

PUSHOUT

THE CRIMINALIZATION OF BLACK GIRLS IN SCHOOLS

DISCUSSION GUIDE

FOR GENERAL AUDIENCE

DISCUSSION GUIDE BY

REBECCA C. GROSS, EDUCATOR

Preface

It is our sincerest hope that we foster a deeper appreciation and understanding of Black girls in our society. That by heightening awareness of the systemic challenges they face during their youth, we can ameliorate how they are unfairly perceived and treated in school.

We believe that educators can play a large role in spearheading necessary conversations about bias, with students - talks that allow for the critical analysis of perception, inequitable systems and policies. By doing so we can begin to shift entrenched attitudes and antiquated formulas, leading to positive change in the lives of Black girls and all of us.

Please use this guide as a conversation framework from which to draw upon after screening PUSHOUT. For your convenience, the guide is broken into chapters associated with the film.

SUMMARY OF THE FILM “PUSHOUT”

PUSHOUT: THE CRIMINALIZATION OF BLACK GIRLS IN SCHOOLS is a feature length documentary that takes a deep dive into the lives of Black girls and the practices, cultural beliefs and policies that disrupts one of the most important factors in girls’ lives – education.

The documentary underscores the challenges Black girls face with insight from experts across the country who have worked extensively in the field of social justice, gender equality and educational equity. These experts give context to the crisis and provide a roadmap for how our educational system and those who interact with Black girls can provide a positive rather than punitive response to behaviors that are often misunderstood or mis-represented.

While the challenges that facilitate a school-to-prison pipeline disproportionately impacting Black boys in this country have garnered national attention, absent from that conversation was how girls of color, particularly Black girls, are being impacted. **PUSHOUT** addresses that crisis.

The documentary focuses on conditions and practices that Black girls face, emphasizing first-person narratives from girls. We hear about experiences that began for them when they were as young as the age of seven and as old as 19. They describe navigating a society that often marginalizes and dismisses them.

At the same time the documentary lays out how adults and policy makers can address the needs of these young girls and women with positive responses that can short circuit the pervasive over-punishment of Black girls.

THE DOCUMENTARY DOES THE FOLLOWING:

- 1 Profiles Black girls as they address how school-based practices have hindered, but also helped them navigate their lives.
- 2 Looks at the relevance of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and how childhood trauma among Black girls are adultified in schools and beyond.
- 3 Examines how awareness of childhood trauma can help girls redirect their lives.
- 4 Examines how school officials – including principals and teachers can find new pathways for discipline that concentrate on the reasons behind certain behaviors rather than punishing them.
- 5 Profiles schools and organizations that are making a difference in Black girls lives –including African American Female Excellence (Oakland Unified School District), Columbus City Preparatory School for Girls (Columbus, Ohio), National Crittendon (Portland, Oregon), S.O.U.L. Sisters Leadership Collective (Miami, Florida), and EMERGE (Alameda County, California). All discuss alternatives to suspensions and expulsions, inculcating community-based and more culturally appropriate responses.
- 6 Explains how “adultification” of Black girls – seeing them as older and more sexually mature than they really are – impacts the response of adults. This in-turn looks at how the development of the adolescent brain influences young people’s ability to make rational and positive decisions.
- 7 Profiles teachers, mentors, judges and principals who have found new ways of working with Black girls that emphasize their inherent value and dignity.

LET’S BEGIN THE CONVERSATION

FOR TEACHER REFERENCE

ENDURING UNDERSTANDING	ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS
<p>Perception of self and perception of others influences the relationships and interaction amongst people in their communities.</p> <hr/> <p>Culturally-responsive and inclusive curriculum address the social, emotional, and academic needs of students.</p>	<p>How can understanding Black girlhood change the structure of traditional education?</p> <hr/> <p>What is the difference between acknowledging vs. addressing the influence of racial bias in education?</p>

<p>RUN TIME</p> <p>1:15</p>	<p>NOTE</p> <p>The documentary runs 1 hour and 15 minutes. Ideally, we recommend an additional 60 minutes for discussion.</p>
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Trigger Warning

Please note that this documentary examines issues that may elicit an emotional response from viewers. Some of the girls' traumatic experiences include bullying, depression, and prostitution. There is also a swear word at **56:56** of the documentary.

GLOSSARY

ACEs	The Adverse Childhood Experience questionnaire is used to measure childhood trauma. The evaluation consists of ten questions that fall under the three types of ACEs: abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction.
Adultification	The assignment of adult norms towards a child.
Criminalization	To make an activity illegal or a violation of law. Also, to treat someone or their behaviors as "criminal" if these are not an actual violation of law.
Racialized gender bias	bias or discriminatory treatment on the basis of race and gender.
School-to-confinement pathways/PUSHOUT	The policies, practices, conditions and prevailing conscious that facilitates student contact with the juvenile court or criminal legal system.

BEFORE SCREENING THE FILM

NOTE

Prior to viewing the film in class it is highly recommended that an introductory lesson be taught. Feel free to incorporate all or some of the questions listed below in your lesson.

1 Define the following in your own words:

Adultification:

Racial Bias:

Racialized Gender Bias:

1b After learning the formal definition of each term, how might they apply to the title of the film?

2 As a student, how would you describe the role of teacher-student relationships in your development? What factors influence the success or failure of teacher-student relationships?

2b What outside influences impact the ability for students, teachers, and staff to build meaningful relationships?

FILM BREAKDOWN AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

NOTE The discussion questions are intended for use after watching the film. They have been divided by chapter of the film.

OPENING OF DOCUMENTARY

START TIME	00:00
FEATURED	Samaya, Emma, Ariana, Terriana, Kiara Jean
INTERVIEW(S)	Monique W. Morris, EdD
THEMES	Education, Self-Image
SUMMARY	Film's purpose and featured students are introduced. Students describe their feelings on what it means to be a Black girl. The history of public education in the Black community and its relation to inequity is also summarized.

QUESTIONS

1. What was one of the most significant changes in education in the Black community between the 19th and 20th centuries? How did this adversely affect Black girls within the school environment?
2. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 7% of the 4 million teachers in the United States are Black, while Black girls make up 16% of the student population. How could the deficit of Black female teachers be a contributing factor in how Black Girls are perceived and treated in school?
3. Apply analysis of the quote below when answering questions 3a and 3b.

“
You have the right to b Black, and you’ve got the right to be a female. So, you gotta believe in yourself. If no one else believes in you, you better be, like, your biggest fan. Be your number one biggest fan. Believe your’re going to get somewhere. Believe that you’re going to do it
”
emma

- 3a. In her interview, Emma places emphasis on the “right” to be Black and female. What does this tell you about Emma’s experience as an individual and an observer of the treatment of Black Girls?
- 3b. Emma’s story is featured later in the documentary. Choose an excerpt from the quote. Explain its meaning and how you think it may encapsulate Emma’s soon to be shared story and the films topics.

CHAPTER 1

“YOU DON’T UNDERSTAND ALL THE THINGS I HAD TO DO JUST TO GET TO SCHOOL.”

START TIME	5:24
FEATURED	Footage of students from Columbus City Preparatory School for girls and the Oakland Unified School District
INTERVIEW(S)	Venus Evans-Winters, PhD, Tanisha Wakumi Douglas, Nzingha Dugas, Monique W. Morris, EdD, Vivian Anderson, Judge Terri B. Jamison, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Rebecca Epstein
THEME(S)	Racial Bias, Education, Mental Health, Racialized Gender Bias
SUMMARY	This portion of the film examines the need for inclusive curriculum, representation in school staff, and the importance of recognizing and understanding the challenges Black girls face outside of school.

QUESTIONS

1. Read each statement and apply your analysis to answering questions 1a and 1b.

“What you see in your eyes is not all what we are. You just can’t come up to a Black Girl and think of them a certain way.... There is something more grounded.... than us being ghetto, or us looking and acting a certain way.

Emma

“These young women, they are pushing up against racism, sexism, classism, homophobia....”

VENUS EVANS-WINTERS, PHD

- 1a. The prejudices Dr. Evans-Winters lists are related to multiple ways Black Girls may identify, while Emma speaks of an identity that people unjustly assign Black Girls. How does this illustrate one of the problems affecting the treatment of Black Girls? How might this issue be internalized? Why is internalizing this a problem?
- 1b. Why does Dr. Evans- Winters emphasize the need for Black female teachers, support staff, and administrators as a means of addressing the needs of Black female students?

2.
 - 2a. Why is representation in school curriculum described as “imperative” and “empowering” for Black female students? How can an inclusive curriculum create a nurturing environment for Black female students and influence teacher- student relationships?
 - 2b. Using answers from question 2a, reflect on your schools curriculum (ex. history or literature). If there is a lack of inclusion, how do you propose changes can be made? How would these changes be beneficial to the student population?
3.
 - 3a. Analyze the quote below and explain its meaning.

“**It’s important for us to recognize that our communities are holistic entities. We all share racial vulnerabilities. They sometimes play out differently across gender...**”

KIMBERLÉ CRENSHAW

- 3b. How does the quote above relate to themes such as racialized gender bias and mental health discussed in this portion of the film?
4. Describe the correlation between the over-punishment of Black Girls in school and the school-to-confinement pathways (the term school to prison pipeline is used in the film).
5.
 - 5a. In the film Judge Jamison states “I think the judiciary needs to be able to empathize...They can’t necessarily put themselves in that place if you’ve never been a Black Girl” How can addressing the need for empathy Judge Jamison identified help combat over punishment?
 - 5b. Some would argue that it is the judiciary’s job to be objective and enforce the law, not empathize with the people brought before them. Is understanding the environmental and societal factors influencing Black girlhood a hindrance to justice; or, does it enhance justice? Explain.
 - 5c. Black Girls are often seen as guilty even before they have the opportunity to explain themselves. Does responsibility lie with school district policy, state legislation, or enforcement? How can this be addressed?

CHAPTER 2

“EVERYONE HAS AN ACE SCORE. IT MAY BE HIGH. IT MAY BE LOW”

START TIME	12:26
FEATURED	Footage from National Citternton Meeting on ACEs
INTERVIEW(S)	Jeannette Pai-Espinosa, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Venus Evans-Winters, PhD, Judge Terri B. Jamison, Nzingha Dugas.
THEME(S)	Mental Health, Education, Racial Bias
SUMMARY	Introduction to ACEs and how the ACE score is useful in identifying and addressing trauma. Adults misinterpreting normal and age appropriate behavior from Black girls is introduced and questioned.

QUESTIONS

1.
 - 1a. Define what the Good Girl/Bad Girl “phenomena” described in the film means.
 - 1b. Give two examples of how the “Good Girl/Bad Girl “phenomena” is reinforced in our societies culture. Choose one of your examples and explain its potential influence on how Black girls see themselves and how authority figures (i.e. school staff) interact with them.
2.
 - 2a. The girls in the clip are participating in an exercise requiring them to list words and phrases that have either been said, or projected towards them by “they” (parents, teachers, peers, etc). List two things “they” say about Black Girls. “They” may include you. There is no need to identify the person it comes from, just be honest.
 - 2b. Choose one example from your list. Describe how what “they” think can contribute to the emotional trauma experienced by Black female students. How does it influence teacher-student relationships?
3.
 - 3a. Emotional trauma and its causes are discussed in the clip. Examine how the Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) evaluation is used. How can the data from ACE evaluation be an aid to treating mental health or training teachers to better understand their Black female students?
 - 3b. Dr. Evans-Winters, Judge Jamison and Vivian Anderson address how a Black Girls’ behavior or body language may be misinterpreted by school authority figures. Which of the topics previously explored, (Good Girl/Bad Girl, implicit bias, etc) are responsible for this?
 - 3c. How does this relate to over-punishment and criminalization?

CHAPTER 3

“WHY NOT GO TO HEAVEN NOW, I DIDN’T WANT TO BE HERE.”

TRIGGER WARNING

The story shared in this portion of PUSHOUT addresses sensitive topics including suicide. For more details, visit our website and read Samaya’s biography.

START TIME	19:36
FEATURED	Samaya
INTERVIEW(S)	Samaya’s Parents
THEME(S)	Racial Bias, Education, Mental Health, Adulthoodification
SUMMARY	Focusing on how racialized gender bias affects the treatment of Black girls by adults, and its detrimental effect on their mental health.

QUESTIONS

1. One of the problems Black Girls face is being assigned an adult image when they are in fact children (adulthoodification). Where is that evident in how Samaya was treated/perceived by adults outside her family, from the classroom to public spaces like Walmart?
2. Good Girl/Bad Girl, racial bias, adulthoodification and over-punishment have all been previously discussed. Identify how and when the bullying Samaya experienced from her teacher included any of the themes mentioned.
3.
 - 3a. Explain how Samayas story illustrates racial bias as a causation of emotional trauma and a disruption to education.
 - 3b. The suicide rate of Black children under 13 is twice the amount of white children in the same age group. Black Girls makeup half of that statistic. Reflect on what was discussed in the film and in class. Why are such a large number of Black girls at risk to commit suicide? What does that reveal about how Black girls are treated within institutions like school and society at large?
 - 3c. What did Samaya do to recover from her emotional trauma? How can that be applied to addressing the needs of young Black Girls across the country who are also fighting depression?

CHAPTER 4

“TO ADULTIFY BLACK GIRLS CREATES A DIFFERENT DYNAMIC INTERACTING WITH CHILDREN, BUT THEY’RE CHILDREN.”

START TIME	29:09
FEATURED	Footage from National Crittenton meeting on ACEs
INTERVIEW(S)	Monique W. Morris, EdD, Vivian Anderson, Ronald Dahl, MD
THEME(S)	Education, Racial Bias, Mental Health, Adultification
SUMMARY	This portion of the film describes adultification and its influence on school dynamics.

QUESTIONS

1.
 - 1a. Define “adultification and describe how it is exhibited in how adults interact with Black Girls. How has this dynamic been reinforced by popular culture (film, literature, advertising, etc.)?
 - 1b. In your experience, how has adultification affected the dynamics in the classroom and school (student-teacher, peer-to-peer, etc.)?
 - 1c. Compare the adultification of Black girls to the Good Girl/Bad Girl phenomena. How do they contribute to each other?
2. What tools are necessary to help combat adultifying Black Girls in society?

CHAPTER 5

“THE IDEA THAT IT’S ACCEPTABLE IS AN EXTENSION OF THE IDEA THAT OUR GIRLS ARE ALREADY SUSPECT.”

START TIME	31:35
FEATURED	Various clips from news footage (ex., March for Our Lives)
INTERVIEW(S)	Kimberlé Crenshaw, Ronald Dahl, MD
THEME(S)	Education, Racial Bias, Mental Health, Social Justice, Law
SUMMARY	The role of racial bias in the criminalization of Black girls is explored in addition to the natural reaction of these girls to fight against injustice. This raises additional concerns about the toll of racial bias on the development and mental health of Black girls.

QUESTIONS

1. How does the school principal and vice principal's interpreting "hyper and giddy" behavior as suspicious exemplify how racial bias and criminalization occur in school discipline?
 - 1b. The Binghamton School District has defended the strip search of the four girls by citing district policy and the law. Should there be laws protecting students from these scenarios? Or does the problem lay with those who enforce it? How does Judge Jamison's critique of a need for teachers and the judiciary to empathize with Black Girls apply to this?
2.
 - 2a. How have you been exposed to the "intensity" Black Girls experience when advocating for their rights? You might refer to social media, the news and real life experiences. Describe.
 - 2b. Black girls involvement in advocating for their rights has brought up concerns for the girls mental health. In your opinion, how can this be made part of the conversation of the impact of racial bias on Black Girls?

CHAPTER 6

“WE HAVE A LOT OF GIRLS WHO FACE DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY”

START TIME	34:56
FEATURED	Emma, Ariana, footage taken at Columbus City Preparatory School for girls
INTERVIEW(S)	Stephanie L. Patton
THEME(S)	Education, Racial Bias, Mental Health
SUMMARY	The significant influence a school's environment plays in addressing the socio-emotional needs of its students is examined.

QUESTIONS

1. Compare Emma and Samaya's stories. What was the difference in how their depression manifested itself? What did it take for them to recover?
2. How does social media reinforce racial bias and further damage the self image of Black Girls?
3.
 - 3a. Using Ariana's story as a reference, how can the relationship between the school community and its students be impactful?
 - 3b. Analyze the quote below. How does it relate to discussions previously shown in the film about the need to understand what Black girls face outside of school? How does it relate

“It's just some people go more through thngs tha y'all even know, and y'all don't even take the time out to see what's going on. Y'all just judge them, just because the way they present themself; and, I don't think it's fair.”

Ariana

4. What support did Emma and Ariana receive from their school that helped change their trajectory as part of the school-to-confinement-pathway?

CHAPTER 7

“I HAVE A RIGHT TO BE ANGRY AND SOMETIMES I MAY MISPLACE MY ANGER.”

START TIME	44:01
FEATURED	Kiara Jean
INTERVIEW(S)	Vivian Anderson, Tanisha Wakumi Douglas
THEME(S)	Education, Racial Bias, Mental Health
SUMMARY	Black girls who are at risk are oftentimes overlooked because their behavior does not fit the popular narrative of vulnerability. Services that offer help and the changes that take place in the girls' lives due to those services are explored.

QUESTIONS

1. Describe the contributing factors that influence adults not seeing Black Girls as vulnerable, in spite of youth and background. What vulnerabilities did school officials not recognize when Kiara had trouble in school?
2.
 - 2a. Kiara Jean became immersed in the school-to-confinement pathway due to suspensions for fighting starting in the 5th grade. What services does her new school provide that her old school did not? How did these services aid Kiara Jean's shift in her sense of self and coping abilities?
 - 2b. Do traditional public schools have a responsibility to students like Kiara in providing services that can help her in the same way her alternative school did? Why or why not?

CHAPTER 8

“YOU PUSH A GIRL OUT OF SCHOOL AND YOU PUSH HER INTO THE STREETS.”

**TRIGGER
WARNING**

The story shared in this portion of PUSHOUT addresses sensitive topics including sex trafficking and language. For more details visit our website and read Terrianna's biography.

START TIME	52:01
FEATURED	Terrianna
INTERVIEW(S)	Judge Terri B. Jamison, Susan Burton, Rebecca Epstein
THEME(S)	Education, Social Justice, Mental Health, Racial Bias
SUMMARY	An examination the significant role institutions like schools and the criminal justice system in play in the vulnerability of Black girls who are sexually abused or sexually trafficked takes place.

QUESTIONS

- 1a. Terrianna's story includes many signs that she was at risk. What opportunities for intervention did Terrianna's school miss? How are any of these missed opportunities tied with bias?
 - 1b. Terrianna valued education, but she did not feel valued by her school. What changes do you think schools should make to help students like Terrianna? Include staff training and school services in your proposal.
2. Why is education stressed as an important tool in fighting against Black Girls becoming victims of sex trafficking?

CHAPTER 9

“WE LOOK AT NOT ONLY THE BEHAVIOR BUT THE REASONS BEHIND THE BEHAVIOR BEFORE WE EVEN GET CLOSE TO THE CONSEQUENCES.”

START TIME	59:23
FEATURED	Footage from Columbus City Preparatory School for girls, National Citternton meeting on ACEs, and African American Female Excellence.
INTERVIEW(S)	Ronald Dahl, MD, Monique W. Morris, EdD, Stephanie Patton, Monique W. Morris, EdD, Joanne Smith, Venus Evans-Winters, PhD, Tanisha Wakumi Douglas, Nzingha Dugas, Susan Douglas
THEME(S)	Education, Mental Health, Racial Bias
SUMMARY	Solutions to criminalizing Black girlhood could be largely addressed with changes to classroom management and prioritizing the socio-emotional needs of the student.

QUESTIONS

1. The teachers in the clip are discussing strategies they used to address behavior that is traditionally perceived as “disruptive”. What did they do that created a different outcome than if they responded in a more punitive manner?

CHAPTER 10

“I LEARNED WHEN BEING IN INSTITUTIONS YOU WILL FIND MONEY WHEN IT’S YOUR PRIORITY”

START TIME	1:08:21
FEATURED	Footage from African American Female Excellence, Columbus City Preparatory School for girls
INTERVIEW(S)	Joanne Smith, Nzingha Dugas, Kimberlé Crenshaw
THEME(S)	Education, Social Justice
SUMMARY	Addressing the concerns highlighted in the film requires change. These suggested changes, including a critique of the attitudes that impede these improvements are discussed.

QUESTIONS

1. All of the girls featured in the film had to change schools in order for their social-emotional needs to be addressed. Is the lack of support due to funding or is it a problem of prioritizing Black Girls and the programs that will help then? Explain.

CHAPTER 11

“IT SHOULDN’T BE THAT RADICAL TO EXPECT YOUR TEACHER TO CARE ABOUT YOU.”

START TIME	1:12:32
FEATURED	Footage taken at the Columbus City Preparatory School for girls.
INTERVIEW(S)	Monique W. Morris, EdD
THEME(S)	Education, Racial Bias
SUMMARY	Is addressing the needs of Black girls in traditional education truly radical? Executive Producer, and Author of Pushout, Monique W. Morris, EdD, presents an argument that it is not.

QUESTIONS

1.
 - 1a. What is the teacher accomplishing by greeting each of her students at the door with “Good morning” while maintaining eye contact when shaking their hand? How does this relate to the importance of teacher-student relationships, especially for students who may not have had positive ones in the past?
 - 1b. Monique W. Morris has framed her argument for structural changes in education, by stating that “wanting your teacher to like you, is not radical.” Why would any of what she said be considered difficult to implement?

CLOSING

“YOU JUST GOT TO LOVE AND SUPPORT THEM. THAT’S ALL THEY REALLY NEED. LOVE AND SUPPORT.”

START TIME	1:15:03
FEATURED	Samaya, Emma, Ariana, Terriana, Kiara Jean
THEME(S)	Education, Racial Bias, Mental Health
SUMMARY	Epilogue, girls featured in the film share their final thoughts.

QUESTIONS

1. Many of the girls featured changed schools to address their needs academically and emotionally. In your opinion, are there any other ways of addressing cases such as theirs without transferring schools? What steps would need to be taken? Who needs to lead this work? Who needs to be in partnership around this work?
2. What images and words/phrases have contributed to how students featured in the documentary saw themselves and how they were treated? What is necessary to contribute to changing this? (ex. Kiara)

END

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