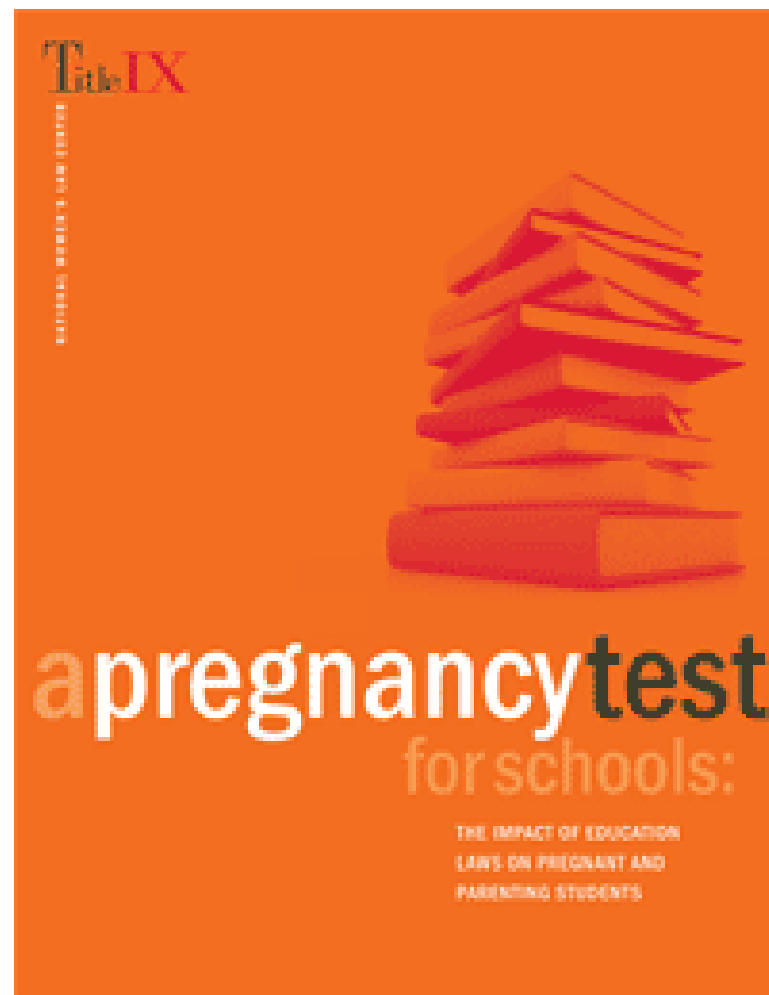
- Work demands, childcare responsibilities, and stigmatization can prevent young mothers from realizing educational success.
  - Only 51% of young mothers get a high school diploma by age 22 compared to 89% of women who don't have children in their teen years.

- Unlawful school discriminatory policies, like refusing to excuse pregnancy-related absences, also impede teen mothers' success.

Most Common Forms of Discrimination against Pregnant & Parenting Students

- Environment of discouragement

- Punitive absence policies

- The unequal alternative

- Inaccessible homebound services

- nwlc.org/issue/pregnant-parenting-students

Helping Pregnant & Parenting Teens Succeed

□ Collect data to track and improve outcomes for pregnant and parenting students.

□ Eliminate barriers that push out pregnant and parenting students, including harassment and discriminatory attendance policies.

□ Provide academic support and flexibility so teen parents stay engaged and on track for graduation.

Access to STEM & Extracurricular Activities

How Limited Access to Opportunities in Science, Mathematics, and Athletics Limit Achievement for African American Girls

Two Root Causes of Low Numbers of African American Girls in STEM Classes

Lack of Course Offerings in High-Minority Schools

- Only 57% of Black high school students have access to the full range of math & science offerings in their schools, compared to 71% of white high school students.

- Teachers in high-minority, high-poverty schools are less likely to have the resources necessary for instruction.

Stereotypes that Discourage Black Girls from Pursuing STEM Offerings

- Studies show that educators tend to steer African American girls to classes that promote dialogue, instead of science and math courses.

- African American girls who are steered away from math and science in high school later face limited collegiate & professional opportunities in these fields.

Limited Access to Sports & Extracurricular Activities

- Young women who play sports are more likely to graduate from high school, have higher grades, and score higher on standardized tests.

- Participation in athletics also results in positive health and emotional outcomes, such as a lower risk of obesity, higher levels of self-esteem, and lower rates of sexual activity and pregnancy.

- Financial barriers often impede girls from high-poverty schools with fewer resources from participating in sports and other extracurricular activities.
    - For example, transportation for afterschool programs often presents an insurmountable problem for students who don't live within walking distance.

Finishing Last: An NWLC Report on Girls of Color & School Sports

Key Findings:

- ❑ 42 percent of U.S. public high schools are 90 percent or more white, or over 90 percent students of color.

- ❑ 40 percent of heavily minority high schools have large female opportunity gaps compared to 16 percent of heavily white schools.

- ❑ Read more: nwlc.org/finishinglast

Improving STEM Opportunities & Achievement for African American Girls

- Offer opportunities (e.g., mentoring programs, field trips) to increase girls' exposure to female STEM professionals.

- Offer hands-on learning opportunities and tutoring during school, after school, and over the summer.

- Train educators to recognize and overcome implicit bias so they don't subconsciously discourage STEM participation for African American girls.

Encouraging Participation in Sports & Other Extracurricular Activities

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- Engage in outreach & recruitment to encourage African American girls to participate in sports and other extracurriculars in which they historically have been underrepresented.

- Provide financial and other supports, such as transportation, to address barriers that limit African American girls' access to activities.

What We Covered Today

- ☐ Race and Gender Stereotypes
- ☐ Disproportionate discipline that pushes African American girls out of school
- ☐ Pervasive sexual harassment and violence
- ☐ Discrimination against pregnant and parenting students
- ☐ Limited access to STEM, athletics and other extracurricular activities

- ☐ Read more at nwlc.org/unlockingopportunity.

Questions & Answers

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