Morris, M. W. (2018). *Pushout: The criminalization of Black girls in schools.* New York: New Press.

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Student discipline continues to be a major concern among education stakeholders in the 21st century. The likelihood that students of color experience out-of-school exclusionary discipline is three times greater than the rate for their White male counterparts, according to the most recent data provided by the U.S. Department of Education's School Climate and Discipline data (2011-2012). However, much of what we know about student discipline outcomes for students of color is informed by research on Black males (Blake, Butler, Lewis, & Darensbourg, 2011; Dinkes, Cataldi, & Lin-Kelly, 2007; Gregory, Skiba, Noguera, 2010; Losen & Skiba, 2010; Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Townsend, 2000; Wallace, Wallace, Goodkind, & Bachman, 2008). Black female students have received less attention in conversations about discipline. They have been largely ignored in discussions about appropriate solutions that schools and communities might implement to support this vulnerable population.

   The literature holds that there are negative consequences of exclusionary practices for
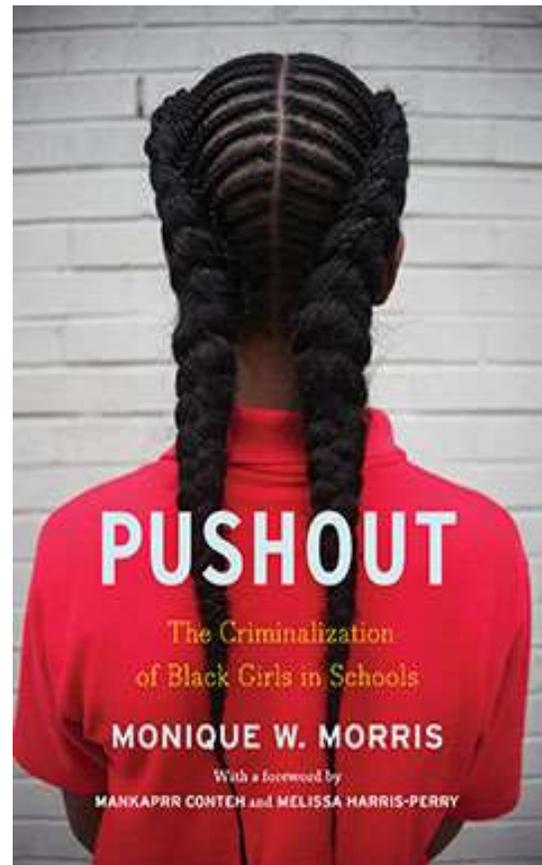
students and communities. These practices, initiated by federal zero-tolerance legislation, continue to be of growing concern. In *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools,* Monique Morris concedes that some districts have made inroads to review and restructure discipline practices so social justice is at the center. These are noteworthy efforts; but, according to Morris, more should be done to provide long-term sustainable answers. School districts have a social, professional, and moral obligation to keep students safe. However, efforts should be made to assess how those practices may be detrimental to the growth and development of all their students. The revelations in *Pushout* expose a very different reality for Black girls in U.S. detention facilities.

Pushout seeks to fill this void for practitioners, parents, and community members. Using powerful narratives and first-hand accounts, Morris demonstrates how harsh school discipline and disengaging instructional practices have negatively impacted Black girls in American school systems. A culmination of nearly three years of research, *Pushout* imparts wisdom from those with the richest experiences: Black girls in juvenile detention centers who have been disenfranchised educationally. Each girl interviewed by Morris shared a profoundly tragic story of how her school experiences did little to alleviate her life circumstances, and furthermore, provided the catalyst for disengagement.

According to Morris, *pushout* is defined as "beliefs, policies, and actions that degrade and marginalize both their learning and their humanity, leading to conditions that push them out of schools and render them vulnerable to even more harm" (p. 8). Morris maintains that Black girls experience school discipline both similarly and separately from Black boys. Gender, she explains, is significant. Because the intersectionality of gender and race for Black females who experience suspension or expulsion has not

been thoroughly explored, the education community continues to lack the appropriate response to their misbehavior.

Moreover, the intersection of poverty, sexual violence, and institutional racism create unique challenges. National statistics note 35% of Black girls under the age of 18 experience poverty, 40% are victims of sex abuse, and 18.9% surpass their White and Latina counterparts for personal offenses that lead to incarceration (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012; U.S. Department of Commerce, 2013). Each statistic represents compounding threats to the livelihood and well-being of Black girls, especially those of school age. Morris forces her readers to contend with these and other heartbreaking statistics that support the need for a more aggressive response to the plight of Black girls.

Within the first few pages of *Pushout*, the author powerfully retells of the stories of the arrests of Dajerria Becton in 2015, Ashlynn Avery and Kiera Wilmot in 2013, and Marche` Taylor in 2008. These arrests, among many others, were relatively unnoticed by media outlets. By detailing the lack of public knowledge concerning their violent arrests, the author corroborates the explosive truth that the treatment of Black girls has long been ignored and must be brought into collective consciousness. Morris's introduction does much to explore the "unique pathways" experienced by Black girls that lead them to the school-to-prison pipeline so frequently traversed by Black males.

Throughout the book, Morris artistically interweaves the voices of Black girls and sobering statistics. The stories of girls like Francine, who desires that teachers understand the power of mutual respect, and Diamond, whose involvement in sex work kept her out of school, encourage personal and professional reflection for educators who may not have been cognizant of the relationship between a Black girl's behavior and her life circumstances. Moreover, the

complicity of educational actors remains a constant refrain, forcing readers to consume the text in bite-sized servings, as one needs to pause, reflect, and re-read with the continual realization of the actual lives led by these girls. Reading *Pushout* is not an undertaking for those with a colorblind and gender-neutral view of the 21st century classroom. This view is disrupted repeatedly, leaving readers to confront the realities.

The main text concludes with the most promising aspect of public education often underutilized and ignored: relationships. Morris argues that restoring relationships between Black girls, their teachers, and schools might lead to better learning outcomes. While the author's suggestions are not groundbreaking, they bear repeating. Importantly, in reframing the way that schools support Black girls, Morris suggests, "Every intervention that schools, communities, and lawmakers design for our girls has to recognize that gender expression and identity – and sexual expression and identity – must figure prominently in order to support their well-being" (p. 180).

Morris shares conversation starters, resources, and restorative practices in two appendices with the intent of making *Pushout* not just a testimonial, but also professional guidebook for parents, educators, and community members who have the potential to touch the lives of Black girls. Appendix A is a question-and-answer section for girls, parents, community members, and educators. Divided into three sections, the appendix addresses what she believes are the most pressing issues in supporting Black girls who have not experienced positive education outcomes. In the first section of Appendix A Morris addresses girls directly, the first time in the text, by attempting to answer questions connected to incidents previously mentioned in the book. By using Black girls' vernacular, the questions approach such topics as responding to challenging teacher

relationships to bullying to low self-esteem. While these questions are not an exhaustive list of concerns, they have the potential to produce meaningful conversations between girls and responsible adults. However, because the author has refrained from speaking to girls earlier in the book, the questions may be placed too late in the text for girls to access.

A second appendix appears just as beneficial in that it outlines the benefits and shortcomings of Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) and Restorative Justice. It is important to note that many educators will find the discussion around PBIS familiar as these structures are often present, in some form, in most public schools. However, Restorative Justice is not as prevalent, and some educators find it does not provide the punitive feel some desire. It might have been useful, however, for Morris to spend time exploring less well-known programs or approaches since the overarching premise of the text is to explore a little known issue. Areas for future research could include targeted interventions, which might be replicated in other school contexts.

Morris should be praised for her scholarly and respectful approach to her research topic and subjects. Through the lens of critical race theory, she is able to bring an ignored population of young women to the forefront of the school discipline conversation. Yet, it should be mentioned, readers may falsely conclude that these extreme cases are not representative of Black girls in mainstream settings or that these girls cannot be considered credible in light of their past transgressions. I would admonish readers to set aside these misgivings and approach the text with a willingness to understand and to challenge their beliefs. As education and community stakeholders, we have a shared accountability to all children. None of them is disposable. And, none of them should be pushed out.

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