



Disregarded, Underserved,
and Falling through the
Crack: Addressing the Child
Welfare System's Failure to
Protect Black Girls

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Current State of the Child Welfare System

102,413 girls & 40,882 Black children in the foster care system -> 105,463 girls & 44,445 Black children exited the foster care system (Casey, 2021)

Black children overrepresented -> make up 14% of the population but 22% of kids in foster care (Casey, 2021)

The Child Welfare System's Impact on Black Girls

Black girls make up 23% of all girls in the foster care system (Edwards-Luce, 2022).

Runaway, human trafficking, lack of stability, & increased mental health concerns (Patrick and Chaudhry, 2017)

25% of foster care children will become involved with the criminal system (Palcheck 2021; Miller and Stewart, 2020)

How Do Black Girls Become A Part of the Child Welfare System?

- Emphasis on nuclear family structures
 - Family consist of a mother, father, and their children and racialized as white (Catron, 2020; Brooks,2022; Jimenez, 2006)
 - 20 percent of American households were composed of 2 parents with children
 - Alternative family structures such as kinship care are villainized for not adhering to the nuclear family structure
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How Does the State View Black Girls in the Child Welfare System?

- Tenets of “traditional” girlhood (Ocen, 2019):
 - Innocence - Purity - Chastity - Virginity
 - Exclusion of Black girls from the social category of being a child due to stereotypes of sexual maturity, adult-like agency, and criminality
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Adultification

- Adultification of Black girls (Epstein et al., 2017)
 - (1) a process of socialization where children function at a more mature development stage out of necessity
 - (2) a social or cultural stereotype that is based on how adults perceive children in the absence of knowledge of children's behavior and verbalizations"
 - Impact on the victimization of Black girls'
 - Black girls are perceived as needing less protection, less nurturing, and more knowledgeable about adult topics. This harmful perception renders Black girls vulnerable to abuse and exploitation from people in power such as the child welfare agency workers.
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Sexualization of Black Girls

- Sexualization of Black girls:
 - Sexual maturity assigns sexual qualities to girls who are not developmentally nor emotionally ready for such roles.
 - Impact on the victimization of Black girls:
 - This sexualization of Black girls contributes to adverse outcomes and their victimization because it depicts Black girls as sexual objects. As a result, it is used as a way to justify or excused the harassment, abuse, and/or harmful attention Black girls receive.
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S o c i e t a l C o n t e x t

- It is important to not only recognize, but also contend with the many social factors that influence perceptions of Black girls and inform their experiences.
 - Issues like racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, and all forms of bigotry informs the adultification and sexualization of Black girls.
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S o c i e t a l C o n t e x t

- The disparities within the child welfare system requires people within the system to understand family dynamics and the systematic and systemic oppression marginalized groups face.
 - Addressing this issue requires collective efforts from not only individuals and communities, but also policymakers, and people within the justice system such as judges to protect Black girls.
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P o t e n t i a l W a y s t o A d d r e s s t h e D i s p a r i t i e s W i t h i n t h e C h i l d W e l f a r e S y s t e m

Providing adequate support for kinship care and other alternative family structures

Divesting from the child welfare system -> California's Alternative Response System (Chibanall et al. 2013)

Implementing policies that protect girls and offer services for those who have been harmed

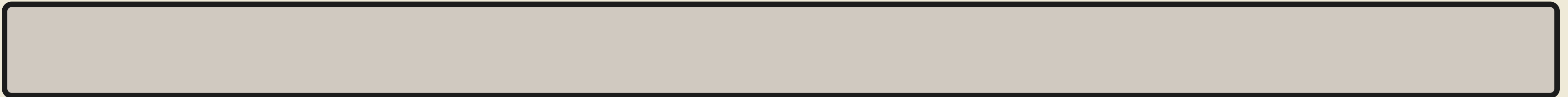
Educating parents, educators, justice system stakeholders, and the public about adultification



By implementing these recommendations, we can collectively work towards creating a society where all girls are protected and able to grow up in a world free from harmful stereotypes and exploitation.



Thank
You!



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