

Do You See Us?: The Need for School-Based Sex Trafficking Prevention Programs for Black Girls

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This paper examines the literature on domestic minor sex trafficking. We draw on a critical race feminist lens, with particular attention to intersectionality and assemblage, to review research on conditions that exacerbate and decrease girls' vulnerability to sex trafficking to emphasize why schools must systematically engage in sex trafficking prevention. We argue that school communities are positioned to address the intersectional and exacerbating conditions that make students, particularly Black girls, more vulnerable to this form of modern-day slavery. Rather than reinforce narratives that often criminalize and devalue survivors, the purpose of this article is to create a dialogue about how schools can be intentional in fighting sex trafficking in their communities. We provide specific recommendations for schools to place girls' voices at the center of this prevention work and build knowledge within the school faculty to sustain this work, work that is both feminist and anti-racist, to equip students to become competent, confident, and empowered leaders.

Keywords: domestic minor sex trafficking, prevention, Black girls, critical race feminism, trauma, schools

Vignette

Living in her third foster home, Rose was all too familiar with packing up her bags at a moment's notice. Rose, an African American girl, was in the eighth grade at City High School, a failing school that had been on the city's "persistently most dangerous" list for three years in a row, where there never seemed to be enough books, computers, teachers, or counselors. Social services had removed Rose from her mom's house after her stepdad was caught sexually abusing her when she was 10 years old, although the abuse had started two years before when she had been just 8. At the age of 13, Rose found herself in a juvenile justice center (JJC) after having been suspended from school multiple times for "defiance" and truancy. While attending school at

the JJC, a few older girls there took her under their wing. On her last day there, when one of the girls, Jade, invited Rose to crash with her and her boyfriend for a few days, she felt like she had finally caught a break! Jade and her boyfriend made sure Rose had everything she needed and listened to her story, even sharing their own experiences. So, when they told her that their friend thought she was cute and wanted to meet her, she trusted them. What started off as dates turned into him wanting to know her every move, and then to tell her that if she loved him, she'd help him make money by having sex with someone—just this one time. When Rose confided in Jade, Jade told her it was fine and that she had nothing to worry about. During a night of drinking, Jade's boyfriend beat Rose, drugged her, and told her that she owed him for taking her in. Rose thought maybe he was right, and yet knew it was wrong. The “one time” soon turned into her being sold and raped up to 20 times a day in some instances. She skipped school since she somehow managed to get in some kind of trouble every time she went anyway—for being late, for falling asleep, for getting in fights with peers who called her names. It was just all too much, and Rose slowly lost touch with her old friends. She didn't even recognize herself anymore; this was her new normal. And even though she felt numb, she felt wanted; she was finally part of this sisterhood with the other girls; she finally had someone who “loved” her enough to make sure that her hair and nails were always done, and in some twisted way, she was in control for once. That, however, was the furthest thing from the truth.

Introduction

In this conceptual piece, we argue for the importance of schools systematically engaging to address the contextual factors of domestic minor sex trafficking (DMST) that disproportionately impact girls of color, such as Rose. Rose is a composite of situational and affective factors derived from a wide range of reports and studies of DMST; we use this vignette of Rose to exemplify the concepts addressed in this article and to personalize the ever-shifting network of risks, interlocutors, affect, intensities, and missed opportunities. Defined as “sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act has not attained 18 years of age” by the federal *Trafficking in Persons Report* (U.S. Department of State, 2010), DMST was not considered trafficking within U.S. borders until this report was published. However, legal approaches addressing DMST stemming from the report are not yet consistent across states, and youth are often criminalized for their exploitation (Kubasek & Herrera, 2015). This form of modern-day slavery (Polaris, 2018) is part of an international phenomenon that can directly impact the work of schools in resource-poor urban and rural communities across the United States. While DMST impacts youth across race, socioeconomic status, gender, and other identity markers, the compounding factors that increase the risk of exploitation for girls of color must be better understood for schools to address DMST contextually.

We examine the trafficking literature to describe contextual factors leading to DMST and provide recommendations for educators to combat the crisis. We argue that P-12 schools must look not only at the conditions that exacerbate the vulnerability of girls of color to DMST but

also at the intersectional subordination that girls of color¹ experience in order to provide effective interventions that humanize and affirm adolescent girls' strengths. We adopt a critical race feminism (CRF) perspective and draw on intersectionality and assemblage to better understand the subordination involved in the lives of girls of color in the United States, as their needs may not be fully addressed in gender- or race-based initiatives and programs (Crenshaw, 1991a). By applying assemblage to this literature review, we also address critiques of intersectionality that difference has come to define identity (Puar, 2012) in order to center our recommendations on the voices of girls of color and the educators who work with them.

Why Schools Should Care about DMST

The impact of racism and oppression on the educational experiences of girls of color is of critical importance (Morris, 2016). Since the average age of girls exploited through DMST is 12 to 14 (Morris, 2016; Selah Freedom, 2019), it is crucial for schools to raise awareness of exploitation, in part by considering the ways they contribute to, and can therefore block, pathways into DMST. When educational systems and educators are unaware of or do not acknowledge the impact of racism, oppression, and exploitation on girls of color, they unknowingly place them in more vulnerable positions in society. If one of Rose's teachers/counselors knew about the warning signs, her story may have taken a different trajectory. Since all behavior is communication, teachers should be aware that when Rose was "acting out" or being "defiant," it was in relation to the adverse childhood experiences and trauma she had already endured. Instead, she was further marginalized, punished, and made to feel that something was wrong with her, and therefore was left feeling unwanted, compounding her unstable foster home experiences.

Schools and educators must first recognize that the experiences of girls of color are vastly different from those of boys of color or their White female peers (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). Black girls experience teachers' lower expectations of them, increased likelihood of reprimands or praise for social attributes over academic ones, and harsher disciplinary actions compared with White peers (Morris, 2016; Wun, 2016). Girls of color are also overrepresented in the criminal justice and child welfare systems (Evans-Winter & Esposito, 2010), systems that often expose girls to violence, repression, and trauma. Black girls in particular have increased involvement in the criminal justice system and experience higher rates of gender-based violence compared with their White peers (Clonan-Roy, 2016; Morris, 2016). Survivors of sex trafficking are often incarcerated in juvenile detention centers upon being rescued by the police, re-traumatizing them rather than providing services afforded to children who have experienced other forms of child abuse. The combination of harsher disciplinary policies (Saar et al., 2015; Wun, 2016), the criminalization of Black and trafficked girls (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010),

¹ We use the terms "girls of color" to represent literature inclusive of Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and other marginalized girls, and use "African American" and "Black" to accurately represent specific literature.

and a lack of cultural and trauma sensitivity throughout these institutions can marginalize girls of color even further, resulting in a lack of appropriate interventions and support.

Studies of U.S. educational and correctional systems that address race and gender portray a fairly consistent picture of intersecting subordinations and their concomitant results: a recurrent theme of trauma and its intensification through traditional markers of identity like gender and race. These and other markers (e.g., socioeconomic status, sexuality) are born of “relations of force, connection, resonance, and patterning that give rise to the concepts” (Puar, 2012, p. 57) of *Black, adolescent female, or poor*. When markers of identity are understood not just as difference but as relational processes, educators can then begin to identify the intersecting factors and affective conditions necessary (Puar, 2012) for DMST to take place in their communities. This understanding is critical to create environments that develop protective factors (e.g., positive self-esteem and self-worth, success, healthy coping skills, etc.) in girls by professionals who work with girls of color vulnerable to DMST, and girls who have experienced this type of exploitation.

Theoretical Framework

The conception of marked identities rests on the theory of CRF (Crenshaw, 1991a) that highlights the multiple consciousnesses that women of color often experience, and the simultaneous oppression that they face because of their race and their gender (and other socially-constructed identities) (Matsuda, 1989). CRF scholars have worked to position CRF as a key “legal and academic stratagem for studying and eradicating race, class and gender oppression in educational institutions” (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010, p. 19), in response to Matsuda’s (1989) call for lawyers to develop multiple consciousnesses to “see the world from the standpoint of the oppressed” (p. 9). CRF theory can illuminate how girls of color navigate their educational experiences, both on personal and systemic levels. Particularly relevant for the current paper, the intersection of multiple systems of oppression plays a major part in modern day DMST, as our review of the literature will show, and as such, a CRF lens is vital for research and programs aimed at understanding and supporting girls of color through its multidisciplinary approach of analyzing and addressing the discrimination they experience within systems.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) is a central concept in CRF and a dominant theoretical tool in feminist theory (McCall, 2005) to analyze the effects of, and the relationships among, social class, race or ethnicity, and gender. The term refers to

the interaction between gender, race and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements and cultural ideologies, to address the fact that the experiences and struggles of women of color [fall] between the cracks of both feminist and anti-black [racist discourse]. (Davis, 2008, p. 68)

It assumes that all identities are lived and experienced as intersectional (Puar, 2012), but are particularly problematic for women of color within a system of White male patriarchy.

Intersectionality deconstructs traditional assumptions about race and gender as mutually

exclusive identity categories to center the convergence of race, gender, and class dominations in the experiences of Black women (Crenshaw, 1991a).

Intersectionality disrupts typical theoretical and methodological practices that “expound identity as woman or person of color as an either/or proposition, ... relegating the identity of women of color to a location that resists telling” (Crenshaw, 1991a, p. 1242). Intersectional analysis can thus help to “reveal how power works in diffuse and differentiated ways through the creation or deployment of overlapping identity categories” (Cho et al., McCall, 2013, p. 797). This disruption to practices is of particular importance to the present paper as we understand how prevention programs in schools can combat DMST.

Assemblage

However, the manner in which power works through identity categories needs more than an understanding of the deployment of categories. A focus on the “patterns of relations” and complexities in which entities are arranged and in constant motion can help us to understand how control (power) works as much through identities as through “affective capacities and tendencies” (Puar, 2012, p. 62). Moving beyond intersectionality, or as Puar (2012) put it, providing a “frictional” relationship to it that can reveal how each lens resonates with the other, identity is recognized as “a process involving an intensification of habituation” (Puar, 2012, p. 62). Marked categories of identity (e.g., Black, girl, poor) are enacted through affective conditions—the “ability to affect and be affected” (Ringrose & Renold, 2015, p. 773)—in the fluidity of any given context. During the haze of drinking, for example, Rose bears the brunt of male violence, perpetrated to subordinate her physically and emotionally; her feelings of guilt intensify her feelings of fear, and, at the same time, she is made to feel guilt for insufficient gratitude, adding yet another example of male aggression to Rose’s lived experience. Societal tropes and perceptions of Rose’s sexuality conjoin with her race and gender in this moment to increase her (and Black girls’) likelihood of being targeted for DMST.

By viewing typical categories of identification (e.g., gender, race, sexuality, nationality, etc.) as fluid rather than discrete representational identities, an assemblage lens emphasizes what is done and how it gets done: “categories—race, gender, sexuality—are considered events, actions, and encounters between bodies, rather than simply entities and attributes of subjects” (Puar, 2012, p. 57–58). Assemblage “allows us to ask questions about what an event”—such as how the normalization of sexual abuse in Rose’s life affects her response to her boyfriend’s request—“*is doing* instead of *what it once did*” (emphasis added) (Kennedy et al., 2013, p. 56).

Recognizing that Puar (2012) and others see intersectionality and assemblage in productive tension with each other, we use the idea of assemblage here as a fruitful extension of the static identity markers of intersectionality to recognize the dynamic, ever-shifting encounters with affective elements enacted by race, gender, age, and sexuality. Since gender or racial identities are “multicausal, multidirectional, liminal” and demand an understanding of the “affective conditions necessary for the event-space to unfold” (Puar, 2012, pp. 59, 61), an understanding of how power (e.g., predatory behaviors) works through affect is essential to

combating DMST. The researcher and educator can then attend to particular moments common to DMST, as evidenced in the literature reviewed below, allowing them to more effectively respond to the intensely personal and affective encounters of DMST (Kennedy et al., 2013), and better critique how “societies of control tweak and modulate bodies as matter” (Puar, 2012, p. 63). Applying the lenses of intersectionality and assemblage can articulate not only the variables at work in DMST, but the variables in movement with each other as girls of color adapt and become in structures of gender, race, class, and sexuality that oppress them. In the present review, this understanding involves the consideration of program components that can re-habituate adolescent girls’ affective capacities and the enactment of intersecting identities to mitigate the risk factors of capitalist sexual exploitation. Programs must confront the multiple layers of domination that often converge in the lives of adolescent girls of color (Clonan-Roy et al., 2016; Crenshaw, 1991a).

Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking: Current State of Affairs

The literature on DMST is neither extensive nor dominated by empirical, peer-reviewed studies. Much of the literature is conceptual or government and non-governmental reports. There is also a paucity of empirical work within education-focused journals, so we have chosen to draw on a range of fields in this review. We privilege research and conceptual work with clearly defined terminology, papers that address the U.S. context, with female research subjects, and when possible, empirical studies that have outcome measures clearly connected to the design elements of the study.

In the United States, consumers of standard news outlets would not be faulted for thinking that the trafficking of minors is more of a problem in areas experiencing grave stressors like extreme poverty and war. American news coverage of ISIS (Guest, 2017), the kidnapping of the Chibok girls by Boko Haram (Amnesty International, 2015), and recent migrants into the sex trade in Europe (Taub, 2017) have been high-profile news stories in American publications. However, the increased attention to the ubiquity of sexual assault through the #metoo and #timesup movements, documentaries such as *Surviving R. Kelly* (Hampton, Simmons, Karlsberg, & Daniels, 2019), and the case of Jeffrey Epstein (Iati, 2020), have brought more awareness to the reality of sex trafficking and assault in U.S. communities. It is doubtful, however, whether this awareness has shifted public sentiment toward substantive action or prompted substantive social or educational policy changes to protect victims. In fact, recent U.S. Department of Education rules suggest a move toward narrowing the rights of victims of sexual assault (Green, 2018).

Part of this inattention is a lack of understanding of DMST, even among legislators and activists. Recently, there was a push for legislation to fully decriminalize “the sex trade” in both New York and Washington, D.C. (Mathieson & Meyers, 2019). After a 14-hour hearing including testimony from advocates and activists expressing their concern over the bill, it did not pass. Our concern was the lack of specific consideration of DMST: any conflation of DMST with voluntary sex work does not lead to more protections for anyone, except for those buying sex.

While this proposed legislation did not concern DMST explicitly, it highlights the multiple systems in place already not providing enough safeguards for survivors of DMST: Rose was failed by the school system and the foster care system, and legislation like this would make her more vulnerable by removing further protection from the justice system. We bring attention to these recent events to draw out the complexities of the lack of understanding of DMST and the need for more systemic collaboration among all stakeholders.

Few news stories or public service initiatives educating the public about DMST, or the sensationalization of the few (e.g., Long & Hajela, 2018), are at odds with the statistics showing it as an increasing problem. Between 1996 and 2013, the number of cases opened by the FBI increased from 100 to 7,000 (Harpster, 2014). This sharp increase is mirrored in the economics of the industry: a 2010 Urban Institute study estimated that in eight major U.S. cities, the underground sex economy was worth between \$39.9 million and \$290 million. A recent U.S. Department of Justice supported report (Swaner et al., 2016), noting the limitations of data due to a dearth of empirical studies, estimated the number of youth “engaged in the sex trade nationwide” to be between 4,457 and 20,994 (p. xiii). Since 2007, the National Human Trafficking Hotline (n.d.) operated by Polaris (2018) has received reports of 22,191 sex trafficking cases inside the United States. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (2016) estimates that of the 18,500 reported runaways, 17% are likely to be victims of sex trafficking. Statistics suggest a picture of fluid trafficking across state lines, and from rural to urban centers (Pierce, 2012). In one estimate, 1,078 youth are trafficked from Ohio annually (Perdue, Prior, Williamson, & Sherman, 2012).

Therefore, the current state of affairs of DMST suggests a disjuncture between the (limited) data on its growing prevalence, and the lack of attention DMST receives. One possible reason for this discrepancy is the weaving together of U.S. sexual exceptionalism and structures of domination as consistent threads in U.S. life. U.S. sexual exceptionalism is the “common sense” notion that American feminists are rescuers of oppressed women, and representatives of evolved, liberatory, and professionalized feminism to which other societies are compared (Puar, 2007). This exceptionalism works in tandem with other narratives of the nation’s exceptionalism to perpetuate the violence and oppression of an empire (Puar, 2007). Exceptionalism allows U.S. actors to police boundaries of acceptable gender norms and forms of sexuality that are “mobilized by discourses of sexual repression” (Puar, 2007, p. 9). Therefore, when Black girls are characterized as (over)sexualized and “adultified” while still underage (Epstein et al., 2017), their vulnerability to DMST is elided by narratives of liberatory U.S. feminism that these girls need saving because of themselves rather than confronting state institutional violence that subjugates these girls. The common tropes of adultification and non-normative sexualization of Black girls allows them to be targets of violence and oppression, since sexual exploitation is

“one element in a repertoire of techniques of occupation and subjugation” (Puar, 2007, p. 79²). In all, the drivers of U.S. sexual exceptionalism—women’s and LGBT rights and sexual freedom—are seen as normative, while the consequences of minoritized adolescent girls’ sexualization are ignored. This denies girls of color preventative supports that address the patterns of violence and repression they experience daily.

Disproportionate Impact of DMST on Black Girls

Black girls are disproportionately at risk of DMST, comprising more arrests for “juvenile prostitution” than any other group, and 40% of all youth exploited through sex trafficking (Rights4Girls, 2018). Black girls also have increased involvement in the criminal justice system and experience higher rates of gender-based violence compared to their White peers (Clonan-Roy, 2016; Morris, 2016). This criminalization of Black girls is a prime example of the compounding impact of race as it relates to DMST. The 2012 statistics in Los Angeles are even more staggering, as 92% of girls involved in the juvenile justice system and exploited through sex trafficking were Black, with more than half involved in the child welfare system (Boxall, 2012). Hurst (2015) found that while the most significant risk factors for adolescent sex trafficking are childhood sexual abuse and emotional maltreatment, their effects are compounded at the intersection of poverty and race. Therefore, factors such as socioeconomic status and poverty are possible explanations for girls’ of color disproportionate entry into sex trafficking (Hurst, 2015). Furthermore, the author found that African Americans had the highest rates of juvenile entry into sexually exploitative relationships. In Rose’s case, her attendance at an underfunded school with a lack of trained staff, their disciplinary actions, and her involvement in the juvenile justice system are all examples of Rose’s race shaping her experiences with state violence. Joined with male violence and tropes of adultification of Black girls, her race and gender roles all create a web of factors that make her subordination more likely. Other research has supported this finding: Kramer and Berg (2003) found that females of color experienced commercial sexual exploitation at significantly younger ages, despite White women experiencing child abuse more often per capita. In addition, they found that educational level and minoritized status exerted a significant effect on the timing of entry into exploitation (Kramer & Berg, 2003).

This has been partly explained by noting that racially marginalized youth can internalize the racism and oppression they face, which can impact their sense of self-worth, and in turn make them more susceptible to further exploitation (Hurst, 2015). This internalization of racial oppression, the acceptance of the negative cultural stereotypes of their gendered racial identity, undermines girls’ development, both in their identity formation and school performance (Morris, 2016). Furthermore, if they appropriate those stereotypes of being “less intelligent, hypersexual, loud, sassy, or domestic” (Morris, 2016, p. 43), educators (and others in systems entrusted with

² It should be noted here that Puar (2007) is writing in the context of state (U.S. and Israel) imperialist occupation of Palestine and Iraq. However, we view this as applicable to the way U.S. state institutions have subjugated, and continue to subjugate, African American, Latinx, and Indigenous peoples.

their care) often see them as bringing drama upon themselves. “In modern ghettos, Black girls are routinely expected to seamlessly reconcile their status as Black *and* female *and* poor, a status that has left them with a mark of double jeopardy, which fuels intense discrimination and personal vulnerability,” potentially blocking girls of color from even being able to see their success (Morris, 2016, p. 23). Ocen (2015) stated that “the protections of childhood afforded to the Black girls in the juvenile detention center, like the concept itself, are dynamic and highly contingent on other identity categories such as race, gender, and class” (p. 1590). Not only is it problematic that only 15 states have Safe Harbor Laws, which protect girls from being charged as “juvenile prostitutes” (Ocen, 2015), but the criminalization of Black girls is further compounded with each intersecting system they navigate.

The way Black girls are often stereotyped “as less innocent and more adult-like than their white peers” refers to adultification bias and has the potential to significantly impact their experiences navigating systems (Epstein et al., 2017, p. 2). Surveying hundreds of adults concerning their perceptions of Black and White girls, the study found that Black girls were seen as needing less nurturing, protection, support, or comfort, to be more independent, and to know more about adult topics and sex (Epstein et al., 2017). While the study looked at its impact in educational and juvenile justice systems, these racialized and gendered stereotypes of adultification (Epstein et al., 2017) across systems play a role in compounding factors that lead to the disproportionate exploitation of Black girls through DMST. Therefore, if school systems are not creating safe spaces to build protective factors, they are complicit in contributing to the exploitation.

Rose’s story, which began this article, mirrors the overrepresentation of girls of color in school discipline and juvenile justice systems, and the ways they are seen as needing less comfort and support (Epstein et al., 2017). The same is true for victims of maltreatment and trauma. Ford et al. (2012) found that approximately 90% of youth in residential juvenile justice facilities had experienced at least one traumatic event. More specific to girls, according to Saar et al. (2015), 73% of girls in the juvenile justice system have histories of trauma, specifically sexual and physical abuse. Mallett (2017) stated that involvement in juvenile courts is based on a combination of individual, familial, and community-based risk factors, including family dysfunction, trauma, violence, identified/unidentified special education disabilities, poverty, mental health issues, unstable neighborhoods, and poverty. Implementing trauma-competent practices has the capacity to act as a protective factor for all of these risk factors, as further explored in the recommendations below.

Compounding Factors That Increase the Risk of Exploitation through DMST

Puar (2012) turned to assemblage for its potential to answer not who is at fault, but “what affective conditions are necessary for the event-space to unfold?” (p. 61). In the following review of the literature, we attempt to understand DMST through this framing question and by outlining the primary and secondary factors that lead to exploitation.

Childhood Sexual Abuse and Trauma

Adolescent commercial sex trafficking is a complex phenomenon, but there is consensus about factors of vulnerability. In a review of nursing literature on sex trafficking since 1980, Choi (2015) organized risk factors into three categories: environmental, trauma, and behavioral factors. Environmental factors include dysfunctional family environments, such as domestic violence, parental substance abuse, and more encounters with child welfare and juvenile justice systems (Choi, 2015; Countryman-Roswurm & Bolin, 2014). Other literature has suggested other environmental factors, such as poverty (Choi, 2015; Cobbina & Oselin, 2011; Hurst, 2015) and homelessness (Choi, 2015; Cobbina & Oselin, 2011; Greene, Ennett, & Ringwalt, 1999; Kaestle, 2012; Hurst, 2015). Trauma factors include childhood sexual abuse, physical abuse (Choi, 2015; Cobbina & Oselin, 2011; Greene et al., 1999; Kramer & Berg, 2003), and emotional abuse and neglect (Choi, 2015; Greene et al., 1999). Behavioral factors include running away from home (Choi, 2015).

While it is likely that these three types of risk factors intersect and can amplify each other, earlier research has consistently emphasized trauma factors as the primary predictors of susceptibility to sex trafficking. Trauma is defined as a response to a stressful experience where a person's ability to cope is dramatically undermined. Traumatic experiences, which include, but are not limited to, physical threats/violence, emotional maltreatment, neglect, abandonment, and loss (Yaroshefsky & Shwedel, 2015), often further marginalize youth. In a national survey of 12,240 adolescent students, childhood sexual abuse was the only form of abuse that remained significant on its own in predicting entry into sex trafficking (Kaestle, 2012). Other research has concurred that trauma is consistently a main risk factor for victims of sex trafficking (Brawn & Roe-Sepowitz, 2008; Cobbina & Oselin, 2011; Countryman-Roswurm & Bolin, 2014; Greene et al., 1999; Hurst, 2015; Kaestle, 2012; Kramer & Berg, 2003; Lavoie, Thibodeau, Gagné, & Hébert, 2010).

Secondary Factors

The trauma of childhood sexual abuse as a primary factor implicated in DMST involves an array of other, often intersecting, factors, as the work of Choi (2015) above alludes to. For instance, in a secondary data analysis of case file reports collected from a statewide juvenile justice database, Brawn and Roe-Sepowitz (2008) found reported substance abuse was linked to the primary risk factor of childhood abuse, and to unstable living situations, disorganized families, little or no contact with a parent, and/or a history of abuse or neglect. It is notable that the link between substance abuse and trafficking is found in studies with small samples ($N = 23$; 74% had used alcohol and 70% had used drugs; Countryman-Roswurm & Bolin, 2014) and larger samples ($N = 158$; Lung, Lin, Lu, & Shu, 2003). Brawn and Roe-Sepowitz (2008) also identified substance abuse to be associated with more mental health diagnoses, and increases in school suspension, expulsion, or dropout. Studies showing early school dropout as a risk factor (Brawn & Roe-Sepowitz, 2008; Countryman-Roswurm & Bolin, 2014) exist alongside other studies showing educational levels intersecting with such factors as living situations, such as

state custody, group homes, or homelessness (Greene et al., 1999; Kramer & Berg, 2003; Lung et al., 2003).

These findings exemplify the intersectional identities (mainly gender and socioeconomic status in the aforementioned studies) and affective context of vulnerabilities to DMST. One large-scale national study noted that many youth involved in sex work felt desperate, manipulated, or coerced (Kaestle, 2012), suggesting that primary and secondary factors not only intersect to leave few options for girls experiencing such factors, but work through confusion, coercion, and manipulation. Beyond the gendered identities and associated affective conditions of girls, such as desperation (Kaestle, 2012) or low self-confidence (Chermayeff et al., 2015), minoritized women who experience primary and secondary risks have twice the hazard rate as White women in at least one sample (Kramer & Berg, 2003).

Despite the common myth that victims of sex trafficking are held against their will or abducted at random, psychological means of control are much more common (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Office of Trafficking in Persons, 2018). Fear, trauma, intimidation, and lack of options due to vulnerable situations (e.g., poverty or homelessness) can prevent victims from seeking help. Young girls are often forcibly “guerilla” pimped, or “finesse” pimped (Williamson & Prior, 2009) through grooming by recruiters who exploit intersecting factors of vulnerability that many youth experience. According to the National Human Trafficking Hotline (n.d.), victims often do not even self-identify due to psychological factors, such as self-blame or believing they are in love with their trafficker due to the latter’s emotional manipulation and control. These data suggest that sex trafficking of adolescent girls is as much about preying upon intersecting identities (race, gender, socioeconomic status) as it is about the affective processes that both predators and victims enact. The control of adolescent girls necessary for sex trafficking is often done through emotional capacities and tendencies (Puar, 2012) that can maintain and enforce identities that traffickers view as susceptible. While adult entry into commercial sexual exploitation is often a survival mechanism based in economic instability or drug addiction, adolescent entry is based on childhood victimization (Cobbina & Oselin, 2011), and exacerbated by a host of secondary risk factors.

The habituation of predatory practices on girls of color is explained in part through what the literature terms “risk factors,” typically constructing “at-risk” identities as racial and gender markers that are embedded in structures of oppression, and in part, by examining these identities as affective habituations of adolescent girls (e.g., expressions of self-confidence) and predators (e.g., a need to exert control over girls to perpetuate DMST) for sex trafficking to take place. However, this literature had little to no discussion of perceptions of sexuality alongside markers of gender and race, nor were there studies centering the voices of trafficked girls to better understand their adaptations and responses to their systematic subordination.

Prevention

It is difficult to protect girls of color from DMST when those entrusted with their education and care are not often aware of the complexities. Instead, the burden of blame and

responsibility is often on the oppressed rather than the oppressor. Even with the mainstream resurgence of the #metoo movement, rather than rape culture or toxic masculinity being questioned, survivors of sexual assault are often questioned until their stories are validated. Rather than reinforce narratives that criminalize and devalue the abused, the purpose of this section is to create a dialogue about how schools can be intentional in their fight against DMST in their communities through creating educational environments where *all* students feel safe, empowered, and emboldened. Even in the midst of current movements such as #metoo, #blacklivesmatter, #timesup, and the Women’s March, the voices of the most vulnerable students are often not being heard, even though they are often the most impacted. Therefore, the next step is to engage students in fighting DMST by cultivating their leadership to influence one another and create systemic change within their communities. The following section focuses on how schools can help with prevention rather than perpetuating risk factors that can lead to DMST. This leads to the question: how could the school system have helped prevent Rose’s current situation?

CRF, through its multidisciplinary approach analyzing systemic oppressions, and assemblage, along with its focus on what is done and how it gets done, offers a framework in which we can begin to combat the dehumanizing treatment that adolescent girls of color often face in resource-poor educational institutions by creating spaces where their voices are centered and acted upon to prevent any susceptibility to DMST and for their empowerment. While still viewing DMST as a human rights issue, this would allow us to simultaneously view it through the lens of capacity building (of girls, of schools, of communities, of responding to a culture of toxic masculinity and misogyny) when responding to the local contexts of DMST. It may allow us to recognize the profoundly affective dimensions of DMST within the deployment of race, gender, and sexual identities.

Recommendations for Educators

There is persuasive evidence for the importance of school-based and trauma-competent prevention initiatives that address the risk factors of DMST, and therefore fulfill the mission of providing a safe space. Schools must operate beyond the principles of risk factors and move towards engaging girls of color in ways that address their intersecting gendered and racialized subordinations and the patterns of affect concomitant with the enactment of such identities. Since DMST is a prime example of pathways from trauma to confinement, schools must focus on the development of protective factors in girls of color, and the support of their voice and leadership in the process. We see these protective factors as a way to cast aside the burden of deficit-oriented messages girls of color regularly experience and to address the repressive and disproportionate impact of U.S. sexual exceptionalism on them. Through educating teachers and students about the factors of vulnerability and working with administrators to build a school community that is humanizing to all students, the voices of students can be foregrounded in the fight against DMST. It is important to not just continue to build awareness about the issues, but also build on protective factors, such as trauma-informed practices, school connectedness, and

the development of intrapersonal skills for girls' empowerment as a means of trafficking prevention.

Education and Awareness

The first component of prevention programs highlights the lack of awareness about the risks and reality of sex trafficking (Samarasinghe & Burton, 2007), nationally and internationally. In the U.S. context, with established educational institutions and policies that mandate school attendance, it is crucial for schools to educate youth about gender-based human rights (Rafferty, 2013). In one particular study where runaway, homeless, and street youth ($N = 23$) participated in a discussion group about sex trafficking and healthy relationships, 82% of the participants said they felt they were less likely to fall prey to sex trafficking with this newfound knowledge and awareness (Countryman-Roswurm & Bolin, 2014). Therefore, integrating curricula about gender-based human rights issues, including trafficking and relationships, into general education courses educates the whole student body (and concurrently, staff) about these issues. Furthermore, when youth become educated and aware of DMST, they begin to understand the risks, their patterns, and become more cognizant of their relationships as well as those of their peers (Countryman-Roswurm & Bolin, 2014; Rafferty, 2013). Such findings highlight the need for awareness of intersectionality and the accompanying patterns of relations and affect that girls experience in their relationships.

Trauma-Competent Schools

According to the Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative (Massachusetts Advocates for Children, 2018), trauma-sensitive or trauma-competent schools are defined by six attributes: (1) a common understanding among staff; (2) supporting all children's physical, social, and emotional safety and academic needs; (3) responding to student needs, with consideration to relationships, self-regulation, academic competence, and physical and emotional well-being; (4) connecting students to the school community and engaging them in practicing new skills; (5) collectively sharing responsibility for all students; and (6) adapting to the evolving needs of students. The U.S. Department of Education (2014) found that school supports such as school connectedness and trauma-informed programs (Kaestle, 2012) were more influential for students' school and academic outcomes than the presence of poverty and crime.

The trauma of abuse and exposure to violence can manifest itself in a multitude of internal and external behaviors. Without trauma-informed training, behaviors exhibited by youth who have experienced trauma can lead to the erroneous identification of learning disabilities or their criminalization (Oehlerg, 2008), as was the case for Rose, who was punished for her "defiance" and truancy. This is especially critical for Black girls, who are already over-disciplined and suspended at rates significantly higher than their White peers (Morris, 2016). Conversely, when educators understand the impact of trauma on student behavior, they can utilize practices that engage students more fully in their education (Day et al., 2015). Rose's story highlights the need for safe spaces for young people who have experienced trauma and are at risk of, or are being, exploited through DMST, and the positive impact her teachers and

counselors could have made by both knowing the warning signs of DMST and supporting her, rather than further marginalizing her. Trauma-competent schools have a positive impact on all students, not just on those who have experienced trauma, as these efforts aim to build classroom and school-wide cohesion. By educating all school staff about both the potential impact of trauma and the externalizing and internalizing ways in which it often manifests in student behavior, school counselors can play a vital role in equipping staff with tools to develop trauma-informed classrooms, where students feel safe and connected.

School Connectedness and Empowerment

The socializing aspect of school is especially critical for youth who have been economically or socially marginalized (Morris, 2016). Schools are, unsurprisingly, one of the biggest influences on the life trajectory of Black girls (Morris, 2016). They are places where children develop understandings and identities in relation to the world around them. Although many youth felt desperate, manipulated, and coerced into sex trafficking, Kaestle (2012) found that school connectedness acted as a protective factor in the lives of adolescents. For students who have experienced trauma, connectedness is an essential factor to their formation of healthy relationships and holistic development (Cook et al., 2005). By not experiencing this sense of connectedness at school, Rose found instead a sisterhood of sorts among the girls with whom she was being exploited, and a sense of belonging *to* her trafficker.

Research has shown that self-esteem is connected to a sense of belonging, and therefore it is critical that girls of color feel accepted, respected, and validated in their schools, leading to confidence (Clonan-Roy et al., 2016). As noted above, one population of girls particularly at risk of DMST is runaway, homeless, and street youth (RHSY). One of the keys to the success of empowerment programs is their provision of “a safe place for RHSY to explore their own beliefs and values regarding healthy relationships with themselves, parents, peers, and intimate partners” (Countryman-Roswurm & Bolin, 2014, p. 534). There is therefore a need for empowerment programs for all students, but especially in communities where a high percentage of students have experienced childhood sexual abuse or for students who have run away or experienced homelessness (Hurt, 2012; Kaestle, 2012), to address DMST. A lack of self-esteem and feelings of alienation can be intensified by abuse and homelessness. Not only can schools recognize early warning signs relating to sex trafficking, they can also connect students who are experiencing, or are at risk of, homelessness, with resources to ensure their safety, sense of belonging, and stability to reduce the intensification of vulnerability. Rose’s past academic and behavioral history in schools, her withdrawal from school and friends, coupled with her living situation and the sense of guilt, shame, subordination, and control she felt, serve as notifications of risk factors. When schools are unable to identify such tangible and affective risk factors and fail to intervene, they risk alienating their students further and making them more susceptible to DMST, and others may continue to end up in situations similar to that of Rose.

Implications and Future Research

This conceptual review of the literature is intended to develop the knowledge of school communities who work with girls at risk of DMST. Empirical research and data-driven reporting suggest that girls of color have more intersecting factors that often make them more vulnerable to DMST, so future research and sex trafficking prevention programs need to address race and gender in the U.S. context in order to be impactful. However, vulnerability is not clearly based on common markers of identity that intersect like race, gender, and class: the risk of sex trafficking is as much about the affective processes of early traumas and traffickers capitalizing on girls' abilities to affect and be affected (Ringrose & Renold, 2015) by finesse pimping, violence, and suchlike, to render control over their bodies. DMST is as much about individual experiences as it is about the societal patterns that ignore these risk factors to support the fiction of U.S. sexual exceptionalism. As such, more work is needed to map out such processes and patterns of relations to understand this exploitation and how prevention and empowerment programs can wrest this control from perpetrators.

The experiences of this population cannot be “subsumed with the traditional boundaries of race or gender discrimination as these boundaries are currently understood... [or] captured wholly by looking at the race or gender dimension of [their] experiences separately” (Crenshaw, 1991b, p. 1244). Black girls are often objectified in many aspects of public life: girls who are often seen as recipients of projects and programs, yet silenced; girls who are stereotyped as loud and outspoken, yet are often afraid to speak up when it truly counts; girls who are victimized and criminalized, even in instances where they should be provided with treatment, support and care. More research on how schools both perpetuate compounding factors that lead girls into DMST and counter those compounding factors is needed. This research will allow for a more complete understanding of the facets and shifting nature of the DMST situation to better inform governmental and institutional policies.

As this review has shown, there are clearly limitations in the research of DMST and the programs aimed at its prevention and the empowerment of girls of color. As a research community, we know little of the effects of programs housed in non-governmental entities with few resources to engage in robust evaluative research. In addition, many programs are small and their reach limited. From a programmatic standpoint, it is a challenge to create programs that will be sustainable, compete for limited funding, and address the multiple risk factors that intersect in the lives of girls of color (Samarasinghe & Burton, 2007). However, through the systemic and intentional focus on developing environments that are trauma-competent and affirming, educational institutions can create pathways that counter the many subordinations girls of color experience that too often lead to exploitation through sex trafficking.

There will never be a single solution to DMST, as it is influenced by numerous policies, systems, and social attitudes. Systematic reform is necessary on many levels, including the mental health system, child welfare system, juvenile justice system, school discipline systems, and funding systems for public educational and community/nonprofit organizations. While we

are aware that such systemic improvement is a long time coming, we have chosen to specifically focus on Black girls, many of whose experiences mirror those of Rose, to highlight how issues of protection, prevention, and empowerment are systemic issues that can be addressed by thoughtful and comprehensive school-based programs.

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