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HOW MUCH IS A LITTLE GIRL WORTH? A CRITICAL QUALITATIVE INQUIRY OF THE SYSTEMIC DEHUMANIZATION OF BLACK GIRLS THROUGH DOMESTIC MINOR SEX TRAFFICKING (DMST) AND HOW SCHOOLS CAN PLAY A PIVOTAL ROLE IN PREVENTION

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by
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Dedication

To my brown-skinned beauty, my beautiful daughter Ava. May you always know who you are and Whose you are. May you always know your worth and the power of your own voice. May the words of the first children's book I ever read you, *How Much is a Little Girl Worth?"* always ring true. May I do everything in my power so that you believe them too

Abstract

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2021–2022
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Ph.D. in Education: Specialization in Counselor Education & Supervision

Black girls who have experienced childhood sexual abuse are disproportionately exploited through domestic minor sex trafficking (DMST)—as the intersection of their experiences of systemic marginalization exacerbates their trauma and increases their vulnerability to DMST. The purpose of this critical qualitative study, involving 10 Black girls and 13 women of color advocates, was to explore the self-identified and observed ways in which systems, especially schools, *silence* Black and Brown girls, as well as their recommendations for educators/schools and other systems to play a role in DMST prevention. This study builds on existing research on the adultification, criminalization, and sexualization of Black girls, acknowledging the ways in which schools exacerbate vulnerabilities to sex trafficking for girls of color. Grounded in the expertise and experience of the co-creators/participants, this study proposes a School-Based Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking Prevention Model for Girls of Color comprised of the following 8 components: 1) DMST education, 2) Comprehensive sex education & consent, 3) Healing-centered community, 4) Policies & protocols, 5) Restorative culture, 6) Culturally sustaining, 7) Community collaboration, and 8) Aligned with American School Counseling Association (ASCA) National Model.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

"How Much is a Little Girl Worth?"

How much, how much are you worth, precious girl? How much is a little girl worth? More than the sun and the moon and the sky, More than the shimmering sea. All of the beautiful treasures of earth--You are worth more than all that to me. You're beautiful, worthy, and you should be loved Because of all that you are. Different from anything else in this world, You are precious beyond all the stars. You bear God's image--mind, body, and soul--lovingly made to be perfect and whole.

You are worth fighting for, raising my voice, Worth every sacrifice, every hard choice. Worth changing laws, worth all the fight, Worth whatever it takes to do what is right. Worth more than money or trophies or fame, Worth more than power or protecting a name. Worth speaking loudly to shout what is true, Worth whispering softly how much I love you. Worth fighting for justice, worth standing alone, Worth whatever it takes for your worth to be shown.

How much, how much are you worth, precious girl? How much is a little girl worth? More than the sun and the moon and the sky, More than the shimmering sea. All of the beautiful treasures of earth--You are worth more than all that to me. Your value is found not in what you can do or the things you accomplish and win. It is found in how you were made, precious girl--Created and cherished by him. Your worth cannot fade; it will not go away; It is not changed a bit by what happens today. No one and nothing can make you worth less. How much, how

much are you worth, precious girl? How much is a little girl worth? Worth so much more than all my words could say--No one and nothing can take that away." (Denhollander, 2019, pp. 1-32)

Rachel Denhollander, the author of this children's book, has spent her life advocating for survivors of sexual assault, most famously Simone Biles and the U.S. Women's Gymnastics Team--a personal mission as she was assaulted by Larry Nassar herself (Weiss, 2018). If only more systems and individuals in Cyntoia Brown and Crystul Kizer's lives saw their worth, these parts of their stories may have turned out differently–as both were imprisoned for murdering their traffickers and rapists. (Carroll, 2019) They both had a series of juvenile justice and system involvement prior. These systems and the schools they went to failed them on so many levels. (Annamma et al., 2019; Morris, 2016; Wun, 2016)

I draw attention to their stories, not to tokenize them, but rather to highlight how systems intersected with their vulnerabilities and identities to lead them down an unimaginable path. While each of their stories represents its own set of identities, hopes, fears, dreams, wounds, and triumphs, there are also elements of their stories that are far too representative to thousands of other Black and Brown girls. I name them to remind us that I am not merely talking about statistics and systems, but beautiful souls who are too often not afforded the right to be children. The right to be heard, seen, protected and fought for. I start with this story and by naming Cyntoia and Chrystul to keep the countless girls who have experienced and are vulnerable to similar experiences at the heart of this dissertation–as I continue to center their humanity in everything I do–within and beyond this dissertation.

Foundation of this Dissertation

> Every space, system, relationship, and experience where their voices have been silenced represents the opportunity to create a radically different healing space where their voices are valued, empowered, and forefronted. (Walker et al., 2022)

This belief statement encapsules the foundation of this dissertation, as well as my passions and career thus far. The concept of this study did not originally arise in academia or for the purposes of dissertation, but rather through a desire to impact the lives of Black and Brown girls and engage communities in addressing the crisis of domestic minor sex trafficking in the United States context. It arose from dismay and frustration that modern day slavery is not a even a part of mainstream conversation in education. It arose from frustration that oftentimes schools are resistant to engaging in anti-trafficking initiatives or addressing sexual assault, even after learning of students who have been victimized. It arose from an awareness of its disproportionate impact on Black and Brown girls and the lack of widespread sustained outcry over it, even across systems whose sole purpose is supposedly to advocate for young people. However, before discussing the need for reform across multiple systems that influence the lives of Black and Brown girls and increase their vulnerabilities to domestic minor sex trafficking (DMST), let's briefly explore what it looks like in the U.S. context.

Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking in the United States

The *Trafficking in Persons Report* (U.S. Department of State, 2010) defined domestic minor sex trafficking is 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 act has not yet attained 18 years of age," which led to the first time the U.S. officially

recognized this form of exploitation within its borders. In 2018 alone, there were approximately 15,000 *identified* survivors of sex trafficking, the primary means of recruitment being through personal relationships, romantic or familial (Polaris, n.d.). In terms of DMST, Selah Freedom (2019) stated that up to 2 million children are vulnerable to sex trafficking every year. Amongst those children, approximately 17% of the 18,500 reported runaways were sex trafficking victims (National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, 2016), and the average age of entry into exploitation is 12-14 years old (Morris, 2016; Selah Freedom, 2019).

This form of modern-day slavery profits off the commodification of largely Black and Brown bodies, with an economy estimated close to $300 million, with traffickers taking home $5,000-$32,000 a week (Dank et al., 2014). In 2017, there was a brief outcry over the number of Black women and girls who had gone missing in Washington, D.C., critiquing the lack of coverage over the crisis. While awareness is a critical first step, and there are sporadic outcries from the general public, the critique did not result in a call for sustained efforts that would improve social service or train law enforcement/hold them accountable to their abuses of power and the inconsistent ways they handle missing Black women and children (Lindsey, 2020), other than from those actively engaged in activism around DMST and Black girls and women. While the estimated 64,000-75,000 Black women and girls missing in the U.S. now also include runaways and abductions, many of them include Black and Brown girls at the margins who have been targeted for their multiple intersecting vulnerabilities and exploited through sex trafficking (Lindsey, 2020).

Few news stories or public service initiatives educating the public of DMST, or the sensationalism of the few (e.g., Long & Hajela, 2018) have shown the extent of this crisis, despite its growing prevalence. Increased attention to the prevalence of sexual assault through the #metoo and #timesup movements, documentaries such as *Surviving R. Kelly* (Bissell et al., 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. However, this has yet to shift the mainstream public sentiment or to materialize into substantive action or social/educational policy changes to protect especially those most vulnerable to sexual exploitation (Walker et al., 2022).

DMST is a subset of the commercial exploitation of children (CSEC), that identifies those who are victimized as US citizens or permanent residents trafficked within U.S. borders (Goldberg & Moore, 2017). This dissertation largely focuses on the disproportionate exploitation of Black girls and their specific vulnerabilities to DMST, therefore I use Black when the research specifies that. However, I use Black and Brown girls/girls of color interchangeably to be inclusive of Black, Hispanic, Indigenous, and other girls of color, when research does not specify. Each of these communities has its own sets of contextual factors that must be addressed in terms of combating/preventing DMST, however, much of this work can still be applied to advocate for girls of color experiences CSEC overall. It is important to critically examine the landscape of who is involved, as race, gender, and class intersect to exacerbate this crisis for Black and Brown girls. Marie Hatcher, the human trafficking coordinator for the Cook County Sheriff's Office of Public Policy stated that "sex trafficking victims are typically treated as chattel property, similar to African-Americans enslaved in the antebellum South. The

mindset of being able to ‘buy a person’ is a notion that is deeply ingrained in the American psyche and that never really left, despite changes in the legal reality” (Reese, 2017).

Disproportionate Exploitation of Black Girls in the U.S. DMST Crisis

While it is true that children across all racial, class, and gender lines can experience DMST (U.S. Department of Justice, 2020), statistics show that about 40-45% of confirmed sex trafficking cases involved Black youth (Thorn, n.d.; U.S. Department of Justice, 2011), even though they make up only 14% of the population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). Furthermore, of the over 200,000 minors in the United States who are exploited through domestic sex trafficking, approximately 43% are African American girls. Most girls exploited through DMST are from urban areas, have experienced childhood sexual abuse, poverty and/or homelessness, school pushout, and child welfare involvement (Rights4Girls, 2022). The FBI stated that Black youth make up for almost 60% of all juvenile “prostitution” arrests - although minors legally shouldn’t be charged with “prostitution” under 18 years of age (Cole & Sprang, 2020).

Those statistics go even higher when looking at its intersection with the juvenile justice system. In Los Angeles County, 92% of girls involved in the juvenile justice system and exploited through sex trafficking were Black and of those 92% of girls—62% had child welfare involvement and 84% were from low-income communities in Southeast Los Angeles (Boxall, 2012). Rights4Girls (2021) reported on the racial and gender disparities in DMST across states the following stats to exemplify the disproportionate exploitation of Black girls through DMST:

- In King County, Washington, 52% of all child sex trafficking victims are Black and 84% of youth victims are female, though Black girls only comprise 1.1% of

the general population.

- In Connecticut, the Department of Children and Families reported that 73% of referrals for trafficking were children of color and 87% were girls.
- In Louisiana, 49% of child sex trafficking victims are Black girls, though Black girls are only 19% of Louisiana's youth population.
- In Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 55% of sex trafficking victims are minors, 97% of victims are female, and 65% are Black, though Black people are only 27% of the population. (p. 1)

Problem Statement

Girls of color who have experienced childhood trauma disproportionately experience exploitation through sex trafficking. According to the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA), enacted by U.S. Congress in 2000, this type of exploitation is 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 act has not attained 18 years of age" (U.S. Department of State, 2010). Not only did this legislation consider multiple forms of trafficking as modern-day slavery, but it clarified that no coercion requirements were required for minor— a pivotal moment in the anti-trafficking movement. However, it was not until 2010 that the United States included itself within the Trafficking in Persons report, formally acknowledging human trafficking within its borders. (U.S. Department of State, 2010). This is especially important due to the commonly held misperception that sex trafficking only happened across country borders. More specifically, domestic minor sex trafficking (DMST) is defined as the exchange of value (e.g. food, shelter, or money) for sex with a person under 18 years of age. Polaris (n.d.)

reported an underground sex economy worth up to almost $300 million dollars in the U.S. alone, making it this country's fastest growing industry and second largest criminal enterprise in the U.S (Urban Institute, 2014; U.S. Department of Justice, 2010). DMST can also take many shapes in communities:

- Familial trafficking accounts for almost 30% of cases (Polaris, n.d.) and often involves family members exchanging sexual acts with their child/relative for drugs or other monetary gain.
- Adults can pose as *caring and safe* within their communities (Rosenblatt, 2014) in order to garner the trust of children/teens as a means of recruitment.
- "The life," refers to "the subculture of prostitution/*DMST*, complete with rules, a hierarchy of authority *involving a pimp*, and language…Women and girls will say they've been 'in the life' if they've been involved in prostitution for a while" (Shared Hope International, 2022).
- DMST can be a singular sexually exploitative relationship that looks like a 12-year-old with a much older "boyfriend" sexually exploiting her in exchange for food, money, sex, or shelter– making especially youth experiencing homelessness much more vulnerable to DMST.
- Youth from rural communities were more likely to be trafficked by family members (Reid, 2016), as opposed to urban environments where it was typically through school peers (Dalley, 2010), feigned friendships and boyfriends (Perkins & Ruiz, 2017).
- In a report by Thorn (n.d.), approximately 55% of children/teens were recruited through social media, website, or app. Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic,

online forms of DSMT recruitment have risen by 45% (Polaris, n.d.), and up to 75% of girls are advertised online leading to increased cases of child pornography (Thorn, n.d.).

Although sex trafficking impacts youth across gender, race, and SES, domestic minor sex trafficking (DMST) disproportionately impacts the lives of minoritized girls, particularly those who have experienced childhood trauma, as traffickers largely rely on emotional manipulation to recruit girls by initially using a series of coercive tactics in their recruitment called grooming, some offering love and/or monetary/material things to gain trust (Goldberg & Moore, 2017). Regardless of the type of DMST, as shared above, traffickers often use psychological means of control such as fear, trauma, and intimidation to keep them entrapped (Williamson & Prior, 2009), along with the ever-present threat of violence. Other forms of grooming girls involve using other girls/women to build trust by acting as their friends or a caring mentor/older sister to recruit and *train* them (Goldberg & Moore, 2017). More on grooming and the resulting trauma bonding will be described in Chapter 2.

This pathway from trauma to confinement, which will be explored further in the conceptual framework, is influenced by a host of systemic and individual factors, inside and outside of their schooling experiences--such as abuse, truancy, school dropout, homelessness, foster care, and juvenile justice--which make them increasingly vulnerable to DMST (Greene et al., 1999; Kramer & Berg, 2003; Lung et al., 2004). Due to the relatively recent attention to this crisis, it is also aligned with trends in both education and the justice system, as girls of color are disproportionately criminalized in both. (Morris, 2016; Musto, 2016; Wun, 2016). Whether looking at domestic minor sex trafficking,

juvenile justice, abusive relationships or other dehumanizing experiences, childhood sexual abuse is often an early marker in this pathway, whose impacts are often further exacerbated through further marginalization as they engage with each system. The oppressions that impact the various identities of Black and Brown girls do not operate in isolation of one another, but rather it is the intersectionality of all these systems and its impact on their experiences in educational systems that constructs and shapes the inequities they face. Without looking at those complexities within DMST--and the ways in which systems, particularly schools, either contribute to its exacerbating or protective factors--we do not get a full understanding of their experiences in order to fight oppression with and for them. Schools often reflect the oppression of minority populations in society, not only ignoring their legacies, histories and contributions, but even silencing them through policies at all levels (Evans et al., 2011). Therefore, it is critical for educational institutions to become aware of the ways in which they exacerbate the issue, so that they can play an integral role in prevention. This means it is essential for us, as researchers, educators, and mental health professionals to forefront the experiences of Black and Brown girls who are most vulnerable, along with those who advocate for them across systems so that we can create transformative healing systemic change.

The simultaneous involvement across the systems listed about increases their vulnerability to sex trafficking--all of which are compounded at the intersections of gender, race, and poverty, considering the majority of girls of color exploited live in marginalized communities. The *sexual abuse to prison pipeline* (Saar et al., 2015), which will be explained further in Chapter 2, refers to the disproportionate number of girls of color in the juvenile justice system who have experienced childhood trauma. Saar et al.

(2015) stated,

> When law enforcement views girls as perpetrators, and when their cases are not dismissed or diverted but sent deeper into the justice system, the cost is twofold: girls' abusers are shielded from accountability, and the trauma that is the underlying cause of the behavior is not addressed. The choice to punish instead of support sets in motion a cycle of abuse and imprisonment that has harmful consequences for victims of trauma. (p. 12)

According to Susan Cole, trauma is defined as a response to a stressful experience where a person's ability to cope is dramatically undermined and includes, but is not limited to, physical threats/violence, emotional maltreatment, neglect, abandonment, and loss which further marginalize students (Yaroshefsky & Shwedel, 2015). According to Hockenberry and Puzzanchera (2014), more than 2.1 million students under 18 were arrested in 2010, leading to 1.2 million cases involving juvenile delinquency, many of which involved status or nonviolent offenses, such as truancy, substance abuse, defiance, and running away (Salsich & Trone, 2013), which are often behaviors resulting from student's experiences of trauma or victimization (Mallett, 2017). The prevalence and breakdown of status offenses will be explored further in Chapter 2. In addition, approximately 80% of justice involved youth have a mental health diagnosis (Rights4Girls, 2019).

One particular study documented that 73% of girls in the juvenile justice system have histories of sexual or physical abuse (Saar et al., 2015), while some studies show that up to 90% of youth in both residential juvenile justice facilitates and those having those past experiences of trauma (Ford et al., 2012). Furthermore, Rights4Girls (2019), a

gender-based human rights organization, notes that while Black girls make up for only 22% of the youth population, they make up about 66% of girls who are incarcerated. Similarly, Black girls represent 40% of all young people victimized through DMST (Rights4Girls, 2019). A study in Los Angeles found that up to 92% of incarcerated girls who were exploited through DMST also identified as Black (Boxall, 2012). This early victimization is exacerbated by a host of factors, along with the sexualization and adultification of Black girls makes them even more *invisible.* According to Ocen (2015), "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 categories such as race, gender, and class" (p. 1590). Similarly in schools, the impact of external and internalized racism and oppression on the educational experiences of Black and Brown girls is of critical importance (Morris, 2016). Since the average age of girls exploited through DMST is between the ages of 12-15 (Morris, 2016; Selah Freedom, 2019), it is crucial for schools to raise awareness of exploitation as well as the ways in which they contribute to and can therefore prevent pathways into DMST.

Why Should Schools Care About DMST Prevention?

How can we begin to engage schools in combating sex trafficking, when there is often an unwillingness to even name the very factors that exacerbate the crisis in the first place and to fully recognize the humanity of Black and Brown girls? Baldwin (1962) once stated that "Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced" (p. 38). Considering that 55% of youth report still attending school while being trafficked (Thorn, n.d.), schools are positioned to play a protective and preventive role in addressing sexual violence that disproportionately affects girls and more so girls

of color. However, we cannot talk about the importance of engaging in discussion/prevention for DMST and the need for healing-centered schools without acknowledging the scope of childhood sexual abuse, partner/relationship violence, and more specifically sexual violence–that directly play into the DMST crisis. Let's start by looking at sexual violence, which is defined as sexual activity that occurs without freely given consent, such as through force, in capacitation, coercion, misuse of authority, or inability to consent due to victim age (CDC, n. d.).

Sexual Violence Among Girls. Startling statistics paint a somber portrait of the problem of sexual violence among girls in the United States:

- 43% of women experience sexual violence before turning 18 years of age, the rates are even higher for Black and Brown girls living in resource-poor communities (Woodson & Andrews, 2017).
- According to Tonnesen (2013), girls of color also experience some of the highest rates of sexual harassment in schools.
- 1 in 4 American girls will experience some form of sexual violence by the age of 18; 15% of sexual assault and rape victims are under the age of 12.
- Nearly half of all female rape survivors were victimized before the age of 18.
- Girls between the ages of 16 and 19 are four times more likely than the general population to be victims of rape, attempted rape, or sexual assault. (Saar et al., 2015, p. 5)

Dating Violence. Dating violence also affects U.S. girls, as shown by the following statistics:

- *1* in *4* adolescents reports verbal, emotional, physical or sexual dating violence

each year.

- In high school, 1 in 5 girls *vs* 1 in 10 boys in relationships have experienced physical and/or sexual dating violence. (CDC, n.d., p. 1)
- More generally, 1 in 3 girls in the US is a victim of physical, emotional or verbal abuse from a dating partner, a figure that far exceeds rates of other types of youth violence (love is respect.org, n. d.).

Dating Violence Among Black Teens. Dating violence is prevalent among Black teens, as demonstrated by the following statistics:

- In 2011 African American students (12%) were more likely to report being victims of dating violence than white students (8%).
- The Youth Risk Behavior Survey also indicates that in 2013 black female (12.3%) and white female (12.9%) students in grades 9-12 were equally likely to report having experienced teen dating violence. (Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community [IDVAAC], n.d., pp. 3–4)

While this study specifically is focusing on addressing the disproportionate rates of sexual violence among girls of color, it is important to note that bringing these issues to the forefront positively impacts all young people, as 64% (about 2.7 million) of K–12 students (ages 5-18) experience childhood sexual abuse (Woodson & Andrews, 2017)! Regardless of the specific types of abuse and groups impacted, the data supports that there is a need to address the rates of sexual and partner violence impacting young people yearly, which are not even including numbers of prior childhood abuse outside of partner/relationship violence.

Childhood Sexual Abuse. Childhood sexual abuse is also a major problem in the United States. The following statistics outline the extent of the problem:

- Girls were most likely to be molested at the age of 5 and be sexual abused for first time between 5-8 years old (Saar et al., 2015).
- In FY16 alone, Child Protective Services agencies substantiated, or found strong evidence to indicate that, 57,329 children were victims of sexual abuse.
    - 82% of all victims under 18 are female.
- Every 9 minutes, child protective services substantiate or find evidence of child sexual abuse.
- One in 9 girls and 1 in 53 boys under the age of 18 experience sexual abuse or assault at the hands of an adult.
- Among cases of child sexual abuse reported to law enforcement, 93% know the known to the victim
    - 7% are strangers
    - 59% are acquaintances and
    - 34% are family members. (RAINN, n.d., "Child Sexual Abuse Is a Widespread Problem")

All these figures exemplify the need for imagining schools as safe, affirming spaces for Black and Brown girls–with the awareness that doing so will positively impact all young people. I am often asked to make a case for why schools should care about being engaged in combating this evil. Sex trafficking may seem like an insurmountable human rights crisis to tackle, and there are many elements of it that are outside of the control of a school as will be discussed through this dissertation. However, research

shows that there is much we can do as educators to prevent and combat it through raising education/awareness about DMST, combating the forces that exacerbate it and creating humanizing and affirming for girls of color through restorative and healing-centered practices. In addition, while there may not be statistics on how K12 comprehensive sex education reduce DMST specifically, these programs have been shown to significantly prevent and decrease interpersonal/dating violence (Foshee et al., 2004; Wolfe et al., 2009) coercive behaviors (Pacifici et al., 2001) and to increase an understanding of healthy relationship communication skills, consent (Righi et al., 2021) and bystander interventions (Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2021; Willis et al., 2019). Beyond a call for specific reforms, curriculum, or mental health programs, it is a call for a paradigm shift that engages schools in calling out the sexual violence and oppression silencing Black and Brown girls--rather than reinforcing the internal narratives and societal inequities that exacerbate their vulnerabilities to DMST. Through fore fronting the voices of Black and Brown women advocates and girls, this dissertation is a celebration of their voices as they demand change for themselves and a society that is complicit in dehumanizing them at alarming rates.

My Background: Why I'm Passionate About This Topic

While I did not know all these statistics above, my passion for fighting DMST and advocating for Black and Brown girls came from years of seeing the impact of trauma in their lives and how multi-level systemic oppression exacerbates its impact on them...and the lack of systemic responses to both resisting those systems and providing spaces for healing.

Dr. Paul Farmer, renowned medical anthropologist and physician once stated, "The idea that some lives matter less is the root of all that is wrong with the world" (Powell, 2018). When you look at the disproportionate statistics of Black and Brown girls exploited through sex trafficking and the money to be made from selling a body over and over, you begin to understand what a beast this whole machine is ... and it is a machine...one that is steeped in misogyny, racism, and capitalism … a business that is meant to exploit and profit off those most vulnerable in society. In the Fall of 2018, I attended the University of Toledo's 2018 Human Trafficking and Social Justice Conference, whose mission is *uniting the global community to learn, connect, and collaborate to combat human trafficking and promote social justice.* There were many advocates, academics, and people across social work, law, medicine and other fields. However, even at a conference that attracted academics and advocates across the world, educators and counselors were absent, contributing to two large gaps in content and discussion: the disproportionate exploitation of black and brown girls and the role of schools in prevention or awareness.

In every survivor story shared at the conference, there was some version of both the need for resistance and healing-centered safe spaces. When speaking of their schooling experiences prior to, during, or after they experienced exploitation through sex trafficking, each of the survivors shared that no one ever asked them if they were okay or safe. They all shared that while they did not have the awareness of how sex trafficking really occurred before or the language to describe it during, they would have known what to say if someone asked them if they were safe. The fact that no one had asked them about their safety speaks to the ways systems often fail those who are most vulnerable

and underlines the need for resistance. When sharing about what got them out of "the life," which is how many survivors often refer to their involvement/entrapment in sex trafficking, there was also some version of recognizing their own worth through their interaction with someone involved with their rescue, aftercare, or support. The fact that these interactions were transformative moments in their lives speaks to the need for more humanizing spaces.

Throughout my career in school counseling, outpatient therapy, nonprofits, and girls' human rights advocacy, I have encountered the most resistance from schools when it comes to engaging in conversations about sexual violence and sex trafficking. Even as I initiated preliminary conversations with potential sites for this dissertation, I encountered barriers and pushback from multiple avenues. At one particular meeting, two counselors asked if we could rephrase our project as a *leadership* program because the interim principal would feel uncomfortable with the words *sex* or *trafficking*, much less the combination of both. Friends and colleagues who work in anti-trafficking organizations have shared that schools are often the most resistant to education/awareness campaigns and prevention workshops with students and families. Reform is needed on every level and a whole paradigm shift needs to happen to respond to this crisis. There is a need to center healing from both individual and community/generational traumas. There is a need to teach young people about consent. To educate them about healthy relationships and create spaces where they can ask hard questions and process what is happening in their lives.

While this study will acknowledge how juvenile justice, child welfare, and mental health systems impact Black and Brown girls, it will center on exploring the ways in

which educational systems have the potential to act as either exacerbating vulnerabilities or protective factors in the lives of Black and Brown girls. In order to engage schools in combating sex trafficking, we have to acknowledge the ways in which these systems interact and more specifically for this study...the ways schools criminalize, sexualize, and adultify Black and Brown girls. Epstein et al. (2017) found that adults perceived that Black girls need to be protected, supported, nurtured, and comforted less, while also assuming that they are more independent and know more about sex.

I found this to be true in my experiences as a school counselor, as I collaborated with juvenile justice agencies, social workers, mental health clinicians, parole officers, and many other agencies and systems in order to advocate for my students. I was asked several times to testify in disciplinary court hearings intended to transfer students whom it was clear that every system had failed/written off...which I refused both on principle and conflict of my role as the school counselor. When dealing with sexual assault cases, I recall multiple situations when teachers and administrators responded by making comments like, "she knows what what she's doing…she'll never learn...she's just too fast for her own good." They were more likely to see *her* as acting out rather than victimized. Nothing could have been further from the truth for her and thousands of other girls in similar situations. Did I mention she was 11? That she was still a child. That she needed us to see her as a child ... that she deserved a childhood. That she needed us to believe her. To fight for her. To hear her pain. To see her full humanity. To affirm her. Certainly not to write her off. And even more certainly not to lock her up under the guise of *protecting her from herself*. We need to dream of a type of world where we provide support that doesn't involve *silencing* them or locking them up, but rather one that

embodies justice and healing.

Positionality

The values of justice, healing, love, faith, and resistance that I bring to this dissertation are largely shaped by who I am and my experiences. Growing up as part of an Egyptian immigrant family, I have always been aware of how society and systems, especially schools, often marginalize and *silence* those they do not understand or value. Many of those experiences led to a belief about myself until I had the language and awareness to see that they did not reflect who I was, but instead revealed a system that was built to silence me. That gradually shifted as I found safe spaces to heal through therapy, through my personal faith and faith communities, through affirming relationships, empowering loving communities, and the tools to resist those same systems where I once felt I did not belong. As I look at my own beautiful North and West African Black daughter, who is 8 months old now, I am even more committed to creating humanizing spaces in which my brown-skinned beauty and all other Black and Brown girls would feel affirmed and empowered. Starting from my third trimester at every prenatal appointment and on my birth plan, I insisted that every doctor and nurse that was part of Ava's birth called her by her name, that they acknowledged her humanity in every choice they made and acknowledged mine by informing and asking me about those choices that affected both of us. While of course a very different type of labor of love than my Ava, my company RAGOH Speaks and this dissertation, have been labors of love for girls of color I have had the honor of engaging with throughout my life thus far and to represent those that I will always advocate for and with, in one shape or another.

I have spent years working with girls of color, who were so full of joy, love,

strength, laughter, power, brilliance, and creativity. Yet, time and time again, I saw them navigate environments where these elements of their humanity weren't affirmed or fostered. In schools, I saw their inquisitiveness seen as combative, their leadership seen as a challenge to adults, and their moments of out-loud-joy be seen as disruptive. I have witnessed even the most well-intentioned trauma-informed/sensitive models fail due to viewing students through a deficit lens and a lack of buy-in. As much as school initiatives and reforms say they need and value the voices of all stakeholders, the reality is that the voices of students, especially Black and Brown girls, and even those who advocate for them continue to be silenced, ignored, and/or tokenized through various ways. While professional school counseling has the potential to play a vital role in resisting systems of oppression and creating empowering initiatives to equip students in their educational journey, even there, the social-emotional component and creating spaces where they can heal from their experiences of trauma are often not valued in schools (Hamedani & Darling-Hammond, 2015).

The irony is that I learned about the *extent* of sex trafficking locally through the experiences of several students and during my initial pursuit of becoming engaged in girls' human rights advocacy globally; not during a graduate counseling program; not during years of professional developments (PD) as a professional school counselor; not even during training as an outpatient therapist for a mental health organization. The irony is that people are often more comfortable discussing injustice around the world than in their own backyard...because that means they must acknowledge the ways their silence makes them complicit in acknowledging why it does not matter enough...or maybe because of *who* is disproportionately impacted, as presented above.

Epistemology

Who I am and the lens through which I see the world shapes how I view and interpret issues and the need for change in the sex trafficking crisis. It certainly affects who I am as a researcher. It affects how I view sex trafficking and injustice, how I see this study and certainly how I see my participants. It describes my belief that we cannot truly gain knowledge without listening to and learning from individual experiences, as told from their perspective. Claiming a critical constructivist lens, which values criticality, acknowledges that we cannot do justice to any inquiry of knowledge without understanding the context in which it is situated, as it is always shaped by the interactions between society, systems, and contexts. Within these interactions, there is always a dynamic of power as only certain voices and groups are deemed legitimate. Resisting traditional forms of research, it places great value on mutual understanding, critical reflection, and dialogue (Manning, n.d.).

This critical constructivist lens lays the foundation for my conceptual framework, and the ways in which I am grounding these explorations around the complexities surrounding how systems impact this crisis and the ways in which the voices of Black and Brown girls are silenced across those systems. It also affirms my methodological choices and intentions/priorities as follows: (a) creating spaces that empower rather than silence the voices of Black and Brown girls, (b) exploring how systems get in the way, and (c) engaging young people themselves to produce recommendations for moving forward. Considering the focus of this dissertation on how voices have been silenced, choosing methodologies and frameworks that forefront and value their stories, thoughts, feelings, and knowledge is even more paramount. Critical reflexivity will also be

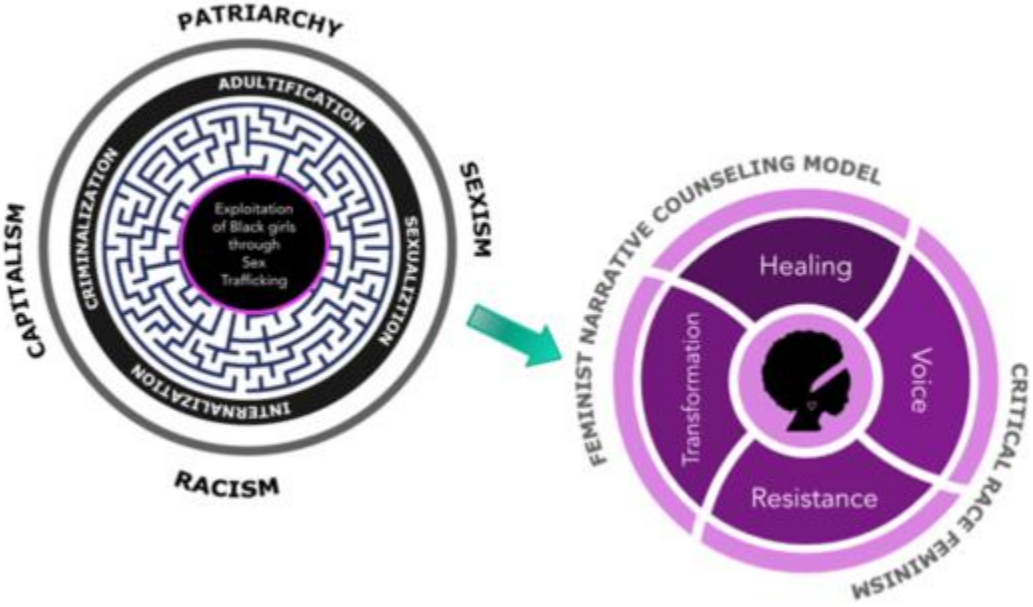
prioritized throughout the study to constantly reflect these values and reflect my epistemological stance. As a woman of color who has committed my professional career to working with young people, especially Black and Brown girls, my epistemological belief systems along with my experiences have led me to adopt particular paradigms and frameworks that guide my qualitative work and how I see my role as a critical researcher in this space.

Conceptual Framework: Transforming *Pathways From Trauma to Confinement* Into *Healing Sites of Resistance*

This study is an invitation to imagine schools as holistically safe, affirming spaces for Black and Brown girls--that combat both the internalized and external oppression that exacerbate their *pathways from trauma to confinement*, built upon many of their experiences in the sexual abuse to prison pipeline (Morris, 2016; Saar et al., 2015) discussed above. Beyond a call solely for specific reforms, curriculum, or mental health programs, it is a call for a paradigm shift that centers *healing* (Ginwright, 2016) *and resistance* (Clonan-Roy et al., 2016), *while centering and affirming the humanity of Black and Brown girls* (Figure 1). So what do I mean by transforming *pathways from trauma to confinement* into *healing sites of resistance* (Burke, 2021; Clonan-Roy et al., 2016; Ginwright, 2016; Morris, 2016; Saar et al., 2015; Taft, 2011)? Prior to describing how I am using the terms, let's look at their definitions according to Webster's Dictionary and the ways this dissertation will use them.

Figure 1

Transforming Pathways



Note. Created by researcher.

Trauma

Defined as a response to a stressful experience where a person's ability to cope is dramatically undermined and includes, but is not limited to, physical threats/violence, emotional maltreatment, neglect, abandonment, and loss which further marginalize students, according to Susan Cole (Yaroshefsky & Shwedel, 2015). Therefore, when exploring the disproportionate exploitation of Black and Brown girls, I use the word *trauma* to encompass early individual victimization, generational/community trauma community, and the retraumatizing experiences that result from navigating these systems.

When addressing both individual and community/collective trauma, it is important to not solely see trauma as individualized, as that alone does nothing to change the oppressive systems, therefore allowing those cycles to repeat (Ginwright, 2016). However, trauma can have bio-psychosocial impacts on impact students' development and capacity to learn in the moment, especially when their basic needs are not being met. Young people are often criminalized for responses to their trauma (Salsich & Trone, 2013) because the behavior is seen as the problem, rather than a response to the pain that they are experiencing. Shifting that lens pushes for a need to address both the collective and the individual impact of these experiences of trauma. While multiple studies have found that childhood sexual abuse is one of the primary factors leading to increased vulnerability to sex trafficking (Choi, 2015; Hurst, 2015), it is often how systems exacerbate this victimization through the *sexualization, criminalization and adultification* of Black and Brown girls that leads their disproportionate exploitation, which will be explored further in Chapter 2.

Confinement

Confinement (noun) is defined as "the action of confining or state of being confined." The verb *confined* means "to keep or restrict someone or something within certain limits of (space, scope, quantity, or time)." The noun *confine* is defined as "the borders or boundaries of a place, especially with regard to restricting freedom of movement." This phrase is not to stereotype any singular experience or conflate one injustice with another, but rather to give name to these dehumanizing experiences that often exacerbate their vulnerability (in this case, particularly Black and Brown girls) to further exploitation through domestic minor sex trafficking. So, am I referring to

confinement as in being physically trapped or *confined*? Within some forms of exploitation or even juvenile detention, that may certainly be the case. However, more comprehensively, I am referring to confinement as a form of silencing one's voice and/or freedom, literally or figuratively...freedom of having choices, freedom to make choices, freedom to fully pursue dreams/goals, an internalized sense of oppression that silences.

Pathways From Trauma to Confinement

This criminalization, adultification, and sexualization of Black and Brown girls, coupled with the impact of childhood trauma, are critical factors that exacerbate these pathways *from trauma to confinement* through both inside and outside of school factors– as all of these systems intersect often. There is a full continuum of discretionary decisions that are made from arrests to placements. Once Black and Brown girls get tagged as *problematic* in school, they are over disciplined disproportionately and often under the guise of discretionary rules such as *willful defiance* or *disturbing schools*. Winn (2018) recounted a story which demonstrates the way these exclusionary principles and statutes show themselves in schools. When "Shakara," a 16-year-old African American girl in South Carolina, refused to give up her cell phone, an armed school police officer proceeded to drag her out of her desk and the classroom by her neck while her classmates watched mortified. Her classmate Niya came to her defense, later claiming, "I know this girl don't got nobody" (Winn, 2018, pp. 1–2). What Niya's response demonstrates is that (a) educational systems play a part in criminalizing the most vulnerable, and (b) that they needed each other and standing up for injustice was essential for creating restorative and healing spaces. Winn (2018) stated that the language South Carolina's "Disturbing Schools" statute leaves way too much room for interpretation. While students cannot be

arrested for nonviolent offenses, they can be criminalized for violations of court orders and discretionary policies such as the one demonstrated here.

The adultification, or *erasure of Black girls' childhood* results in others viewing them as less innocent resulting in more harsh punishments (Epstein et al., 2017) and assumptions about both their character and motives. Thus...the cycle of system involvement begins. Once they get *tagged,* often through schools, this cycle of system involvement can have lifelong implications...including its influence on the disproportionate number of Black and Brown girls victimized through domestic minor sex trafficking. Erroneously seen as more adult-like as mentioned above, they are seen as bringing situations upon themselves, as being *fast* or *asking for it*. This sexualization results in educators criminalizing them for challenging the stereotypical ways that they/society believe girls should behave, assuming their *intent* or *character* even when they are crying for help from assaults in or outside of school (Morris, 2016).

As girls navigate all different aspects of their lives, they may experience these silencing and dehumanizing forces differently across systems and environments. Conversely, those same forces may influence their lives in multiple places in a multitude of ways–and in every single one, there are opportunities to intervene and respond with care. These same principles apply to all youth-serving institutions...especially schools. *Treating* or addressing trauma as solely individualized without attending to systems that exacerbate the trauma (Ginwright, 2016) of Black and Brown girls is exploitative and irresponsible. While the biopsychosocial impacts of trauma on students' capacity to engage in school are important, there is a need to resist oppressive systems that perpetuate these cycles of trauma to confinement for Black and Brown girls ... before

they come more statistics in the sex trafficking crisis.

Healing Sites of Resistance

When I use the term, *healing resistance,* I am imagining what it would look like if our schools were places where Black and Brown girls to embrace their childhood, to dream, to be affirmed. And if necessary, to heal from trauma they *may* have already seen/experienced in their young years. Where they themselves are given safe spaces to find their own voices and are equipped to lead in the healing of their own schools and communities. Where their bodies are not seen as commodities. Honestly, when I first wrote this 2 years ago, I was writing it in terms of equipping girls with the tools to resist, however, after conducting this study, I had to come back to revise it. Now I imagine these *sites of healing resistance* to include a whole community of advocates and educators who won't turn a blind eye to exploitation or any of the silencing experiences leading up to it, but rather stand up to fight for and alongside girls of color.

In an episode of Brene Brown's (2021) podcast, "Unlocking Us," Tarana Burke recalls the beginning of her work with Black girls in Selma, Alabama, sharing

> What I found were a bunch of girls who were eager to do that work but who were also carrying so much trauma and so much pain. And it started to feel unethical to some degree to ask these girls to go out and fix the community to be empowered to go and go back & create change in their communities without empowering them to create change in their own lives. Without addressing the trauma they were holding in their own lives. — as if it were just normal: we can't skip over that.

So how then do we begin to create spaces that affirm the humanity and dignity of our young people, particularly Black and Brown girls? The following models provide

examples that exemplify healing-centered spaces.

Healing-Centered Engagement. Schools are often not equipped to acknowledge and holistically address what has happened in the lives of young people, much less the traumas they have experienced. Even well-meaning interventions of *trauma-informed/sensitive* models can simply place a band-aid on those wounds at best and continuously rip them off at worst, exacerbating the original wounds that were there while creating new ones. Therefore, there is a need to move beyond traditional deficit-oriented, pathologizing trauma-informed models and center the notion of *healing-centered engagement* (Ginwright, 2016). Even when attempting to create these spaces as a professional school counselor and through the first attempted partnership for this dissertation, I was met with systemic barriers.

However, those barriers speak even more to the necessity of creating spaces that foster a sense of belonging for girls of color. According to the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Standards (CACREP, 2016) advocacy is defined as taking actions on behalf of students promoting their individual worth, dignity, and potential and fighting long-standing systemic barriers that could impede students' personal development and growth. As school counselors are the front line of collaborating with juvenile justice, child welfare, and mental health systems, it is even more imperative they are not only aware of the ways schools are complicit in exacerbating pathways from trauma to confinement. More about both healing-centered engagement and the role of school counselors will be shared in Chapter 2.

Adapted Positive Youth Development Model for Girls of Color. Clonan-Roy et al. (2016) created an adapted positive youth development (PYD) model for adolescent

girls of color, placing critical consciousness at the center, surrounded by character, competence, connection/caring, resistance, resilience, confidence, contribution, and resistance. Critical consciousness has been noted in feminist literature as a way for women and girls to not just assess, but also to respond to the power structures which affect their lives. The need for creating spaces where Black and Brown girls can deconstruct and resist the internalization of "messages floating in the culture about gender, race, sexuality, and class" at a young age (Pastor et al., 2007) is key in healing-centered environments for girls of color that can act as protective against DMST.

Voice

Since traffickers most often target and recruit girls who have experienced childhood trauma for their vulnerabilities, it is extremely important to understand the impacts of trauma and internalized oppression on their lives. A community-oriented lens of empowerment and systemic change versus solely personal goals leads to an activism that has the potential to change not just their communities (Taft, 2011), but also to encourage girls to use their voices to stand up for themselves. This is important, as studies have shown that Black and Brown girls are less likely to speak in situations where they feel their safety is threatened (Way, 1995). As traffickers recruit girls online, from within schools, group homes, juvenile justice centers, shelters, and foster care settings, young people must not only be aware of DMST, but how to speak up and ask for help. By simply creating species for girls of color to share their lived experiences (Morris, 2016), we can help "make sure these voices are heard" (Way, 1995, p. 126), which is at the heart of this dissertation. The following sections that outline the complementary theoretical frameworks, paradigms, and methodologies intersect to explore the ways in which

educational institutions have the potential to exacerbate and combat domestic minor sex trafficking.

Theoretical Frameworks

Critical Race Feminism and Intersectionality

Originating from critical legal theory, feminist legal theory, critical race, and the work of Patricia Hill Collins, (2000) the mother of Black Feminist Thought, Critical Race Feminism (CRF) is grounded in a commitment to simultaneously combat racism and patriarchy. This multidisciplinary lens provides a powerful framework to analyze the multiple oppressions of minoritized Black and Brown girls experience that lead to their disproportionate exploitation through DMST. Drawing from a lineage of Black feminist scholar-activists, CRF serves as a "legal and academic stratagem for studying and eradicating race, class and gender oppression in educational institutions" (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010, p.19). Just as girls often fall through the cracks in race-based conversations and initiatives addressing the school-to-prison pipeline (Morris, 2016; Wun, 2016), the disproportionate exploitation of Black and Brown girls through DMST is often ignored through gender-based trafficking initiatives. CRF calls "for theories and practices that simultaneously study and combat gender and racial oppression" (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010, p. 20). The multidisciplinary lens of CRF aids in the analysis of systems that continue to increase girls' vulnerability to traffickers, while also combating the dehumanizing treatment in systems entrusted with their education, support, and treatment. It highlights how sexism further impacts the ways in which Black girls are seen as deficit when they do not align with what is expected of White femininity (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). Minoritized girls, especially those who lives at the

intersection of race, gender, and poverty, are even more susceptible, therefore intersectionality helps frame this "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). I draw on CRF and a fundamental notion of this theory, intersectionality, to provide a useful framework for examining the disproportionate exploitation of girls of color in DMST and how schools can combat the crisis where they are often rendered invisible; both CRF and intersectionality will be explored further in Chapter 2.

Feminist Narrative Counseling Model

My experience counseling, mentoring and advocating for girls of color who have experienced trauma led to the development of my personal counseling model, which impacts how I view my cocreators in this study, their experiences, and the need for more affirming and humanizing environments. This Feminist Narrative Counseling Model combines the tenets of both feminist and narrative therapeutic models. While acknowledging the psychological oppression (internal and external) that women and people of color experience, and viewing problems in a sociopolitical and cultural concept, feminist therapy grounds the personal experiences in the political, critical consciousness, and social change (Crowder, 2016). Recognizing the power of connectedness, the therapeutic relationship is egalitarian, valuing the voices of girls/women and other minoritized groups, further resisting traditional ways of therapy up to this point (Crowder, 2016).

Similarly, narrative therapy's humanistic phenomenological perspective places value on counseling in a way that doesn't require defining clients by their presenting issues--in other words, resisting deficit-oriented models. Therapy, then becomes a "cultural arena that people who are experiencing difficulties or tensions in their lives can use to construct or reconstruct a sense of agency, personal identity, and belonging" (McLeod, 2004, p. 352). This Narrative Feminist Counseling model, which will be explored further in Chapter 2, has undoubtedly shaped the design of this dissertation as well. Acknowledging the dehumanization of Black and Brown girls through DMSTs, while simultaneously seeking to create more healing-centered spaces where their humanity is affirmed and their voice is emboldened have always been foundational to my work and worldview, and this dissertation is no different.

The marriage of a critical race feminist framework with my Feminist Narrative Counseling model provides an integral lens to analyze the systemic adultification, sexualization, and criminalization that amplify the DMST crisis–and therefore the ways in which humanizing spaces within those systems can embolden the voices of Black girls, resist the internalized and externalized oppressions in their lives. This framework also grounds my methodological choices and the ways I engaged with my participants, exploring the ways we can all fight resist the pathways that exacerbate the vulnerability of Black and Brown girls to sex trafficking–because there is a space for everyone in this fight.

Methodological Approaches

While it was not my methodological choice of inquiry, critical participatory action research (PAR) as an epistemology grounded me in conducting this study in a ways that

"refuses to speak *for* but stretches to speak *with*" (Fine et al., 2003, p. 196) my cocreators in creating recommendations for policy-makers and educators to combat DMST. It focuses on the conditions that create injustices in the first place by asking, "what are the policies, institutions, and social arrangements that help to form and deform, enrich and limit, human development" and "how do people resist the weight of injustice in their lives?" (Torre et al., 2012, p. 179). Building upon the work of critical and Indigenous scholars across multiple fields (Tuck, 2009), Baro's liberation psychology, Freire, Lewin's action research, and the work of W.E.B. DuBois (Fox, 2015), critical PAR orients the acquisition of knowledge through research "toward what ought to be" rather than solely an exploration/analysis of what is (Martin-Baro, 1994, p. 29).

Critical Qualitative Inquiry

In this study, I used critical qualitative inquiry as my methodological approach to center the voices of Black girls and women of color advocates. I conducted 23 interviews total that were analyzed and coded for themes, which will be presented in Chapter 4. The goals of critical qualitative inquiry, according to Denzin (2009) are:

1. It places the voices of the oppressed at the center of inquiry;
2. It uses inquiry to reveal sites for change and activism;
3. It uses inquiry and activism to help people;
4. It affects social policy by getting critiques heard and acted on by policy makers;
5. It affects changes in the inquirer's life, thereby serving as a method of change for others. (p. 9)

Contrary to its beginnings, there is no longer the illusion that qualitative research can inherently be objective or neutral, as we are all embodied beings situated in a specific

socio-political time (Denzin, 2016) with our own experiences and identities that shape our very perception of a phenomenon and pursuit of its inquiry. However, at the core of critical qualitative inquiry is the desire to forefront the voices and experiences of those whose lives are impacted most by the judgements, interpretations, and understanding of both researchers and their resulting recommended policies and practices (Denzin, 2016). How, then, do we not fall into the same process as researchers? We knowingly and willingly bring our full selves to the process and invite participants to bring their full selves as well ... in the hope that "we are free in these spaces to move forward into new spaces, into new identities, new relationships, and new radical forms of scholarship" (Denzin, 2016, p. 14). This methodological inquiry will be described in more depth in Chapter 3.

Adopting critical qualitative paradigms, critical race feminist theoretical framework, and feminist narrative counseling model represent my values as they relate to advocacy, gender-based human rights, mental health, and education. The combination of these frameworks grounds this study, committing to forefront the voices of historically marginalized Black and Brown girls and women, whose voices have been largely silenced and dismissed.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this critical qualitative study is twofold. The first is to explore the ways in which the voices of Black and Brown girls are routinely silenced and affirmed across educational, juvenile justice, child welfare, and mental health systems. This was explored through both the perspectives of Black girls and WOC advocates across the multiple systems listed above. Since schools have the potential to either exacerbate or

reduce their vulnerability to exploitation, the second purpose was to explore recommendations for schools (and other systems) to engage in combating DMST within their own communities. More specifically, it was to highlight how schools can become safe humanizing and affirming spaces that facilitate healing while helping prevent DMST. I sought out to forefront the expertise of WOC advocates across different systems/fields who are engaged in anti-DMST efforts and/or work with Black and Brown girls--either directly or in collaboration with schools. Again, both the girls and WOC advocates were seen as co-partners in this exploration in terms of the value their expertise added to this body of knowledge.

Participants

The participants for this study included 10 Black girls between the ages of 12–18 years old and 13 WOC advocates across a number of fields. The average age of youth exploited through sex trafficking is 12–14 years old and up to 40% are Black and Brown girls (Boxall, 2012). Therefore, this demographic of girls encompassed this population and allowed them to reflect on their current and past educational experiences and experiences navigating systems. Although participants were not screened for experiences of trauma or juvenile justice/truancy/foster care/child welfare system involvement, questions addressing barriers will create opportunities for them to share these experiences. The 13 self-identified WOC advocates for Black/Brown girls through their professions in education, social work/child welfare, law, ministry, juvenile justice, mental health, or anti trafficking agencies. All of them have worked directly in or collaborated with school systems and have an awareness about DMST and its disproportionate

exploitation of Black/Brown girls. The following research questions guided my conversations with all my participants.

Research Questions

1. What are the self-identified (by the girls) and observed (by WOC advocates) ways in which Black and Brown girls have been silenced (and/or empowered) through their experiences in and interactions with various systems (i.e. schools, child welfare, juvenile justice, law enforcement)?
2. What recommendations do the WOC advocates and girls have for educators/schools (and systems overall) in playing a pivotal role in sex trafficking prevention? In creating affirming healing-centered environment that equip/empower the voices of Black and Brown girls?
3. What are the experiences of WOC advocates in combating sex trafficking and advocating for Black and Brown girls within schools and other systems in which they work and interact/collaborate?

Significance of the Study

There is a lack of empirical, peer-reviewed literature on domestic minor sex trafficking, especially in the field of education. More research is present in social work, public health, law, and medical journals. However, as mentioned above, schools have the potential to be primary sites of prevention in fighting this crisis. Due to the intersection factors and systems that lead to Black and Brown girls' increased susceptibility to trafficking, from childhood trauma to involvement in various systems, there is also a lack of humanizing literature related to all of these issues. The fact that sex trafficking has only been framed as a national public health/criminal justice issue over the last 20 years

highlights the need for empirical research about the crisis in general. Literature points to a critical need for voices of those most vulnerable to exploitation to be fore fronted in the literature and in prevention efforts. As established above, "there is *also* a need for more scholarship in the field of education that looks at the educational experiences and schooling processes of African American girls" (Evans-Winter & Esposito, 2010, p. 12). Therefore, this study will glean wisdom from both Black girls who are experts in their own schooling experiences and Black women who have committed to forefronting their voices and advocating for them in one way or another. This study is also significant in that it also highlights the need for this issue to be looked at from all angles, including the influence of schools as sites of prevention, rather than further criminalizing students and exacerbating the crisis. This study sought to forefront the voices and experiences of women who have committed to create more spaces where the voices of Black and Brown girls are affirmed, valued, empowered and heard.

Researcher Role and Assumptions

Sometimes the conversations around sex trafficking lead to a conflation with sex work (women over 18+) or agency/choice (young people under 18 years); therefore, I think it is worth explicitly stating my stance on some common assumptions that may arise from this topic. First, sex trafficking is a form of sexual abuse, victimization and violence. Second, I do not use *girls/children* often because I do not see young people as having their own sense of agency. On the contrary, I believe so much in their voices that I want to counter the adultification they experience and remind us that we are talking about children whose voices are being silenced. Third, while sex work and agency are necessary and important issues/topics to discuss, this study is not engaging with them. In

this specific conversation around domestic minor sex trafficking, these conflations often render those already mostly vulnerable even more invisible in this crisis. It is about commercial sexual exploitation of children–which disproportionately victimizes girls of color. It is about the second largest form of organized crime in the U.S. in which a child's body is seen as a commodity. In "Nameless," a documentary about child sex trafficking in D.C. by Friedman (2019), an activist stated, "Let's be very clear. Children cannot consent to sex work. There is no such thing as child prostitution and the bottom line is it's rape." Lastly, in terms of prevention, there would be no DMST crisis if people, predominantly men, didn't buy and sell children, predominantly girls, for sex. There are much-needed organizations out there that focus on criminalizing perpetrators and on building consent culture among men. This dissertation, as outlined above, focuses on prevention of one of the most disproportionately victimized groups within the crisis.

Organization of the Dissertation

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the 1984 Nobel Peace Prize winner who fought for justice in South Africa's anti-apartheid movement, stated that "There comes a point where we need to stop pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they're falling in." In a student voice activity we often use in schools, we do a root cause activity using this analogy where townspeople go upstream to realize that people are falling through a crack in the bridge while they're going to the next town over for food–poor infrastructure and food insecurity. Similarly, there are activists/advocates, some you will hear from later in Chapter 4, who are constantly doing the necessary work of rescuing Black and Brown girls "from the river" of DMST and fighting the systems

that often render them invisible. I invite you to take a trip upstream with me to ask, "Why are they falling through the cracks?" (Ricks, 2014, p. 11).

Our trip upstream will consist of the following four chapters. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature of DMST and how cultural mindsets and dehumanizing practices (across educational, juvenile justice, and child welfare systems) exacerbate Black girls' vulnerability to the crisis. This section also further examines the role of schools in prevention, such as fostering healing environments, sexual education/consent, and acknowledging sexual assault. Chapter 3 describes my methodological choices and processes–from recruitment of participants, data collection, interview protocols, and data analysis–while staying grounded to my conceptual framework and the integrity of this study. Chapter 4 presents both groups of my participants, Black girls and women of color advocates, illuminating the ways in which the voices of Black and Brown girls have been silenced across systems and their recommendations for how schools can play a significant role in preventing DMST. Now let's begin our journey upstream together, not only to find out why they are "falling through the cracks,"—and more importantly to learn how we can patch up those dehumanizing cracks that make them more vulnerable to DMST for and with them and create spaces that affirm the fullness of their *divine* humanity instead.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

We begin our journey upstream by exploring several bodies of literature to frame our understanding of DMST and the forces that further marginalize girls of color making them more vulnerable to exploitation. This journey will also explore the ways in which we youth-serving professionals and organizations can create more humanizing spaces to affirm girls of color in preventative (for DMST) and protective ways. Before diving more into these areas, let's explore my chosen theoretical frameworks of critical race feminism (CRF)/intersectionality and feminist narrative counseling to ground the rest of our journey upstream through the literature.

Critical Race Feminism/Intersectionality

Critical race feminism, originating from feminist legal theory, and critical race theory (CRT; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), provides a powerful lens to look at the experiences of girls of color with systemic sexual violence and all the forces in society that both dehumanizing and affirming environments. Stemming from legal theory, CRT was known as "the work of progressive legal scholars of color who are attempting to develop a jurisprudence that accounts for the role of racism in American law and that work toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of eliminating all forms of subordination" (Matsuda, 1991, p. 1331). Applied to education, CRT's tenets informed research, curriculum, and policy for students of color through the following five tenets: (a) the centrality and intersectionality of racism (b) the challenge dominant ideologies/claims of race neutrality, objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness and equal opportunity, (c) the commitment to social justice, (d) centers the

experiences and voices of the marginalized and oppressed, and 5) is interdisciplinary in scope and function (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

However, CRT falls short in exploring and fully advocating for girls of color "Because women of color experience racism in ways not always the same as experienced by men of color and sexism in ways not always paralleled to experiences of white women, antiracism and feminism are limited, even on their own terms" (Crenshaw, 1995, p. 360). Therefore, CRF prioritizes the experiences of girls of color in schools, particularly Black girls. Evans-Winters and Esposito (2010) defined the following tenets of CRF as follows:

- *CRF* as a theoretical lens and movement purports that women of color's experiences, thus perspectives, are different from the experiences of men of color and those of White women;
- *CRF* focuses on the lives of women of color who face multiple forms of discrimination, due to the intersections of race, class, and gender within a system of White male patriarchy and racist oppression;
- *CRF* asserts the multiple identities and consciousness of women of color;
- *CRF* is multidisciplinary in scope and breadth; and
- *CRF* calls for theories and practices that simultaneously study and combat gender and racial oppression. (p. 20)

The multidisciplinary lens allows us to pull from different fields of expertise, both in research as presented in this chapter and through the scope of fields represented by WOC advocates and girls in this study. Another central concept in CRF, intersectionality,

helps illuminate the effects of, and the relationships among class, race/ethnicity, and gender.

As a power analysis (Crenshaw, 1991), intersectionality highlights the multiplicity of oppressions Black and Brown girls face as a result of navigating educational and other systems in which they are routinely silenced. Not only does intersectionality forefront the oppression they experience as a result of their intersecting identities, but also the affective conditions that create and perpetuate injustice (Puar, 2012). These affective conditions speak to the emotional manipulation by exploiters who intentionally seek out girls who are already vulnerable and oftentimes on their own without stable support. Targeting their need for belonging or shelter perpetuates this crisis, feeding a system of exploitation built on their vulnerabilities. It also alludes to the importance of empowerment through encouraging the development of a critical consciousness in Black and Brown girls (Clonan-Roy et al., 2016) and the need for schools to create culturally responsive healing-centered environments. There is a need to collectively move into a space of challenging issues by considering "the environmental context that caused the harm in the first place" (Ginwright, 2016) rather than solely individualizing trauma based on the internalization of oppressions Black and Brown girls face, perpetuating these cycles.

Intersectionality "address*es* the fact that the experiences and struggles of *girls* of color [fall] between the cracks of both feminist and anti-black" racist rhetoric (Davis, 2008, p. 68). Contrary to traditionally held assumptions about race and gender being mutually exclusive identities (Crenshaw, 1991), it assumes that all identities are experienced as intersectional (Puar, 2012), which can be particularly problematic for girls

of color within a system of white male patriarchy. Therefore, intersectionality can illuminate "how power works in diffuse and differentiated ways through the creation of deployment of overlapping identity categories" (Cho et al., 2013, p. 797)—which can be particularly problematic for girls of color living within a system of white male patriarchy. This is important as this dissertation forefronts the voices of Black and Brown girls and women, who are often at the margins of humanizing research, and seeks to make sense of a crisis where they are disproportionately rendered invisible.

Feminist Narrative Counseling Model

As stated in Chapter 1, my personal counseling model combined tenets of both feminist and narrative therapy, which will help illuminate how internalized and external oppression make Black and Brown girls more vulnerable to DMST. The beginnings of the first decade of feminism therapy can be traced back to the women's movement of the 1960s and the activism of the 1970s, which began to critique the ways that women were even oppressed through the mental health system, similarly to the ways they were oppressed through familial, political and economic systems (Enns, 1993). Early themes of feminism gave voice to the harm women had historically experienced through cultural oppression, violence, and being silenced (Worell & Robinson, 1993). While acknowledging the psychological oppression (internal and external) that women and people of color experience, and viewing problems in a sociopolitical and cultural concept, feminist therapy grounds the personal experiences in the political, critical consciousness, and social change (Crowder, 2016).

Stated another way, feminist therapy seeks to assist clients in developing tools necessary to become aware of their own socialization and the impact of oppressive

sexist/societal beliefs, while also identifying their own internalized messages of oppression in order to replace them with more self-enhancing beliefs. This is essential, as a fundamental part of dealing with trauma is embracing self-acceptance (Crowder, 2016). However, feminist therapy takes it one step further and seeks to equip clients to put that sense of personal/social power to practice by acquiring the skills necessary to bring about change in their own life and/or put the ownness on the need to restructure institutions to get rid of discriminatory practices. Feminist therapy believes that social action is fundamental to individual change. It also recognizes the power of relationship and connectedness and therefore, the therapeutic relationship is egalitarian, as it values the voices of girls/women and other minoritized populations--further resisting and challenges traditional ways of assessing psychological health.

Complementary to feminist therapy, the humanistic phenomenological perspective of narrative therapy enables it to place value on the counseling relationship without labeling or defining clients by their presenting issues--in other words, resisting deficit-oriented models. Narrative therapy was originally developed as a type of family therapy at the Dulwich Center in Australia and founded by Michael White and David Epstom based on the writing of Michael Foucault concerning power and social control (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014), which is evident in its five tenets. First, therapy is seen as a political activity, walking alongside clients in creating meaning of their experiences and identities in order to take a political stand against any oppressive influences that may be impacting their lives. Second, this approach requires a sociopolitical conceptualization of problems, as a contrast to focusing on pathologies and dysfunctional family systems in other therapies (Kahn & Monk, 2017). The third tenet challenges normalizing standards

and helps clients learn skills to do the same in their own lives. Fourth, there is a resurgence of subjugated knowledge, viewing the local knowledge of clients as credible, valuable, and useful aspects of their lives. Last, it fosters a sense of agency in the lives of clients in order to stand against oppressive forces that impact both their lives and identities (Kahn & Monk, 2017).

As it relates to our upcoming exploration of the DMST crisis, the combination of CRF and a Feminist Narrative Counseling Model enable us to explore the crisis through the lens of both the forces that seek to dehumanize girls, as well as those which are healing-centered and protective. The combination of the two gives us a tool to simultaneously see every component of this literature review in light of what needs to be resisted and challenged, as well as created and embraced. Now that we have our framework, let's continue on our journey through the literature by further exploring the DMST crisis.

Defining Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking

While sex trafficking can happen at any age, DMST is 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 act has not attained 18 years of age" by the federal *Trafficking in Persons Report* (U.S. Department of State, 2010). This definition also includes the exchange of sex for food, shelter, or to meet the basic needs of a young person under the age of 18 (Fong & Cardoso, 2010; O'Brien et al., 2017). DMST was not considered trafficking within the U.S. until the *Trafficking in Persons Report* (U.S. Department of State, 2010) was published. However, legal approaches which address DMST and stem from the report are not yet consistent across states, which often

criminalizes youth for their exploitation (Kubasek & Herrera, 2015). This form of modern-day slavery (Polaris, n.d.) is part of an international phenomenon and has many forms in the U.S. context, as described in Chapter 1, such as familial trafficking and sexually exploitative relationships with older men in exchange for sex, food, or shelter, and *the life*. Recruitment happens through families (Reid, 2016), feigned friendships and romantic relationships, 55% through digital means like social media/websites (Thorn, n.d.), school peers (Dalley, 2010), and more.

The majority of research regarding DMST discusses young people's risk factors. (Choi, 2015; Cobbina & Oselin, 2011; Fedina et al., 2019; Greene et al., 1999; Hurst, 2015; Kaestle, 2012). For instance, Fedina et al. (2019) stated that,

> pathways into the commercial sex industry for youth may be markedly different than pathways into the commercial sex industry for adults. Researchers suggest that there is no one clear pathway but a combination of risk factors that create situations that lead to involvement in the commercial sex industry. (p. 2657)

Therefore, this review of the literature reframes these risk factors as systemic vulnerabilities, rather than individual factors, as it is the intersections of experiences, interactions, processes, and system involvement that increase young people's vulnerability to exploitation through DMST. This literature review, later, discusses the disproportionate exploitation of Black and Brown girls through DMST. Moreover, the varying components of the intersections lead to the greatest vulnerability to DMST, whose history will be detailed in the next section.

Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking in the United States

The literature regarding DMST is neither extensive nor dominated by empirical, peer-reviewed studies. Much of the literature is conceptual or governmental and nongovernmental reports. There is also a paucity of empirical work within education-focused journals; therefore, this literature review draws on a range of fields. 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 DMST cases opened by the FBI increased from 100 to 7,000 (*Innocence for Sale*, 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 to $290 million. A 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 (n.d.), has received reports of 22,191 sex trafficking cases inside the U.S. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (2016) estimated that of the 18,500 reported runaways, 17% are likely 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 et al., 2012). While there are issues with identification, the most accurate and valid estimates for youth exploited through DMST range from 300,000–400,000 a year (Estes & Weiner, 2002;

Hartinger-Saunders et al., 2017; O'Brien et al., 2017). The average age of recruitment into DMST is 12–15 years old, with some, reportedly, even younger (Boxill & Richardson, 2007; Fedina et al., 2019; Lloyd, 2011; Shared Hope International, 2013b).

Identification and Lack of Training

According to the limited research available, the difficulties of identifying youth exploited through DMST is multi-faceted due to lack of training/acknowledgement regarding DMST, issues with identification, reluctance of survivors to report, criminalization of survivors, lack of available supports for survivors, and past research studies (Hartinger-Saunders et al., 2017). Cole and Sprang (2020) reported on the lack of training and protocols for both identification and response among state child welfare workers and law enforcement. To properly train these workers, there must, first, be an acknowledgement that DMST exists in one's community, as well as an acknowledgement of the groups that are most vulnerable (Farrell, 2009; Fong & Cardoso, 2010; Hardy et al., 2013; McClain & Garrity, 2011).

A national study among mandated reporters found that 21% of trafficked children were trafficked into the United States and 25% were unaware that DMST existed in their own communities (Hartinger-Saunders et al., 2017; Werkmeister Rozas et al., 2018). The media presents DMST as singular situations, rather than as a larger societal issue, which further misinforms people about its prevalence (Werkmeister Rozas et al., 2018). Leaders must deem it a priority to allocate resources to the crisis to develop protocols and standardized tools for screening (Gonzalez-Pons et al., 2020). O'Brien et al. (2017) reported that, "Victims of DMST are a hidden population composed of children who might not wish to be identified, such as those who have run away from home or suffer

from addictions" (p. 266). Therefore, this leads to a lack of police reports and hospital records, which would normally help them identify survivors. The reluctance of survivors to report, according to Fedina et al. (2019), is due to often wanting to protect their traffickers or families or past criminalization by encounters with law enforcement (Farrell & Pfeffer, 2014). In order to shift these dehumanizing experiences with law enforcement, they must begin to view youth as *victims* of sexual exploitation, rather than seeing them as engaging in a criminal offense and them being arrested for prostitution (Cole & Sprang, 2020; Farrell et al., 2010). As aforementioned in Chapter 1, even though the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 states that DMST survivors can no longer be arrested or detained, victims are often charged with offenses related to their exploitation rather than receiving the support they need (Farrell & Pfeffer, 2014).

Vulnerability to DMST

As stated in the introduction, there is a lack of empirical research about DMST; however, there is consensus about factors that lead to young people, particularly girls, being more vulnerable to exploitation. In a review of nursing literature regarding sex trafficking since 1980, Choi (2015) categorized these exacerbating factors into three categories: environmental, trauma, and behavioral factors. Environmental factors included experiencing or witnessing domestic violence, parental substance abuse, and encounters with child welfare and juvenile justice systems (Choi, 2015; Countryman-Roswurm & Bolin, 2014). Other literature suggested alternative environmental factors, such as poverty (Cecchet & Thoburn, 2014; Choi, 2015; Cobbina & Oselin, 2011; Hurst, 2015; Rafferty, 2008) and homelessness (Choi, 2015; Cobbina & Oselin, 2011; Greene et al., 1999; Hurst, 2015; Kaestle, 2012). Further environmental factors such as experiences

of childhood sexual abuse, (Choi, 2015; Fedina et al., 2019; McClanahan et al., 1999; Rights4Girls, 2019; Wilson & Butler, 2014), physical abuse (Choi, 2015; Cobbina & Oselin, 2011; Greene et al., 1999; Kramer & Berg, 2003), emotional abuse, and neglect (Choi, 2015; Greene et al., 1999) were extremely common among DMST survivors. While I will do my best to expound on each in isolation in the remainder of this literature review, there will be overlap as it is the intersection of these vulnerabilities illustrated above through running away/homelessness, childhood trauma, criminalization, sexualization, and adultification are what lead to the disproportionate exploitation of Black and Brown girls in DMST.

Childhood Sexual Abuse and Trauma

Hurst (2015) found that DMST survivors had the most commonality in experiencing childhood sexual and emotional abuse. According to Davey (2020), Black girls experience childhood abuse more than any other race. When it comes to partner violence, almost 37% of women who called National Hotline were trafficked by their partners (Davey, 2020). According to research, girls of color are sexually exploited at significantly younger ages than their White peers (Hurst, 2015; Kramer & Berg, 2003), with their educational levels and minoritized status significantly impacting them as well (Kramer & Berg, 2003). Further, after conducting a national survey of 12,240 adolescent students, Kaestle (2012) found that childhood sexual abuse was the only form of abuse that remained significant on its own in predicting entry into sex trafficking. Familial trafficking, where children are sold for sex in exchange for money, drugs, or other monetary gain, accounts for approximately 30% of all reported DMST cases (Polaris, n.d.). While race was specified within that statistic, DMST cases in rural communities are

more likely to involve families (Reid, 2016) vs school peers and boyfriends in urban settings (Dalley, 2010). Other research concurred that DMST survivors have consistently experienced trauma prior to sexual exploitation through DMST (Brawn & Roe-Sepowitz, 2008; Cobbina & Oselin, 2011; Countryman-Roswurm & Bolin, 2014; Fedina et al., 2019; Grace et al., 2012; Greene et al., 1999; Hartinger-Saunders et al., 2017; Hurst, 2015; Kaestle, 2012; Kramer & Berg, 2003; Lavoie et al., 2010).

The trauma of childhood sexual abuse, as a primary factor implicated in DMST, involves an array of other, often intersecting, factors, as Choi (2015) alluded. For instance, in a secondary data analysis of case file reports collected from a statewide juvenile justice database, Brawn and Roe-Sepowitz (2008) found that 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 et al., 2004). Brawn and Roe-Sepowitz (2008) also identified substance abuse as associated with mental health diagnoses, and school suspension, expulsion, or dropout. Studies which demonstrate early school dropout as increasing vulnerability (Brawn & Roe-Sepowitz, 2008; Countryman-Roswurm & Bolin, 2014) exist alongside other studies which show educational levels intersecting with factors such as living situations, which include state custody, group homes, or homelessness (Greene et al., 1999; Kramer & Berg, 2003; Lung et al., 2004). However, these factors must be reframed as ways of coping (substance abuse), unhealed trauma (mental health diagnoses) and school pushout

(school suspension/expulsion/dropout) in order to look at the root causes of these vulnerabilities and intersection of societal inequities.

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 young people, exploited through DMST felt desperate, manipulated, or coerced (Kaestle, 2012). 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 (Office of Trafficking in Persons, 2018). Fear, trauma, intimidation, and lack of options due to vulnerable situations (e.g., poverty or homelessness) can prevent young people from seeking help once they are victimized. Girls are often "guerilla pimped" through physical violence/force, or "finesse/Romeo pimped" through psychological manipulation (Williamson & Prior, 2009), the latter of which often involves grooming girls with affection, gifts, and the ever-present threat of violence (Shared Hope International, 2022).

Victims of DMST often do not self-identify due to psychological factors, such as self-blame or believing they are *in love* with or *need* their trafficker due to the trafficker's emotional manipulation and control, starting through the grooming process (Goldberg & Moore, 2017). These data suggest that sex trafficking of girls is as much about preying upon intersecting identities (race, gender, and socioeconomic status) as it is about the affective processes that both predators and victims enact. The control of young 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 is exacerbated by a host of other vulnerabilities.

Running Away and Homelessness

In *A Path Appears*, Nicolas Kristof stated within 48 hours of running away, a high percentage of youth who are experiencing homelessness are approached by someone who wants to sexually exploit them (Chermayeff & Davidson, 2015). Of the 300,000 girls that reportedly go missing each year, about 100,000 are *sold* into sex. Statistics like this are staggering when you consider that one in seven youth between the age of 10-18 will run away this year and 75% are female. While there is consensus, in the limited DMST research, that young people who experience homelessness are especially vulnerable to sexual exploitation, there is no distinction between what precipitated them to run away or whether it was from home or foster care placements (O'Brien et al., 2017). Other research states that up to 30% of youth who experience homelessness ran away from their foster families or group homes (Biehal & Wade, 2000; U.S. Department of Justice, 2007). Fedina et al. (2019) found that homelessness was five times more prevalent among DMST survivors (prior to exploitation) than their peers. O'Brien et al. (2017) stated,

> Evidence shows that unsupervised youth, such as runaways, have a higher vulnerability to participating in high-risk behaviors (e.g., delinquent behavior and drug use) and being sexual exploited. Taken together, such research suggests a potential risk process and gateway for DMST: Youth involved in foster care are at risk of running away and/or homelessness. In turn, being a runaway and/or homeless youth places these children at risk of DMST. (p. 271)

However, this deficit-oriented view does not consider the organized nature of DMST and traffickers who literally position themselves in areas where they will find young people who experience homelessness, together, such as at bus stops, parks, malls (Williamson & Prior, 2009), nor does it consider that running away could be a means of survival. According to Halyard (2016),

> Running away is one of the most common status offense charges for girls, who account for almost 60 percent of runaway cases over the past 20 years. After running away, girls become especially susceptible to commercial sexual exploitation (CSE), compounding the initial trauma that may have led them to leave home. Race and gender play a major role in this form of victimization – a New York City study found 85 percent of exploited youth were female and 67 percent were African American. (p. 4)

Neither does this view consider the ways in which traffickers target girls online, which has grown by 45% during the Covid-19 pandemic (Thorn, n.d.). This view, further, does not consider the adultification, criminalization, sexualization, and subsequent internalization that Black and Brown girls encounter at each level, that make them even more vulnerable to both sexual exploitation and system involvement.

Disproportionate Exploitation of Black and Brown Girls

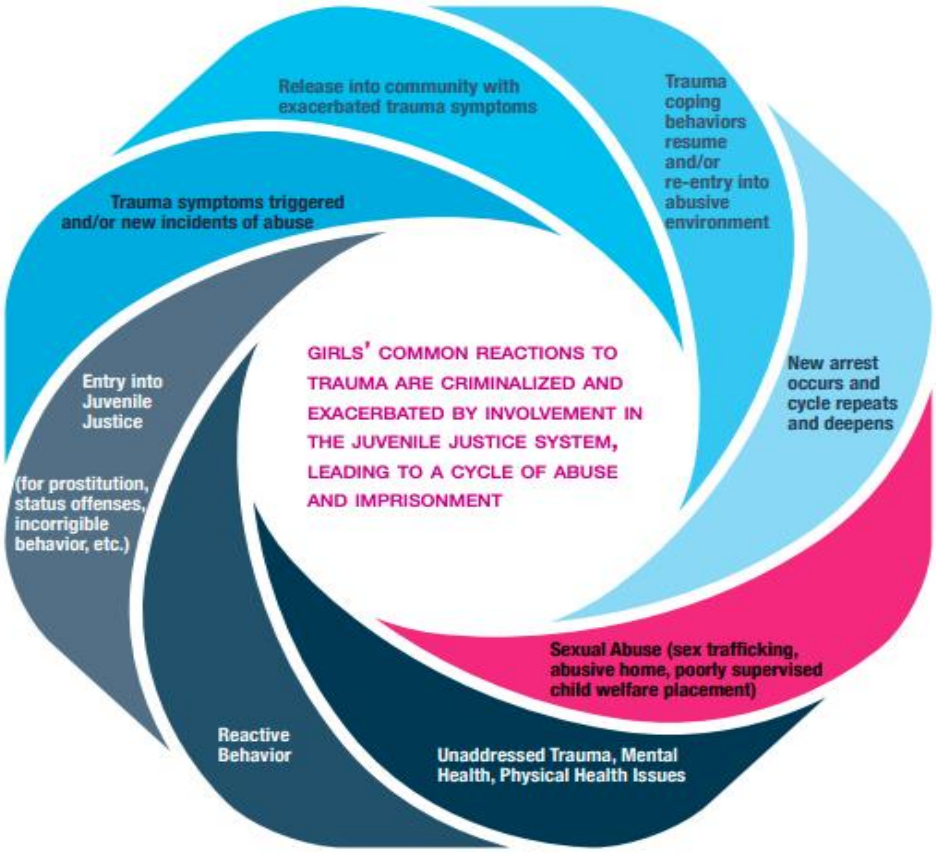
Much of the research present above on DMST highlights intersectional factors of young people who are sexually exploited, highlighted gender and socioeconomic status. However, there is a paucity of research that explores the ways that racism exacerbates the crisis for Black and Brown girls, even though the statistics are clear.

Parallels Between Pathways Into Juvenile Justice System and DMST

As discussed in the introduction, the sexual abuse to prison pipeline (SPP) refers to the disproportionate number of adolescent Black and Brown girls in the juvenile justice system who have experienced childhood trauma (Saar et al., 2015), and the cyclical nature, as presented in Figure 2, that keeps them entangled in system involvement.

Figure 2

Girls' Paths of Sexual Abuse into the Juvenile Justice System



This is critical to understand, as the ages of girls during their arrests and juvenile justice placements are becoming younger and younger, with the 13-15-year-old age range growing at the fastest rate (Saar et al., 2015). This is alarming, as it closely parallels the average age of DMST entry for girls at 12–15 years old.

Girls of color are often arrested for running away, truancy to escape violence, and DMST related offenses. Most girls who are arrested had intersecting experiences with the child welfare system, as a result of childhood experiences of trauma. The most harrowing system-wide example these girls experience is when survivors of DMST are criminalized, especially when Black girls are predominantly the ones arrested for "prostitution." Girls of color are also criminalized more for status offenses and charges for related offenses. Thus, there is, ultimately, often a crossover for girls from child welfare to the juvenile justice system, and they are often referred to the system by foster parents or group homes, with whom they are placed (Sherman & Balck, 2015). Then, once they are placed in the juvenile justice system, they often become even more vulnerable to sexual harassment by staff and/or peers (Vafa et al., 2018).

Further, girls of color experience domestic violence and mandatory arrest policies. As a response to stricter laws regarding adult partner violence, girls of color often get arrested for conflicts between themselves and their families or caregivers, even when there is no harm done and actions are related to chaos in the home. Given Black girls are often perceived as aggressive, arrests for them often seem like their ultimate next step, if they are already a part of the child welfare system (Vafa et al., 2018).

Another issue girls of color experience, while being pushed through the sexual abuse to prison pipeline is poverty and housing instability. Approximately 78% of youth

who experience homelessness had at least one encounter with police, and 44% had already been in a juvenile detention center or jail. Thereafter, their efforts to survive often left them vulnerable to exploitation or criminalization (Pilnik, n.d.). Vafa et al. (2018) stated,

> Without stable housing and the financial means to provide for themselves, girls engage in a variety of survival behaviors that can lead to justice involvement, such as arrests for sleeping in public places (loitering), seeking shelter (trespassing), and stealing to pay for food or other expenses (theft), to name a few. (p. 9)

Furthermore, 67% of girls who experience homelessness were approached by traffickers and 20% had been trafficked for sex, (Pilnik, n.d.) making the lack of housing and shelter one of the biggest factors to their vulnerability to sexual exploitation. All of these parallels and vulnerabilities described above are not enacted in isolation, as they are all impacted by a series of cultural mindsets that continue to silence Black and Brown girls.

Cultural Mindsets That Silence Black Girls

Epstein et al. (2017) referenced the historical context to the perceptions of Black women that continue to impact the adultification, criminalization, and sexualization Black girls encounter that add to their vulnerabilities to and disproportionate exploitation to sexual violence:

> Three dominant paradigms of Black femininity that originated in the South during the period of slavery have persisted into present-day culture, which "paints Black females as hypersexual, boisterous, aggressive, and unscrupulous."

- Sapphire (e.g., emasculating, loud, aggressive, angry, stubborn, and unfeminine);
- Jezebel (e.g.; hypersexualized, seductive and exploiter of men's weaknesses); and
- Mammy (e.g., self-sacrificing, nurturing, loving, asexual; p. 5).

The paradigms above set the stage to discuss how they are enacted upon Black girls today through adultification (*Mammy),* criminalization (*Sapphire*), and sexualization (*Jezebel*)--and the ways in which educators and society attribute certain behaviors to them, rather than looking at the systems in place that further marginalize them (Epstein et al., 2017).

Adultification

According to Epstein et al. (2017), the adultification of Black girls refers to "the extent to which race and gender, taken together, influence our perception of Black girls as less innocent and more adult-like than their white peers'' (p. 2). While research on the specific adultification of Black girls is rather new and still sparse (Epstein et al., 2017; Morris, 2016; Ocen, 2015), the adultification of Black children in the U.S. has historical roots that date back to slavery. According to Dumas and Nelson (2016), Black children were put to work as early as age two during slavery, and they were seen as unworthy of enjoying play and punished for simply behaving like children (Dumas & Nelson, 2016; King, 2005) and needing correction (Simson, 2014). Even as society changed and laws began to protect children more, those protections did not apply to Black children (Ocen, 2015).

According to Green (2021), implicit biases of adultification can be seen in schools, with Black students seen as more responsible for their actions. This perception of Black girls as devoid of innocence creates stereotypes on the basis of both race and gender, rendering them to be viewed as unacceptable, compared to White femininity (Morris, 2007). Surveying hundreds of adults concerning their perceptions of Black and White girls between the ages of 5–14, respectively, Epstein et al. (2017) found that Black girls were seen as needing less nurturing, less protection, to be supported less, to be comforted less, to be more independent, to know more about adult topics, and to know more about sex (Epstein et al., 2017). The way Black girls are often stereotyped as loud and disrespectful, according to this adultification bias (Epstein et al., 2017; Ferguson, 2001; Green, 2021; Simson, 2014), significantly impacts their experiences with navigating systems, leading to their criminalization and sexualization.

Criminalization

There is an overrepresentation of girls of color in both school discipline/school pushout and juvenile justice systems (Annamma et al., 2019; Morris, 2016; Wun, 2016), partially based on the ways they are seen as needing less comfort and support as early as preschool (Epstein et al., 2017). "Adolescents of color are overrepresented at each decision-making point within the juvenile justice system, from arrest to charges to disposition, with the greatest disparities the further a youthful offender penetrates the system" (Mallett, 2017, p. 574). As mentioned in Chapter 1, many cases involving youth of color involve status offenses. Halyard (2016) explained,

> Girls of color have the highest rates of confinement to residential placements for status offenses, with Native American girls placed at a rate of 179 per 100,000,

> African American girls at a rate of 123 per 100,000 and Latinas at a rate of 47 per 100,000. By comparison, 37 per 100,000 of non-Hispanic white girls are confined for the same behaviors. (p. 3)

The same is true for Black and Brown girls who have experienced maltreatment and trauma. Ford et al. (2012) found that approximately 90% of young people 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 factors, including family dysfunction, trauma, violence, identified and unidentified special education disabilities, poverty, mental health, unstable neighborhoods, and poverty. The American Bar and National Bar Association (2001) found that prosecutors dismissed cases involving white girls approximately 70% of the time, as opposed to only 30% of cases involving Black girls.

Black girls have increased involvement in the criminal justice system and experience higher rates of gender-based violence, compared to their White peers (Clonan-Roy et al., 2016; Morris, 2016). Black girls are arrested more for *juvenile prostitution* than any other group of their peers, accounting for 40% of these arrests (Rights4Girls, 2019), which should be illegal, according to the Trafficking in Victims Protection Act (TVPA, 2000). The 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).

The laws and policies created to *protect* women and girls have not been actualized. According to Musto (2016), the criminalization of girls and women who have been sexually exploited dates back to the Mann Act of 1910, the first anti-trafficking law intended to protect women and girls. However, the Mann Act ended up policing women's bodies rather than criminalizing perpetrators. The TVPA (2000) seemed promising, as it removed the coercion requirement for young people under the age of 18 years. However, in order for these Safe Harbor Laws, which only exist in 15 states, to serve as protection from being charged as *juvenile prostitutes*, law enforcement must recognize youth exploited as victims (Cole & Sprang, 2020; Musto, 2016). 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.

Girls of color are often arrested for *prostitution-related* offenses, which leads to their entry into the juvenile justice system. Cole and Sprang (2020) stated that when law enforcement does not recognize DMST as exploitation, but rather criminalizes girls,

> their underlying trauma is not treated, as punitive intervention with the victims may further traumatize youth and deepen their distrust of authorities and service providers, which plays into the traffickers' attempts to isolate and control the victims, and the traffickers are not held accountable for their criminal offenses, which allows them to continue their exploitation. (p. 378)

Even when law enforcement does recognize the exploitation and victimization, there are not supports in place that do not further marginalize girls of color, especially given the lack of shelters and safe spaces for young people who have been sexually exploited (Shared Hope International, 2015; Smith et al., 2009) leads to carceral protection, a simultaneous means of protection and punishment (Musto, 2016). There is a lack of mental health services in juvenile justice facilities that exacerbate the traumas girls of color have already experienced (Sedlak & McPherson, 2010).

Sexualization

According to Bay-Cheng and Fava (2014), research often paints narratives of "at risk" girls making risky decisions in a way that puts responsibility on themselves, rather than assessing the environments in which they are raised and systems in which they are involved. This analysis counters the deficit-oriented lens that often portrays girls as simply lacking assertiveness during unwanted sexual relationships. Rather, it was instability and marginalization, on many fronts in their environments, that put them in positions where they consented to relationships, they did not want but felt that they needed, whether to meet physical or emotional needs (Bay-Cheng & Fava, 2014). The inequities they experienced and lack of social, stable, and physical support in their lives is what made them most vulnerable–along with the multiple ways they've been sexualized. One of the most tangible ways sexualization is seen in school policy is through dress code. In a 2020 New York Times article, Green et al. described the following scenario:

> Alliyah Logan, a recent New York City high school graduate, said she routinely saw her Black female friends punished for dress code violations that did not affect her white classmates. "There would be White girls who wore the same exact

> outfits or even worse than us," she said. "They would wear sheer tops and stuff like that, and I would never see anyone call them out. But if a Black student wore a tank top, then that was a problem." (para. 14–15)

Pavlakis and Roegman (2018) reported that vehicle White girls were technically the highest percentage of student population out of dress code, Black girls were disciplined at about twice their rate, "insisting that female bodies are the problem, and focusing specifically on female bodies of color, the school perpetuates the mentality that their bodies are primarily sexual" (p. 57). As a result, society, and specifically in the terms of dress code, educators often see their dress through their perceived hypersexuality.

As referenced above, their adultification renders them automatically more responsible for their behavior and dress (Epstein et al., 2017; Morris, 2016), even when the issue of others' perceptions of them has consequences beyond a specific dress code violation. Graves (2019) argued,

> Restricting black girls from wearing cultural staples, such as headwraps and other nonreligious headscarves, is a double standard that can produce feelings of internalized shame. When schools single girls out for the tightness of their clothing, it reinforces the belief that the very presence of their bodies is a distraction. These sentiments normalize sexism at an early age and only encourage the widespread victim-blaming and shaming we see in our culture today. (p. 1)

Girls are sexualized in media, movies, music videos and lyrics, television, magazines, advertising, products such as toys and video games, sports media, clothing, and

pornography– the culmination of which often leads to sexist and rape supportive attitudes (Lamb & Koven, 2019).

Internalization

Since traffickers most often target and recruit girls who have experienced childhood trauma for their vulnerabilities, it is extremely important to understand the impacts of internalized oppression on their lives on multiple fronts. The most visible form of internalization in the DMST crisis can be seen through the initial grooming of girls through a process called *trauma bonding.* As described by Goldberg and Moore (2017),

> Trauma bonds are a dynamic, cyclical state in which victims form a powerful emotional attachment to their abusive partners *through* (1) a severe power imbalance causing the victim to feel increasingly helpless and vulnerable and (2) intermittent abuse that alternates with positive or neutral interactions. Grooming techniques (eg, flattery, building trust, normalizing sex) are used to establish the perception that victims are in a consensual and special relationship with their trafficker; thus they develop feelings of loyalty, making some youth not perceive their victimization. The relationship descends into intimidation and violence, in which enmeshment techniques include blackmailing, shaming, financial control, and isolation. As a result, the youth is willing to do what the exploiter asks, including engagement in DMST, to preserve the relationship. (p. 83)

While this process was described in section above on vulnerabilities stemming from childhood sexual abuse/trauma, there are added layers of internalization for girls of color. In addition to this external marginalization described above, 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 and the acceptance of the negative cultural stereotypes of their gendered racial identity, undermines girls' development, both in their identity formation and school performance, potentially blocking girls of color from even being able to see their success (Morris, 2016). According to Love (2016), "spirit murdering within a school context is the denial of inclusion, protection, safety, nurturance, and acceptance because of fixed, yet fluid and moldable, structures of racism" (p. 2). When applied specifically to girls of color in the context of this discussion, it directly applies to the internalization of their experiences of pushout and trauma.

Further, 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 their care) often see them as bringing drama upon themselves, which can be internalized as well. This is especially true when they are punished for defending themselves in situations that warranted support instead. According to Tonnesen (2013), Black girls confront harassment more than any other group, therefore, it is "the failure of schools to intervene in situations involving the sexual harassment and bullying of girls contributes to their insecurity as well" (Crenshaw et al., 2015, p. 10). This insecurity doesn't just affect their levels of confidence (Clonan-Roy et al., 2016), but the likelihood they feel they will be believed/supported if/when they need to reach out for help (Way, 1995)—or even more so whether they are worthy of that support. Adopting the sexualized, adultified, and criminalized tropes that society places on him impacts their sense of self and identity and therefore the lens through which they look at

both their past experiences and current environment and relationships (Crowder, 2016).

Black Girls' Experiences in Education Systems

According to the Ricks (2014), "females of color will comprise approximately 53% of the U.S. population by the year 2050" (p. 11). Therefore, "the idea of dismissing or leaving them out of a national discourse on education and asking them to subsume themselves under other group identities (by gender and/or race) is educationally unsound and inequitable" (Ricks, 2014, p. 11). However, there is still a lack of attention paid to the specific challenges and inequities that Black girls face in schools, from researchers, advocates, policymakers, and funders (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Jacobs, 2018; Morris, 2016; Ricks, 2014). Even though Black girls are disproportionately involved in the sexual abuse to prison pipeline, largely due to zero tolerance policies, as discussed in Chapter 1, Black girls are still in the margins of research and policy for the criminalization of Black young people (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Morris, 2016;). Even within feminist movements at large, "Because feminist epistemologies tend to be concerned with the education of White girls and women and raced-based epistemologies tend to be consumed with the educational barriers negatively effecting Black boys, the educational needs of Black girls have fallen through the cracks" (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010, p. 12).

This is largely problematic because "for many Black girls, schools are toxic, traumatizing places where they receive mixed messages about who and what is valued" (Carter Andrews et al., 2019, p. 2532). Lane (2018) stated that the intersections of race, gender, in addition to coming from "economically dispossessed communities" (in terms of the majority of Black girls who are exploited through DMST) lead to more deficit-oriented ideologies (Lane, 2018). Patrick et al. (n.d.) emphatically stated,

> TOO LOUD. TOO ASSERTIVE. TOO SEXUALLY PROVOCATIVE. TOO DEFIANT. TOO ADULT-LIKE. All across the country, girls are excluded from school for subjective offenses like these, missing out on critical class time and opportunities to learn. Embedded within school discipline policies, dress codes, or codes of conduct are gender and racial biases that manifest in exclusionary punishments that have more to do with who girls are rather than what they do. Girls of color face some of the greatest barriers to educational opportunities and social emotional growth inside schools with poor school climates. Black girls especially face scrutiny, often encountering rules, such as hair codes, that target their cultural identity. (p. 1)

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 for reprimands or praise for social attributes over academic ones, and harsher disciplinary actions than White peers (Morris, 2016; Wun, 2016). Girls of color are also overrepresented in the criminal justice and child welfare systems (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010), systems often exposing girls to violence, repression, and trauma. Black girls have increased involvement in the criminal justice system and experience higher rates of gender-based violence compared to their White peers (Clonan-Roy et al., 2016; Morris, 2016). The combination of harsher disciplinary policies (Saar et al, 2015; Wun, 2016), the criminalization of Black and trafficked girls (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010), 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. 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.

Criminalization in School

Hines-Datari and Carter Andrews (2017) posed the question, "How can schools become sites of possibility (in terms of self-authoring and sense of agency) for Black girls instead of sites where their identities are negatively constructed and devalued?" (p. 1435). Hines-Datari and Carter Andrews described the importance of policy to be conscious of gender and race, rather than (pretend to) be blind to them. "We cannot afford to have more Black girls' identities and voices snuffed out by disciplinary policies and ultimately the educational and criminal justice systems" (p. 1437).

While there are racial inequities for school discipline for all Black children, starting as early as preschool, Black girls are most overrepresented for defiance (Annamma et al., 2019; Blake et al., 2011; Skiba et al., 2002), receiving harsher punishments than their peers, for the same behaviors (Annamma et al., 2019). According to a U.S. Department of Education (2014) study, 54% of preschool girls with at least one suspension were Black, even though they only accounted for 20% of that population. That rate continues as Black girls make up 16% of girls enrolled in K–12, but account for 45% of girls' out-of-school suspensions. Black girls are referred to the office at 3x the rate (Morris & Perry, 2017) and suspended at 5.5x the rate of their White peers. Even though Black girls account for approximately 17% of students, they represent 31% of girls referred to law enforcement by school officials and 43% of those arrested on school grounds (Annamma et al., 2019). Once entangled in the criminal justice system, the

disparities continue, as Black girls tend to receive harsher sentences than other girls for the same offenses (Crenshaw et al., 2015).

Sexualization in School

Tonnesen (2013) described how implicit biases influence how schools engage with Black girls and, more specifically, partially account for the failure of Title IX and Zero Tolerance policies in protecting them. Black girls are seen as less deserving of sympathy because of their perceived aggression. Even with the overcriminalization of Black and Brown students, that is still not the case for young people who sexually harass Black girls. Even further, those working in youth-serving institutions, from schools to juvenile justice systems, often criminalize girls for defending themselves.

Even though Black girls experience some of the highest rates of sexual harassment in their schooling environments, which is often more violent and visible than their peers, Title IX and discipline policies fail to address this crisis. These rates of sexual violence are even more prevalent with Black girls than with every other marginalized identity. Tonnesen (2013) recounted a story from teaching in Philadelphia, where teachers called Child Protective Services after learning a young girl was being abused by her father. At the same time, they blamed her for running away and "acting out with boys" (p. 7). This was a double-edged sword, regarding a "lack of institutional support and severity of violence" (Tonnesen, 2013).

Title IX legally mandates that schools respond to sexual harassment; however, its efficacy has not been realized for advocating for Black girls who experience sexual violence. The civil rights and feminist movements of the 1970s aligned with the push to fight sexual harassment in K–12 schools. However, a policy is only as powerful as its

compliance and enforcement. Thus, when educators turn a blind eye to sexual harassment, what message does that send to girls? Their biases that *boys will be boys*, combined with their perception of *angry* and/or *fast* Black girls (even when in self-defense) create yet another double-edged sword (Tonnesen, 2013).

Approximately 64% of K–12 school aged children experience sexual victimization (Tonnesen, 2013), and Black girls living in resource-poor communities experience sexual violence at even higher rates (Woodson & Andrews, 2017). Based on these rates, educators need to understand the dynamics around race, gender, and rape. Those in the public eye who have been accused of sexual assault often attribute their past actions to youth and ignorance. As discussed in the introduction, even R. Kelly's defenders continued to blame those he victimized for years. Unfortunately, schools are often a reflection of these mindsets, perpetuating and exacerbating harm. For Black girls living and learning in neighborhoods and schools with concentrated poverty, the gender-specific risks of sexual harassment, exploitation, and sexual violence are often exacerbated (Miller, 2008).

Sexual Harassment. While there is a plethora of research on bullying in K–12 schools, there is a complete lack of research studies regarding sexual harassment as it largely centers on the workplace and higher education–even less research exploring educators' point of view around the issue (Charmaraman et al., 2013). Concerning sexual harassment, educators reported a scarcity of training around by districts–which largely framed it as an HR issue, rather than focusing on students' experiences of sexual harassment. Most teachers in the study assumed that sexual harassment only occurs between adults and, therefore, did not assume "their role in enforcing a safe 'sexual

harassment free' zone for students at their schools" (Charmaraman et al., 2013, p. 442). Even when made aware, most teachers stated they did not feel equipped to identify incidents of sexual harassment, must less when and how to intervene. The study highlighted the need for school staff to be trained, not just on sexual harassment, but to counter displays of toxic masculinity that may be perceived as normative for boys. Lastly, students must see adults explicitly combat harassment of any kind, regularly, to know that schools are a safe place and that certain behaviors will not be excused or tolerated.

The attention to sex-based harassment in schools can be seen in waves, largely around mainstream events, such Anita Hill's testimony of sexual harassment by then Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas and the 2017 mainstream resurgence of the #MeToo movement. During the 30 years between these two incidences, schools have yet to respond with urgency, both regarding reporting and addressing sexual-based harassment in K–12 schools (Cunningham & Sowell, 2021). While this is about student-to-student harassment, the same can be said for adult educators who perpetuate gendered violence without accountability.

Even though Stone (2020) knew how changes to Title IX would impact the role of school counselors and educators, what about addressing harmful and inappropriate behaviors that do not meet Title IX criteria for harassment? This unclear relationship between bullying and sex-based harassment contributes to the very small number of the latter that are ever reported through Title IX claims (Cunningham & Sowell, 2021). Even though sexual harassment falls under that category, it is largely still ignored.

Cunningham and Sowell (2021) noted that there is often no distinction between sexual harassment and gender-based harassment, using the term sex-based to encompass both. However, without an explicit distinction, it is still too easily put under the rug. There are also few studies that differentiate between the rates of sex-based harassment in schools based on race and ethnicity (Cunningham & Sowell, 2021). Black girls experienced more physical sex-based harassment than White girls, who experienced more verbal harassment. Petersen and Hyde (2009) also specified that boys are overwhelmingly perpetrators in both opposite-sex and same-sex harassment and victimization, which is an important consideration for prevention strategies.

The lack of inclusive sex education particularly affect youth with multiple marginalized identities, such as urban LGBTQIA+ youth of color. Kaley (2020) highlighted the need for policies to combat all forms of oppression they experience, rather than to solely focus on one. There is a need to implement comprehensive sex education from both a racial and gendered lens; however, there is still a lack of research regarding LGBQIA+ youth of color. This is evidenced by the disproportionate sexual harassment impacting LGBTQIA+ youth of color. The limited research there is focuses on how multiple factors further marginalize them in schools. “The experiences of LGBTQIA+ youth of color are also often absent from the research on LGBTQIA+ students, which makes it difficult to study the unique intersectional experiences and utilize such data to inform programmatic changes” (McCready, 2010, p. 31).

The Need for Humanizing Schools in DMST Prevention

Morris (2016) stated, “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" (p. 23). Therefore, schools must become affirming places for Black and Brown girls to counter all the experiences and mindsets listed above, rather than reinforcing them. Before discussing the growing shift from trauma-informed to healing-centered engagement, as discussed in Chapter 1, it is important to summarize and critique the research on both school counseling and trauma-informed practices in schools to determine how schools have engaged with and addressed the trauma of young people, overall.

Professional School Counseling

As stated in Chapter 1, CACREP (2016) defines advocacy as fostering young people's sense of worth and potential and resisting barriers that stand in the way of their holistic development. However, the remnants of a school culture of testing/accountability have long left out a focus the psychological, social, and emotional needs of students (Hamedani & Darling-Hammond, 2015); therefore, a renewed focused on these supports is key as funding inequities have also had a direct impact on the roles, course loads and ratios of professional counselors. However, students' access to PSCs and student: PSC ratios directly impact the fidelity in which comprehensive guidance plans can be successfully enacted. Students with lower ratios had fewer disciplinary incidents, less truancy, and higher graduation rates (Lapan et al., 2012). Role discrepancies, through both misperception and utilization about the role of PSCs by administrators, further compound these issues of access (Dye, 2014). Just as is often the case in elementary schools, a focus on social-emotional issues throughout high school needs to be as much a priority in secondary schools as academics and the college-going process.

There is an urgent need for urban school counseling to forefront these issues and combat the deficit-oriented views of students in many areas of education and policy, as the ways in which they are enacted have the potential to negatively impact the social emotional development of Black and Brown girls. In order to best advocate for Black and Brown girls, it is essential that PSCs and educators understand the social, cultural, and systemic barriers in their schools, communities, and all the systems in they interact by creating spaces where "dialogue is valued, prescriptions are avoided, and deficits are rejected (Hipólito-Delgado & Lee, 2007, p. 329). This is critical to the social-emotional development of students, because of the internalized impact of oppression on self-esteem, which can lead to mental health issues (Hipólito-Delgado & Lee, 2007) and in this case, increased vulnerability to DMST. These deficit views lead to a disproportionate referral of students of color to PSCs, often as a result of educators' feelings of inadequacy in teacher students of color from low-SES communities and a lack of cultural awareness (Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008). PSCs should also be at the forefront of educating their colleagues and students about sex trafficking and providing holist supports as they navigate schools and other systems.

Trauma-Competent Schools

According to the Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative (n.d.), trauma-sensitive or trauma-competent schools are defined by six attributes: (a) a common understanding among staff, (b) supporting all children's physical, social, emotional, safety, and academic needs; (c) responding to students' needs, with consideration to relationships, self-regulation, academic competence, and physical and emotional well-being, (d) connecting students to the school community and engaging them in practicing new skills,

(e) collectively sharing responsibility for all students, and (f) adapting to the evolving needs of students. The U.S. Department of Education 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.

Thomas et al. (2019) stated that there has been "no dominant or formally agreed upon framework for trauma-informed practices, as well as no consistent determination of effectiveness" (p. 443). Furthermore, while there has been much growth in implementing positive behavior interventions support (PBIS), social-emotional learning (SEL), restorative practices, and focuses on school culture and climate, they are often seen as additional (Thomas et al., 2019), and even in the way of educating, rather than as a priority woven into every area of schools. While professional school counselors have been trained according to ASCA standards, the lack of a mandated framework for trauma leaves much room for implicit biases to impact Black girls at every level. Relegating a focus on healing PSCs and external referrals (although necessary and important) negates the foundational need to support, affirm, and create holistically safe environments for young people.

The impact of deficit views on students of color is seen through disproportionate referrals to PSC, high truancy and dropout rates, and disproportionate involvement in special education and school discipline, all of which contribute to school pushout through the school-to-prison pipeline (Dye, 2014). While students of color are overrepresented in every phase in the juvenile justice system, the majority of cases are status offenses, which overwhelmingly result from behaviors in response to experiences of trauma and

victimization (Mallett, 2017). Pathways from trauma to confinement, often fueled by educational systems, can further marginalize young people, which can also be seen through the disproportionate number of Black and Brown girls exploited through DMST.

Shift to Healing-Centered Schools

Therefore, this shift in schools (in theory) from trauma-informed to healing-centered is an ideological shift focusing more on addressing root causes and challenging and changing the environment, rather than fixing a young person. The tenets of healing-centered engagement (HCE) as defined by Ginwright (2016) are as follows:

1. HCE is explicitly political, rather than clinical, focusing on liberation, purpose, power, and hopefulness.
2. HCE is culturally grounded and views healing as the restoration of identity.
3. HCE is asset driven, focusing on well-being, rather than suppressing symptoms. It focuses on creating environments where young people can dream and imagine.
4. HCE supports adult providers with their own healing.

Through a focus on healing as ancillary, rather than supplemental, educators can "transform, rather than reinforce, the oppressive nature of schooling by leveraging their social and institutional positionality" (Kelly, 2020, p. 462). Changing the lens through which educators see young people and their experiences is critical to how they engage with them. Morris (2016) stated,

> Our schools are the places where most of our young people spend their days; they are places that have just as much (arguably more) influence as any other social

> factor on how children understand themselves personally and in relation to the world around them. (p. 25)

Therefore, creating humanizing and holistically safe schools is critical for young people. As aforementioned, having these safe environments is often not the case for Black girls, especially, as inequities from systemic racism and sexism in the U.S. are mirrored in schools. According to Walker et al. (2022),

> 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. Black girls experience teachers' lower expectations of them, increased likelihood for reprimands or praise for social attributes over academic ones, and harsher disciplinary actions than White peers. (p. 84)

Specifically, in the case of system involvement and domestic minor sex trafficking, schools enacted these implicit biases and pathologizing behaviors that Black girls may exhibit, as a result of unhealed trauma, which has impacts far beyond their school buildings. However, schools have the potential to play a pivotal role in DMST prevention.

Education and Awareness

The first component of schools engaging in prevention 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 young people about gender-based human rights (Rafferty, 2013). In one study, in which young people participated in a series of discussions 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). 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).

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 understanding 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). Rather than seeking a sense of belonging through other means, building these spaces within schools has the potential to offer a sense of community, especially when integrated into the fabric of schools.

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, given this leads to confidence (Clonan-Roy et al., 2016). As noted above, one population of girls who are particularly vulnerable to DMST is those who have run away from home or who experience homelessness. This makes school “a safe place…to

explore their own beliefs and values regarding healthy relationships with themselves, parents, peers, and intimate partners" (Countryman-Roswurm & Bolin, 2014, p. 534)—and it makes it an important place to tackle the crisis.

Comprehensive Sex Education (CSE) and Consent

In order to create holistically healing-centered schools to combat the DMST crisis, schools must prioritize culturally responsive sex education, including consent. According to the Guttmacher Institute (2022), a global leader committed to advancing sexual/reproductive health and rights, 39 states require sex education to be taught. While that may sound promising, there are many gaps and loopholes about each state's curriculum and mandates. and even less accountability. For example, only nine states require that programs provide culturally appropriate and nondiscriminatory education, concerning race, sex, or ethnicity. Even though 35 states and Washington DC require education about building healthy relationships, and 40 states plus DC require teen dating and sexual violence education, only 11 states mandate that sexual consent be covered (Guttmacher Institute, 2022). However, consent, including coercion, are crucial components of sex education that must be prioritized in order to combat DMST, especially considering the emotional grooming processes involved in this type of exploitation, as discussed above.

Defining Consent and Coercion. Willis et al. (2019) defined affirmative consent as a verbal or nonverbal explicitly communicated, voluntary, non-coercive mutual agreement among all participants to engage in sexual activity. Even though coercion is a part of the definition, it is an important distinction to further define, considering the grooming processes in which DMST can occur, as discussed in Ch 1. Sexual coercion is

the use of verbal or nonverbal tactics to have sexual contact with a partner who has already refused or shown disinterest (Eaton & Stephens, 2019) or trying to verbally pressure someone to go further than they are comfortable (Hines, 2007). Coercion can use man tactics such as lies, guilt, begging, manipulation, continual arguments, threats, getting angry/sad/resentful if one says no, or physical force--causing feelings of pressure, guilt, and shame (Eaton & Stephens 2019; love is respect.org, n.d.; RAINN, 2022). This includes normalizing toxic sexual expectations, such as saying, "I need it, I'm a guy" or emotional manipulation, such as "Sex is the way to prove your love for me/If I don't get sex from you, I'll get it somewhere else" (love is respect.org, n.d.). While verbal coercion is the most common form of coercion, is "has been identified as the first stage on the continuum of aggressive behaviors in abusive relationships" (Eaton & Stephens, 2019, p. 2057), which makes it a crucial part of sex education that is needed beyond the 11 states for whom it is currently mandated as stated above.

Need for Culturally Sustaining Comprehensive Sex Education

According to the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NIPSVS) reported the alarming rates of sexual violence in the U.S., finding the following: 43.6% of women experienced sexual violence in their lifetime, while 21% experienced rape. Among women rape survivors, up to 43.2% were victimized for the first time before 18 years of age and an additional 38% more between 18–24 years of age (Smith et al., 2018). While the rates of sexual assault and rape were much smaller among men, 26% of those victimized still experienced sexual violence under 18 years of age (Smith et al., 2018). The rates are even higher when looking at dating/partner violence, as 1 in 3 teenage girls report being physically, emotionally, or verbally abused (love is

respect.org, n.d.). Based on these statistics, it is alarming that there is no mention of consent in the *Health Education Position Statement* for the Society of Health and Physical Educators (SHAPE America, 2021), who advocate for sex education to be a part of K–12 education.

In a review of the last three decades of research on comprehensive sex education, Goldfarb and Lieberman (2021) found that the primary focus on these programs has been on reducing the rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and teenage pregnancy. However, the National Sexuality Education Standards incorporated seven topic areas: anatomy/physiology, puberty/adolescent sexual development, gender identity/expression, sexual orientation/identity, consent/healthy relationships, and interpersonal violence (FoSE, 2020). The latter two will be the focus of studies highlighted in this section. Since its first publication in 2012, about 40% of districts in the U.S. have adopted CSE, however, which components they incorporated and how are not as clear. The updated 2020 NSES has a stronger focus on gender equity, rights, and social justice, designed to build an "increased knowledge, awareness and appreciation of gender equity and sexual rights, and awareness of discrimination and oppression" (Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2021, p. 19).

Several large studies showed strong outcomes for decreasing both domestic/interpersonal violence and increasing bystander behaviors. Several programs that took place in Grades 7–9 had significant outcomes in reducing sexual violence perpetration and victimization. When compared to control schools without the program, one specific study showed that the *Safe Dates* program reported 25% less psychological abuse and 60% less partner and dating violence. (Foshee et al., 2004). Similarly, another

study with 1,722 high school students across 20 schools found that the implementation of *Fourth R: Skills for Youth Relationships* program significantly decreased perpetration of physical and emotional interpersonal violence by more than 50% (Wolfe et al., 2009).

Even when girls were perpetrators of interpersonal violence, it was often in self-defense and they are more likely "to experience fear, anxiety, and hurt and to express a desire to leave the situation for self-protection." (Wolfe et al., 2009, p. 698) In a study of the effectiveness a multimedia healthy relationships program entitled *Dating and Sexual Responsibility*, with about 550 high school students, Pacifici et al. (2001) found a significant reduction in the acceptance of coercive behaviors for both male and female participants. In addition to preventing and reducing interpersonal/dating violence and acceptance/perpetration of coercive behaviors, increasing understanding of healthy relationship communication skills, Goldfarb and Lieberman (2021) also found that CSE programs often significantly increased bystander interventions as well. In light of the coercive grooming methods and emotional manipulation enacted in DMST, these findings above show great promise for educating young people to both resist perpetration and acceptance of dating/sexual violence and coercive behaviors.

Consent and Coercion. Affirmative consent communication is in higher education in a few states, but that is not the case for K–12 schools. Willis et al. (2019) stated that if the purpose of sex education is to prevent unsafe sexual behavior, then the nuances of consent should be a prerequisite to that conversation. Young people already learn about sex from many other sources: each other, mass media, and pornography. However, consent is not discussed in any of those areas and certainly not in K–12 schools in the U.S. Willis et al. (2019) found that even though communication skills, decision

making, personal space, and interpersonal relationships were a part of health education standards, school districts did not address them through the lens of sexual consent but rather relationships overall. As long as K–12 sex education remains a taboo subject, many young people will not explicitly be exposed to consent if and until they reach higher education, which is way too late, based on the statistics of sexual assault.

Most research on consent is focused on the experiences of college students, however there is a lack of literature on the topic among high school students or younger. (Javidi et al., 2020). According to a study by Righi et al. (2021), adolescents believed that sexual consent was seen as a 1-time verbal "yes/okay" or "no" and that establishing consent was not necessary in relationships or with previous sexual partners. However, adolescent girls and boys had distinct differences in perceiving the absence of a verbal "no" or "stop" or even (more often) girls' silence as consent. In the study, boys were aware of girls' nonverbal cues signaling their sexual interest but were not as likely to notice or acknowledge nonverbal cues showing a lack of interest, stating they thought it was simply easy for girls to say "no" if they weren't interested (Righi et al., 2021). Therefore, Willis et al. (2019) suggested that sex education should be implicit while addressing the potential experiences of specific groups, such as LGBTQ+ or even those who are differently abled. Even in all this work, there is not one mention of DMST. The crisis and those who it predominantly victimizes are largely invisible in research and initiatives regarding consent.

Models for School-Based Prevention

This section will present three models/sets of recommendations that respectively describe existing school-based frameworks for engaging schools in addressing or the

prevention of: (a) sexual violence, (b) human trafficking, and (c) domestic minor sex trafficking. These will set the tone for both frameworks to pull from and to address missing gaps that will be further explored and addressed throughout this study.

Sexual Violence Prevention

Given the prevalence of sexual violence and based on the findings above, the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS) 2010-2012 State Report (Smith et al., 2017) recommended the following culturally relevant prevention approaches:

1. "Intervening to lessen harms and prevent future risks" through trauma-informed environments, to set young people on a trajectory for "health and wellbeing," (Smith et al., 2017, p. 204) and help facilitate nurturing relationships between caregivers and children.
2. "Promoting the social norms that protect against violence" (Smith et al., 2017, p. 205).

   Countering prevalent narratives by promoting nonsexist and anti-violent gender norms and equipping bystanders to intervene whether shutting down sexist jokes, violent language or when witnessing potential or realized sexual assault all have been shown to effectively reduce sexual violence, especially in dating violence (Schneider & Hirsch, 2020).
3. "Teaching skills to prevent violence" (Smith et al., 2017, p. 205), such as social-emotional learning, focused on emotional regulation, empathy, and building capacity for healthy respectful relationships (Schneider & Hirsch, 2020).

4. “Providing opportunities to empower and support girls and women” (Smith et al., 2017, p. 206). Research shows that girls and women from lower socioeconomic communities are more vulnerable to victimization through sexual violence (Schneider & Hirsch, 2020). “It follows that creating opportunities for women and their children to increase their income, employment opportunities, and access other economic supports will decrease risk for violence” (Smith et al., 2017, p. 206). While they use data suggesting that countries where women are more educated and achieved higher career status experience less sexual violence (Schneider & Hirsch, 2020), that does not seem to paint a picture of sexual assault for young people in the U.S. Also, it puts the onus on those who have been victimized, rather than pushing back on perpetrators or a system that often turns a blind eye.
5. “Creating protective environment” (Smith et al., 2017, p. 206) involves the whole community in different ways, such as schools actually creating protocols to identify and respond to sexual harassment and dating violence, “restraining orders” to promote healthy boundaries, and having students create a map of “hot spots” in their schools where incidents of sexual assault or harassment often occur (Schneider & Hirsch, 2020).
6. “Supporting victims or survivors to lessen harms” (Smith et al., 2017, p. 207).

Human Trafficking Prevention

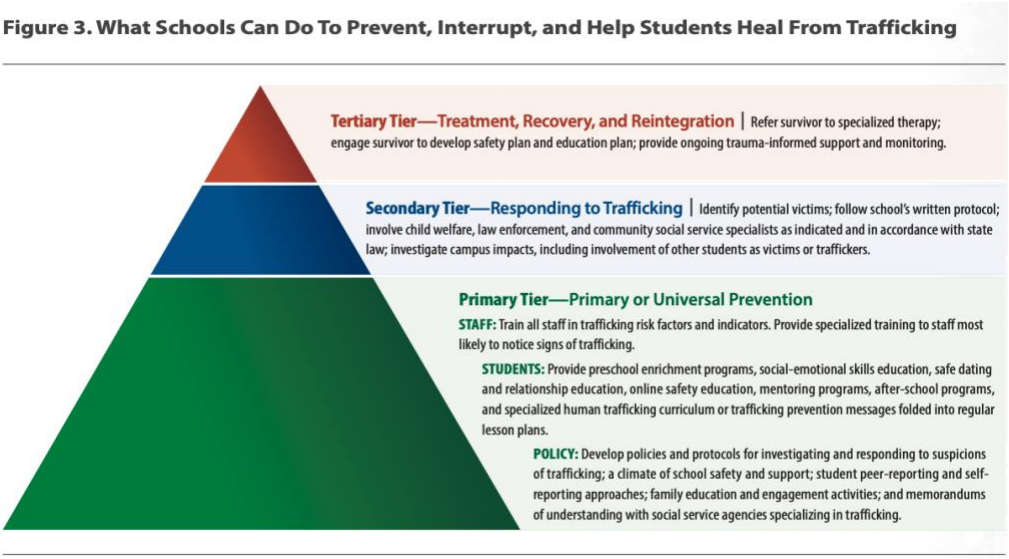
In 2021, the U.S. Department of Education’s (USDOE) report “Human Trafficking in America’s Schools: What Schools Can do to Prevent, Respond, and Help

Students to Recover From Human Trafficking, Second Edition" provides a 3-tier school-based (Figure 3) for human trafficking, inclusive of labor and sex trafficking (p. 11).

This model's focus on prevention focuses on three main components: "strengthening and creating healthy relationships, reducing risks within the students' environment, and increasing buffers to violence" (p. 11). The report also reports the effectiveness of school-based prevention by providing an example of the impact of human trafficking lessons in Prince William County Public Schools in Virginia. After implementing 90-minute human trafficking lessons to secondary students between 2013-2020, 939 students responded to an invitation to privately meet with a social worker and 253 had experienced sexual assault, grooming or had already been victimized through trafficking.

Figure 3

U.S. Department of Ed School-Based Human Trafficking Model



Note. From "Human Trafficking in America's Schools: What Schools Can do to Prevent, Respond, and Help Students to Recover From Human Trafficking," (2nd ed.), by Office of Safe and Supportive Schools. Copyright 2021 by the U.S. Department of Education. Reprinted with permission.

DMST Prevention

Focusing more specifically to the DMST crisis The Center on Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports (PBIS) published a report entitled "Addressing the Growing Problem of Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking of Minors through PBIS" (Asefnia et al., 2021). The report states that "schools are uniquely positioned to spearhead prevention efforts, aid in the identification of risk factors, and implement intervention for DMST related issues on a broader level" (p. 5). Similarly to the U.S. Department of Education's

model above, the PBIS model outlines interventions in a 3-tier system that focuses on (a) understanding risk factors, (b) recognizing signs of trafficking, and (c) reporting to school personnel through appropriate policies and procedures (Asefnia et al., 2021). It is important to note that this model acknowledges the dangers of stigmatizing those victimized by sexual exploitation "that depicts them as being willfully involved" as assumptions and biases directly influence adults' likelihood to report this type of abuse (Asefnia et al., 2021, p. 8). Tier 1 interventions for prevention include the following:

1. School-wide assemblies for staff, students, and parents
2. Educating students about healthy decision-making, healthy boundaries and communication, and being aware of common DMST recruitment tactics
3. "Implement interventions that increase positive relationships with at-risk youth and continue to promote positive school climate while monitoring youth's wellbeing" (Asefnia et al., 2021, p. 10).

Lastly, the PBIS model gives a clear example of how educator-led intervention leads to DMST prevention through describing a teacher's observations of a girl in her class. This middle school teacher overhears some of her students talking about Lana, who had recently been offered a modeling gig by a student who had graduated from their high school. Recognizing her recent drastic change in appearance, increased truancy and rapidly dropping grades and coursework, she called the school counselor with her concerns. After following up with Lana's friends who confirmed she was "dating" the alumni and shared many more signs of DMST, then the school psychologist completed an assessment where she discloses she "was being forced to take sexually explicit photographs by this older alumni that were being posted online for profit." (Asefnia et al.,

2021, p. 14) Immediately, the school psychologist called her local child welfare system and then the National Human Trafficking Hotline for more steps and resources. This teacher, counselor, and school psychologist knew what steps to take because of the school's annual DMST training and clear policies and procedures, showing the importance of equipping all school staff to be involved in awareness and prevention efforts.

Now that we've explored many bodies of literature around DMST, hopefully we can move to the study at hand with a clearer understanding of the DMST crisis and the forces that influence it. Let's continue our journey upstream to learn about the methodology I utilized and to meet my co-creators in this study, a group of girls and women of color advocates who shared the ways in which Black girls are silenced. So that we can begin to learn how and commit to creating more healing-centered spaces to prevent DMST in order to counter many of the forces that you learned about through our journey through the literature around DMST.

Chapter 3

Methodology

As mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation, I attended the University of Toledo's 2018 Human Trafficking and Social Justice Conference in the fall of 2018. With a mission of "uniting the global community to learn, connect, and collaborate to combat human trafficking and promote social justice," there were many advocates, academics, and people across social work, law, medicine and other fields. However, even at a conference that attracted academics and advocates across the world, there were two large gaps in content and discussion: the disproportionate impact of sex trafficking on youth of color and the role of schools in prevention/awareness...except for one session. Advocates from a national anti-sex trafficking nonprofit whose mission is to end sex trafficking through advocacy/awareness, prevention, outreach and residential programs was presenting a new trafficking prevention programming for K–12 students in various settings. *Nova* (as I'll call her here to respect her privacy), a trafficking survivor and a prevention coordinator (at the time) of this organization and I connected after the session about their desire to impact schools in Southern New Jersey and my organization RAGOH Speaks' mission to equip communities to advocate for girls' human rights (RAGOH Speaks, 2022). Further conversations regarding our personal and professional experiences led to the development of a collaborative project between Selah Freedom and RAGOH Speaks that formed the initial stages of this specific study. While circumstances in her life did not allow her to continue collaborating in this project, her voice serves as an inspiration for much of this work. In a study about the silencing of the voices of Black and Brown girls, the erasure of her influence on this project would inherently go against

everything this work stands for. Therefore, I simply seek to honor her part of this journey, while sharing the impact that our time together had on this dissertation. At that point, I knew that qualitative research would allow me to explore the contextual realities of DMST more fully as they relate to girls of color. According to Merriam (1998), qualitative research:

> assumes that there are multiple realities-that the world is not an objective thing out there but a function of personal interaction and perception. It is a highly subjective phenomenon in need of interpreting rather than measuring. Beliefs rather than facts form the basis of perception. Research is exploratory, inductive, and emphasizes processes rather than ends. In this paradigm, there are no predetermined hypotheses, no treatments, and no restrictions on the end product. One does not manipulate the variables or administer a treatment. (p. 17)

My decision to originally co-author this study with *Nova* came from a critical reflexivity about my positionality as being an outsider to the experiences of girls who have been exploited through DMST, but an insider as a woman of color advocating for Black and Brown girls in schools. On the other hand, her experiences gave her an insider perspective to the exploitation of Black and Brown girls, yet an outside perspective to working within schools. Our conversations around this work and the barriers we faced individually and collectively in our advocacy led to the development of and commitment to a critical reflexivity since meeting at the Trafficking conference mentioned above in 2018. While acknowledging power dynamics and proximity to the participants as insiders or outsiders in one's study is one aspect of this positionality, Kohl and McCutcheon (2015) suggest a *kitchen table reflexivity.* This approach provides a means of constantly

reflecting on our positionalities and experiences and the way they shape the research. Through sharing our individual stories, and individually and collectively processing them through conversation (Kohl & McCutcheon, 2015) in relation to the study, we committed to a critical reflexivity throughout the initial formation of this project, holding space to constantly unpack and reflect. While we did not record our conversations or process--as it was not originally intended to be a part of the research process and as it will not serve as data for this project-- it has equipped me to understand its importance moving forward. This critical reflexivity helped me more holistically understand the perspective of my participants and what is at stake for *our girls* and the potential impact of our research (Kohl & McCutcheon, 2015), while also honoring my own experiences and identities and the ways all these things are interconnected and influence one another. It shaped how I engaged with both the girls and WOC advocates during our interviews, whom I will call participants or co-creators of this study throughout this chapter.

An Approach of Interdisciplinarity

With an inquiry around a topic as complex as sex trafficking, and more specifically the ways schools/systems can play a role in prevention, how then do I begin to choose just one form of critical qualitative inquiry without looking at it from multiple perspectives/lenses? Kincheloe (2001) expounded on the idea of qualitative researchers as bricoleurs which was already a controversial approach within academia because of the assumption that its interdisciplinary approach equated to a lack of expertise and understanding of any one topic (Kincheloe, 2001). Interdisciplinary at its core, critical bricolage provides a lens to understand the issue from multiple vantage points that each speak to different points, both systemically (WOC advocates) and individually (girls). In

addition, critical bricoleurs also speak to the power dynamics at play within methodologies of certain disciplines and their subsequent construction of knowledge (Kincheloe, 2001). This awareness of oppression within colonized methodology does not free bricoleurs from rigor, but rather forces them to clarify what *interdisciplinarity* means. Kincheloe suggested that rather than sticking to rigid lines of disciplines, the goal should lead to a dialogue that both informs everyone involved while simultaneously shifting which methodological choices are employed. However, it is not just engaging in different methodological forms of inquiry that defines a project as bricolage; but rather allowing for multiple theories and philosophies as well. Kincheloe stated,

> The interpretive bricoleur understands that research is an interactive process shaped by one's personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity and those of the people in the setting. Critical bricoleurs stress the dialectical and hermeneutic nature of interdisciplinary inquiry, knowing that the boundaries between traditional disciplines no longer hold. (p. 683)

Bringing in perspectives from WOC advocates across different fields that often work in silos and interviewing Black girls about their experiences navigating systems allowed for a more comprehensive picture together than individually, while committing to a critical reflexivity throughout. The methods and concepts represented in this chapter blended to create a more comprehensive view of both their individual and systemic experiences. The qualitative researcher as interpretive bricoleur (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) interprets this "montage sequence not sequentially, or one at a time, but rather simultaneously" (Cook, 1981, p. 172) to create a meaningful emotional whole, as if at a

glance, all at once," (p.5), as you will see in Chapter 4 where the results of this study are presented.

Where a critical theories paradigm situates the researcher as a "transformative intellectual," (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 196), a participatory paradigm builds on that and seeks to place participants as co-advocates in the research process. While this is not a true participatory story in fully engaging participants as co-researchers throughout the entirety of the study from the conceptual to analysis portions, seeing the girls and WOC advocates in this study as co-advocates and co-creators grounds the foundation of this study, as introduced in Chapter 1.

Critical Participatory Action Research (PAR) as Epistemology

Critical participatory action research (PAR) focuses on the conditions that create injustices in the first place by asking, "what are the policies, institutions, and social arrangements that help to form and deform, enrich and limit, human development" and "how do people resist the weight of injustice in their lives?" (Torre et al., 2012, p. 179). Building upon the work of critical and Indigenous scholars across multiple fields (Tuck, 2009), Baro's liberation psychology, Freire, Lewin's action research, and the work of W.E.B. DuBois (Fox, 2015), critical PAR orients the acquisition of knowledge through research "toward what out to be" (Martin-Baro, 1994, p. 29) rather than solely an exploration/analysis of what is. Critical PAR methodologies value collaborative researcher-participant relationships and a co-construction of research with and for participants as a means of advocacy, empowerment, and a redistributing power. Historically, collaboration and action are the foundation for knowledge-building through this approach to inquiry (Fine et al., 2003).

Especially in analyzing the broken systems that lead to the silencing of girls' voices through sex trafficking, the history of PAR and the foundations upon which it was created to forefront the voices of marginalized populations make it an appropriate foundational grounding for this study. Critical PAR challenges the ways in which "urban adolescent" has come to mean badly behaved...young people of color" (Fox, 2015), rather using it to engage youth who have been criminalized and marginalized in order to counter the stereotypical narratives in which they are often represented. While I did not enact PAR as a methodology, I built on its commitment to engage these collective experiences through engaging the girls and WOC advocates as co-creators in developing knowledge of their local communities (Foster-Fishman et al., 2010). As stated in Chapter 1, utilizing critical PAR as a guiding epistemological framework allowed me to stay true to my belief that forefronting voices "that ordinarily would not be heard, and broadcast them into the halls of decision-making power" (Wang & Burris, 1994, p. 182) would lead to invaluable research that engages schools with powerful conversations around DMST and sexual violence prevention.

This is an example of how the issue of accommodation and commensurability allows for participatory and critical approaches to complement one another (Guba & Lincoln, 2004). While some paradigms are irreconcilable due to the opposite ways in which they view the world, both in their ontology (ways of being/reality) and their epistemology theories of knowledge), the two aforementioned paradigms build on one another, keeping social transformation and justice at the forefront (Guba & Lincoln, 2004).

Critical Qualitative Inquiry

Any research methodology comes with its own set of histories, assumptions, benefits, and challenges, and both resistances to and pushes for qualitative research need to be linked to the historical and political contexts at the time. In contrast to being grounded in the hard sciences, qualitative research focuses on the lived experiences of people and all their respective contexts. It is "an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Qualitative research therefore is focused on capturing a rich description of the point of view of individuals, while navigating the constraints of daily life and the contexts in which they are embedded. This form of inquiry relies on inductive logic, learning from specific individuals, groups, and contexts in order to formulate broader findings. Rather than the randomization, standardization, and step-by-step process of quantitative methodology, qualitative research is a more iterative process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Rossman & Rallis, 2017). While forming a conceptual framework is essential at the outset, it is a part of the hermeneutic circle, in which constant reflection and observation through critically reflexive notes, listening to participants, meaning making, and interpreting data co-exist alongside the researcher being constantly aware of how her own history and biases can affect any and all of the aforementioned aspects of the study. As a woman of color, I brought my full self to the interviews and talks with my participants, acknowledging their frustrations, empathizing with their experiences, and affirming them when they shared experiences in which they doubted themselves and their voice. Rather than seeing it as a barrier, I chose to see it as a means of building rapport and a sisterhood or *auntie-hood* in the moment.

This research praxis, which allows the researcher to weave back and forth between theory, data and reflection and its rich descriptions, are two major benefits of qualitative research (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Historically, this rich qualitative data has created spaces for the voices of marginalized populations to be heard in a way that was not evident before. As mentioned previously, its connection to the political and historical contexts in which it is situated allows for an in-depth understanding of particular phenomenon, individuals, or groups of people. The description of a qualitative researcher as a bricoleur or quilt maker (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) attests to the narrative, interpretive, and iterative nature of viewing the world or phenomenon at hand more holistically (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Another great benefit of qualitative research is its potential impact through descriptive studies, evaluation/policy studies, and action research. The four uses of qualitative data, including instrumental, enlightenment, symbolic, and transformative uses exemplify the ways in which this research can transform data into tangible information that can produce impact across many disciplines (Rossman & Rallis, 2017) in an innumerable number of ways.

Despite all its benefits, there have also been challenges and tensions with qualitative research. As mentioned previously, the rise of qualitative research was seen as an "assault on this tradition" of value-free objective experimental sciences, which were seen as the truth and foundation of Western civilization (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 2). As a result, it seems as though researchers who solely employ qualitative research must become accustomed to proving the worth and validity of their work in certain disciplines and fields. Those are external challenges. However, the nature of qualitative research in and of itself provides some challenges of its own (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

While examining things from a more holistic lens provides those rich descriptions mentioned previously, it also brings about challenges concerning what may arise in the context of study. First, as described above, the interpretive and iterative nature of qualitative research may make it more difficult to convince the reader of findings that may be applicable to generalizable populations. While that is not the point of qualitative research, I can see it being a frustration in some respects. I would like to say that explicitly stating the limitations and implications of the study addresses that frustration/point, although it is certainly not that simple. Another large challenge within qualitative research is that individuals and natural environments, as opposed to experiments, cannot be standardized and controlled. Therefore, unexpected variables may arise during research that force the researcher to constantly make decisions and be reflective about their implications for the study. While there are challenges, as with any methodology or type of research, the potential richness of data and influence would make it worth tackling.

Even within qualitative inquiry, Denzin (2017) argued for a qualitative inquiry whose purpose at its core is to challenge and resist, rather than to simply describe--critical qualitative inquiry (CQI). This challenges not only societal inequities, but rather traditional forms of knowledge seeking and production and what counts as legitimate research in the first place. It questions whose stories should be represented, and that, by essence of what it embodies, a focus on social justice should lead to research that is both simultaneously accessible and transformative to communities in study. The purpose of this critical qualitative study was to explore the ways in which systems *silence* Black and Brown girls in a way that further exacerbates their vulnerability to DSMT and

conversely, the ways in which systems-especially schools, can create healing-centered spaces to help prevent/combat it. In describing the commitment of critical qualitative scholars, Denzin (2017) stated,

> As global citizens, we are no longer called to just *interpret* the world, which was the mandate of traditional qualitative inquiry. Today, we are called to *change* the world and to change it in ways that resist injustice while celebrating freedom and full, inclusive, participatory democracy. (p. 9)

Drawing on and centering the voices and experiences of Black girls and the expertise of women of color advocates who have committed their lives to resisting systems that silence Black and Brown girls became the "shifting center to this project: the avowed humanistic and social justice commitment to study the social world from *their* perspectives*"* (Denzin, 2017, p. 10).

Semistructured Interviews as Dialogue

While interviews are commonplace in qualitative research, Rubin and Rubin (2012) expounded on the concept of interviews being forms of in-depth conversations, rather than rigid protocols. The goal of interviews, according to Rossman and Rallis (2017), is to draw concrete examples and details that provide a rich data about their experiences with a particular context in order to reach a more holistic understanding of their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2017). There are similarities being everyday conversations and responsive interviews, such as flow, clarifying and rephrasing questions for clarity, inquiring further through stories and narratives, and closure (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). However, there are several aspects of interviews that distinguish them from conversations, which can help or hinder the richness of data. The two most obvious

differences are the purposeful inquiry around a particular topic and the need to record for data analysis. Both electronic recording and note-taking can become distracting for both the interviewer and participant, however both can always be a means of reassuring the participant that the main goal is to accurately represent their thoughts and experiences. While notetaking with shorthand during interviews requires skill and intentionality in order to do it in a way that it does not interrupt the flow of the *conversation,* it is also a powerful means of following the conversation and jotting down questions for follow up or further inquiry (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

My two guiding theoretical frameworks (critical race feminism/CRF and my personal feminist narrative counseling/FNC Model) influenced my conversations with my co-creators. First, it was critical that all the WOC advocates and girls I interviewed knew that I asked them to participate for their expertise and as much-needed voices whose perspectives were often left out of mainstream conversations in advocacy and education (Morris, 2016). It was also critical that the questions were an invitation for them to participate in a larger dialogue about the systemic reform needed, *based on their personal experience and knowledge,* in order to combat sex trafficking and its disproportionate impact of Black and Brown girls more holistically (Boxall, 2012; Rights4Girls, 2021)–rather than a critique of their specific roles or identities. Beginning the interviews with simpler personal questions ("First of all, how are you? 2020–2021 has been a crazy emotionally, emotionally-charged year to say the least. How have you been experiencing/navigating it all?) and practicing empathy by responding to and relating to their experiences served as precursors to more intense questions about the dehumanization of Black and Brown girls and sex trafficking. Drawing on my counseling

model, I also remained cognizant of any moment the WOC advocates or girls were getting stressed. While Rubin and Rubin (2012), suggested "toning down the emotional level" (p.11), utilizing elements of a feminist narrative counseling facilitated me in collecting more rich data when allowing them the opportunity to really process some of their experiences out loud through the questions. In discussing their experiences working in and engaging within various systems, as mentioned above, the research questions through holistic interviewing (Creswell, 2007) allowed me to simultaneously remain centered on the systemic and individual experiences of Black and Brown girls and advocacy on their behalf.

For both the WOC advocates and the girls, this inevitably brought up moments where their voices or the voices of their peers were silenced throughout their lives. It also brought up moments where they felt affirmed and safe. While an interview is in no way a counseling session, seeing it as more of a dialogue invites this type of narrative and reflection that may bring about some intense emotion. Booth and Booth (1994) suggested that "building rapport demands a measure of intimacy that goes beyond the normal relationship between interviewer and informant" (p. 417). Through empathizing and relating, appropriately and authentically, holding space for these emotions as long as the interviewee does not seem to be in distress, may provide some catharsis for interviewees. Two examples from interviews with the girls demonstrated this. The first was when *Niyah* shared a story about how she felt bad about asking her manager to call security to walk her to her car at night when she felt unsafe but did it anyway, I told her I was proud of her for advocating for herself and encouraged her to continue doing that whenever it was in her power. The second was when *Jamila* got emotional talking about feeling

unheard at home and in other places where she didn't feel like she belonged. I told her to take her time if she needed to gather her thoughts and we sat in silence for a few moments. I asked her if she wanted to share more and if she felt safe. She assured me that she did and went on to explain that she didn't feel like she was taken seriously there or like what she had to say mattered. Rather than just thank her for sharing, I encouraged her to write affirmations in several places that would remind her how much her voice mattered. The choice of semi-structured interviews as dialogue and a commitment to critical reflexivity, allowed for conversations to shift in those directions–especially as they are inextricably linked to the need for safe and bold spaces for girls and women of color.

Therefore, being even more intentional in *inviting* participants and *asking* if they were comfortable sharing and reminding them that participation was always voluntary (Rothman et al., 2018) was even more fundamental to the integrity of the study and the richness of the data. Similarly, building of rapport lasted beyond the single interviews, for several of the girls and WOC advocates who responded to transcripts and themes, asking whether they could get involved with related DMST prevention/awareness work and/or if I would help them think about how to start DMST awareness initiatives at their present or former schools. Similarly, several of the WOC advocates responded offering their partnership/support in my next steps around this work. This qualitative exploration together allowed us to collectively seek an understanding of the social/human crisis (Creswell, 2009) of domestic minor sex trafficking.

Research Questions

I explored the disproportionate exploitation of Black and Brown girls through DMST by focusing on answering the following three questions:

1. What are the self-identified (by the girls) and observed (by WOC advocates) ways in which Black and Brown girls have been silenced (and/or empowered) through their experiences in and interactions with various systems (i.e. schools, child welfare, juvenile justice, law enforcement)?
2. What recommendations do the WOC advocates and girls have for educators/schools (and systems overall) in playing a pivotal role in sex trafficking prevention? In equipping/empowering the voices of Black and Brown girls?
3. What are the experiences of WOC advocates in combating sex trafficking and advocating for Black and Brown girls within schools and other systems in which they work and interact/collaborate?

Participants & Criteria

In order to explore both the observed and self-identified ways in which systems create dehumanizing and affirming spaces for Black and Brown girls in terms of DMST vulnerability, my co-creators in this study were two separate groups:

1. 10 Black girls between the ages of 12-18 years old.
2. 13 self-identified WOC who advocate for Black/Brown girls through their professions in education, social work/child welfare, law, ministry, juvenile justice, mental health, or anti trafficking agencies. Their criteria were as follows:
    a. have worked directly in or collaborated with school systems.

b. have an awareness about DMST and disproportionate impact on Black/Brown girls

Recruitment

Due to the interdisciplinary nature of this study, I utilized purposive (Patton, 2002), convenience and snowball sampling (Robinson, 2014), beginning with contacts from my personal and professional networks. I identified at least one advocate that worked within each of the following systems (education, social work, juvenile justice, mental health/counseling, child welfare, pediatrics, ministry, and anti-trafficking organization) in order to explore their experiences advocating for Black and Brown girls through an interdisciplinary lens. The sampling of WOC advocates was nationwide, as long as each fits the criteria listed above. Depending on my relationship with potential participants, I reached out to them via email, Facebook or Instagram with a description of the study to inquire about their interest. Some responded expressing interest, others scheduled a time to discuss further, while others referred me to colleagues (snowball sampling) whom they thought would be interested and a good fit for the study. Once their questions, if any were answered, and they returned the IRB consent, we scheduled our Zoom interview.

I recruited the girls utilizing purposive sampling through several different avenues. I intentionally recruited Black and Brown girls between the ages of 12-19, as the average age of youth exploited through sex trafficking is 12-14 years old (Fedina et al., 2019; Hartinger-Saunders et al., 2017; Morris, 2016; Selah Freedom, 2019; Shared Hope International, 2015) and approximately 40% of girls are Black (Rights4Girls, 2021), even higher at up to 90% within juvenile justice systems (Boxall, 2012). Therefore, this

particular sample encompassed Black girls within this age range and a few years older, but still recent enough to speak on their educational experiences and experiences navigating systems, if applicable. Although participants were not screened for experiences of trauma or juvenile justice/truancy/child welfare system involvement, questions addressing barriers created opportunities for them to share experiences in any systems but would especially focus on their schooling experiences. It would have been more purposeful to recruit girls with juvenile-justice or child welfare involvement or who had experienced DMST to share their experiences. However, since those partnerships were not working out due to the pandemic and ethical reasons outside of long-term or more participatory partnerships, I decided to utilize convenience sampling (Robinson, 2014) by widening the age range and removing other criteria—knowing that the voices of Black girls and their experiences would shed light on the questions at hand in a way that would significantly add value to this study. Considering the topic of the interviews covered DMST and silencing, I recruited the following ways based on ethical considerations both on the principles of conscience as a trained counselor, as well as to uphold the ethical guidelines of this study.

- I reached out to colleagues and friends who work at youth-serving institutions
- At the end of interviews with participating WOC advocates or in a follow-up email, I asked them to:
    - identify (12–18 yrs) Black and/or Brown girls who may be interested or
    - to connect me with trusted colleagues who work with that population.

In order for girls to participate in the study, they attended a virtual information session with the mentor/educator/counselor that informed them of the study. All were

grouped with either multiple girls with a mentor (personal or from an organization in which they participate) or a group so that none of the girls would feel singled out. I used snowball sampling with the girls as well, asking them if they knew of any friends or peers who may be interested in participating in the study. At the virtual information session, I introduced myself, why I believed so strongly in both engaging in conversations about prevention DMST and why I thought their voices were so needed and should be heard more. I told them we were about to watch an 8-minute video by Saving Innocence (2019) of a young woman named Oree and her experience of being trafficked starting at the age of 11 years old and gave them the option of staying or getting off the call. All of them stayed every time. Oree is now working for Saving Innocence, an organization working to eradicate sex trafficking, advocating for girls herself, therefore it was very much a story of redemption. Therefore, I framed their participation as yet another invitation to lend their voice and be co-creators in this study. Once I received their signed consent forms, we scheduled the Zoom interviews.

Pseudonyms

As you will see all throughout Chapter 4, I chose to select pseudonyms for both groups of participants. For the girls, I chose names of African origins as pseudonyms for each of them with affirming meanings that signified my hopes for all Black girls ... that they would see themselves in this light and that each of the systems they interact with, especially schools, would affirm each of these meanings for them. In stage 2 of my data analysis, I numbered the participants and gave them these pseudonyms, while compiling their responses to each of the interview questions together to begin my thematic analysis. Table 1 provides the correlating participant numbers and pseudonyms with meanings.

Table 1

Pseudonyms for Girls

Participant #	Pseudonym	Pseudonym Meaning	Age (years)
Participant #1	Sharifa	Valued, respected, worthy	18
Participant #2	Habibah	Loved	18
Participant #3	Tahiya	Safe	15
Participant #4	Uzima	Full of life	18
Participant #5	Gamila	Beautiful	18
Participant #6	Aziza	Precious	16
Participant #7	Jasira	Bold, courageous	18
Participant #8	Adla	Justice	18
Participant #9	Heba	Gift	17
Participant #10	Mona	Wishes, desires	17

Since the purpose of my interviews with WOC advocates was to explore the way in which they'd observed Black and Brown girls be silenced across systems and necessary collaborations, especially within education, I chose pseudonyms that aligned with their roles/commitments in the lives of girls of color and their specific role or field, i.e., "Dr. Shaffiah, the pediatrician." Table 2 provides the correlating participant numbers and pseudonyms by field:

Table 2

Pseudonyms for WOC Advocates

Participant #	Pseudonym	Brief Title of Field/Role
Participant #1:	Imani (faith/belief)	Anti-misogynoir theologian
Participant #2	Justice	DMST lawyer
Participant #3	Destiny	Survivor educator
Participant #4	Sage	Education (ed) policy lawyer
Participant #5	Hope	Social worker
Participant #6	Journey	Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC)
Participant #7	Alika (truthful/candid)	DMST Mentor
Participant #8	Azhia (worthy of respect)	Consent coach
Participant #9	Haven	Nonprofit counselor
Participant #10	Joy	School counselor
Participant #11	Serenity	Trauma therapist
Participant #12	Harmony	Sex educator
Participant #13	Dr. Shaffiah (healer)	Pediatrician

Data Collection Procedures

This qualitative study utilized two primary means of data gathering and collection: semi-structured interviews as dialogue and my own journal of analytic/reflexive notes which will be kept throughout the entirety of the research process. A seven-stage approach for data collection for this study included:

1. Submitted proposal and received approval from Rowan University's Institutional Review Board, with revisions as study shifted, as detailed in this chapter's introduction.
2. Selected participants through recruitment methods detailed above.

3. Distributed and received signed assent and parental/guardian consent forms for participants under 18 years and consent forms for those over 18 years of age.
4. Scheduled interviews individually with participants.
5. Conducted 1–1 virtual interviews through Zoom with semi structured interview protocol(s)
6. Transcribed interviews.
7. Simultaneously kept a reflexive journal throughout study.

This inquiry is designed in a way to create space for my participants to reflect on and share their experiences of advocating for Black and Brown girls and their engagement in anti-trafficking efforts.

- To reflect on and share the ways in which they have experienced/witnessed their own/the voices of Black and Brown girls be silenced and/or empowered through various systems (and maybe share their experiences as well if they feel comfortable).
- To provide recommendations for their fields of work and educators/schools in interrupting these pathways from trauma to confinement that often exacerbate disproportionality through DMST. Committing to critical reflexivity, I will reflect on these experiences as well.

Zoom Interviews

Since the sample of participants for this study were nationwide, interviews were conducted over Zoom, a digital meeting platform. The interview protocol below (consisting of up to 15 questions) acted more as a guide than a rigid protocol for the conversation and a means of eliciting experiential knowledge from my participants' experiences. Interviews ranged from 1–2 hours, leaving space for rich narratives, follow up, and conversational dialogue. While an in-person context may offer a level of familiarity to participants when conducted in their own work environments, digital

interviews also offer some advantages as well. While Zoom interviews were recorded (with consent from participants) and transcribed for data analysis. One possible advantage was removing distractions in that the interviews were literally just face-to-face. Also, even though Zoom interviews were recorded (with consent from participants) and transcribed for data analysis, not actually seeing any recording device may have alleviated tension that could have arisen from an in-person recording. Also, being able to share their experiences from the comfort of their own home (or wherever they chose) may have added an increased level of comfort for participants (given they had privacy and a safe environment), who may have felt freer to share the richness of their experiences there. In order to build richness from the interviews and build rapport, the interviews followed a series of stages. After a few minutes of casual conversation, it was important to take a few moments to re-introduce the purpose of the interview/study, why they were chosen specifically for their expertise, and how interviews/data would be used to assure the interviewees (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). While the data for analysis primarily came from the audio transcripts of the interviews, I reflected on the affective responses in the videos through my use of analytic memos, honoring my commitment to stay critically reflexive throughout the entirety of the study.

Critically Reflexive Analytic Memos

Writing analytic memos is invaluable, as it provides researchers with the opportunity and space to write short informal notes about emerging insights, potential themes, connections and links between questions and theories, and any other thoughts the data analysis begins to spark (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). When writing in-process analytic memos, the key is to be creative and write naturally an exploratory open-ended narrative

without having to worry about any formality (Rossman & Rallis, 2017), as is the case in most academic writing. As mentioned above, committing to critically reflexive reflection throughout the study encouraged me to stay *connected* to my participants and the passions/work that connects us, while learning from their experiences and recommendations. Individually and collectively reflecting on our personal and professional experiences, and all ways the systems and positionalities represented constantly intersect aligned with a *kitchen table talk reflexivity* discussed above as well (Kohl & McCutcheon, 2015). Processing and writing notes about emerging themes and thoughts along the way also allowed me to remain as present as possible during the interviews, rather than trying to take detailed notes during our conversations. Approaching research this way also honors our (researchers and participants), our own experiences and identities and the ways all these things are interconnected and influence one another. I used the following protocols to guide the conversations with participants.

Girls Protocol

1. First, how are you? 2020-2021 has been a crazy emotionally, emotionally-charged year to say the least. How have you been experiencing/navigating it all?
2. How would you describe yourself? (in three words)
3. How do you think your peers, teachings/admin/school staff would describe you?
4. What do you wish others (and your teachers/school staff) knew about you?

a. How do you wish they saw you or would describe you?

5. What do you see as the biggest challenge girls face in your school/community?
6. What are your goals and dreams?

a. Do you feel supported in them at school? How? By who?

7. What barriers are standing in the way of your education and goals?

a. What, if anything, can you do to remove those barriers?

b. What can others do to help remove those barriers (for yourself or others)?

8. Where do you most feel a sense of belonging?

9. Where do you feel most safe and unsafe?

10. Where do you feel like your voice is most heard/valued and where it is most silenced/ignored/devalued?

11. What do you think school could do better to help you and other girls feel safer and more heard?

12. If you were to write a letter to former or current teachers/counselors/principals from your school(s) sharing what you wish they knew about you/what you needed, what would you want to say? To answer: "How did *we* (systems set up to educate, support, and protect you) fail you?" to lead to student recommendations for schools.

13. If you knew what you shared could lead to actual student recommendations for schools, what specific things would you want to see happen? Do you think any of those things would help prevent sex trafficking/keeping girls safe/seeking help when they needed it?

14. Is there anything I didn't ask that you want to share?

    a. About yourself?

    b. Or that you want other (educators) to know and understand about your experience(s)?

15. Lastly, if you had 3 wishes, what would they be?

16. Is there anything I didn't ask that you want to share? Or anything that you think would strengthen the purpose of this study?

WOC Advocates Protocol

1. First, how are you? 2020 has been a crazy, emotionally-charged year to say the least. How have you been experiencing and navigating it all?
2. Can you tell me about your current role/field?
3. What led you to enter that field?
4. I'd love to hear more about your why. What happened in your own life that led you to first get involved in anti-trafficking work/advocating for Black/Brown girls and women?
    a. How do you define/describe this work to others who don't know about it?
5. From your perspective, is there an awareness/understanding of sexual exploitation more broadly and sex trafficking specifically in your field? What about its disproportionate impact on Black and Brown girls and/or the dehumanization of Black/Brown girls?
    a. Tell me more. How have you noticed/experienced that?
6. Can you tell me more about your experience working with/advocating for Black and Brown girls?
7. How have you seen the [above] system(s) engage with Black/Brown girls--as opposed to their peers?
8. How have you seen their voices be silenced through educational & other systems? Can you walk me through it/tell me a story that exemplifies that?

9. Conversely, can you share experiences that exemplify the need for safe spaces that empower their voices?
10. How do you think the *juvenile justice [or whatever system interviewee work in/with] system can better serve girls of color?
11. What has been your experience collaborating with schools and other systems on behalf of them? Could/should there be more collaboration with schools? How?
12. What do you think needs to happen in order to address/break these cycles of system involvement and exploitation?
13. Do you think schools can combat sex trafficking in their own communities and play a role in prevention? How so?
14. How can we collectively, more specifically your [fields/spheres of influence], combat sex trafficking in your own community and play a role in prevention?
15. Is there anything I didn't ask that you want to share? Or anything that you think would strengthen the purpose of this study?
16. Would you be open to a follow up interview if I have any questions?

Data Analysis & Coding Process

In order to interpret meaning from approximately 500 pages of data from interview transcripts, I conducted multiple (and sometimes simultaneous) rounds of analysis for interviews, primarily utilizing inductive reasoning. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), this process "*lets* the analysis emerge during data collection rather than structuring a study around a hypothesis or narrow questions." (p.272) While it is true that the process is much more organic than building a study around a hypothesis, Kakali Bhattacharya (2019) stated that data is generated through analysis, rather than just

emerging on its own; rather, they are "IDENTIFIED by the researcher and when shared with the participants, co-constructed as verified patterns within and across data sources." Data from both sets of (girls' and advocates') interviews were analyzed in three phases, as follows, to uphold the integrity of both participants' words and the study itself:

1. Transcription and in-vivo coding (Saldaña, 2016).
2. Reflexive notes (Kohl & McCutcheon, 2015).
3. Constant comparative method (CCM; Boeije, 2002).
4. Thematic analysis across interviews (Capous-Desyllas & Bromfield, 2018).

The first phase involved within-interview transcript analysis of each interview through transcription and in-vivo coding (Saldaña, 2016), where specific phrases were highlighted from participants. Reflexive notes allowed for the constant reflection of emerging themes, thoughts, and wonderings as I was beginning to make sense of the data. After reading through transcribed interviews, I utilized trhee of Boeije's (2002) steps for CCM: "1. Comparison between interviews within the same group *and* 2. Comparison of interviews from different groups" (p. 395). I gathered and grouped responses to each individual question from girls' interview protocols and then did the same for the WOC advocates' interviews. Once I had my answers grouped by the protocol questions, I conducted a thematic cross-interview transcript analysis (Capous-Desyllas & Bromfield, 2018) in order to find themes by group (girls and advocates). Lastly, for the questions that were the same across both groups, I then compared the responses from different groups (Boeije, 2002) to create themes. I utilized the same forms of data analysis for my memos as for the questions individually within and then across participant groups. For this second round of coding for the advocates' interviews, I utilized Dedoose, a computer

data analysis software, utilizing recommendations for voice-centered interviews (Rossman & Rallis, 2017) and in-vivo coding (Saldaña, 2016) to inductively create themes from the transcripts of participants. While it helped me to create themes as presented below, I ended up doing manual coding for both. The themes which were generated from Dedoose aligned with my results as presented in Chapter 4 and served as another form of triangulation of data (Denzin, 2009), which "allows the consideration of the different levels of depth that the unveiling on an event *_or data_ requires … for understanding an event from two or more perspectives or methodological approaches" (Santos et al., 2020, p. 657).

While flexibility was imperative in this study, Saldaña (2016) states that these multiple phases of data analysis and coding brought about "specificity and complexity - not complication" (p. 76). The flexibility of thematic analysis allowed me to create meaning by finding themes across interviews, while in-vivo coding to not lose sight of anything important I wanted to highlight from each of the girls or advocates. While reviewing data concerning the ways in which Black and Brown girls are silenced across systems and how those interactions play a role, positively or negatively, in relation to DMST, this was critical in order to create new insights and connections through the richness of participants' recounting of their experiences.

Significance of Study & Transferability

Sex trafficking has only become known as a criminal justice/public health issue to be investigated through research over the last two decades and has yet to be forefronted in educational research and institutions. The concentrations where it is explored are within law, nursing/pediatrics, social work, and mental health journals; and much of the

statistics are presented through government or non-governmental organization (NGO) policy reports. Furthermore, while there are great anti-trafficking initiatives in place, there is a lack of conversation about prevention and education/awareness, especially in school settings. However, as more scholars bring awareness to the experiences of girls in the school to prison pipeline, often referred to as the *sexual abuse to prison pipeline* (Saar et al., 2015) and school pushout (Annamma et al., 2019; Morris, 2016; Wun, 2016) for girls of color, it makes forefronting the ways in which these inequities align to Black and Brown girls' vulnerability to DMST even more timely.

When conducting qualitative research, the goal is transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of findings, which according to Slevin and Sines (1999) is fostered by these five criteria:

- Providing rich and dense data;
- Focusing the study on the typical;
- Multisite investigation;
- Studying the leading edge of change;
- Use of systematic approach. (p. 91)

Understanding the ways in which schools contribute to these pathways from trauma to confinement (*the typical)* through the voices of Black girls and WOC advocates (*rich and dense data/"multi-site" investigation)* will play a crucial role in the creation of sustainable institutionalized school-based prevention efforts (*leading edge of change)*. In addition, all too often, professionals/advocates work within their own silos, engaging with those with the same professional backgrounds and experiences as them. While reform is needed across all systems individually in order to combat the DMST crisis,

there is even more of a need for interdisciplinary spaces where collaborations, not competition, become the conduit for creating sustainable impact.

Credibility & Trustworthiness

This study relied on multiple systematic methods–three rounds of data analysis, intentional interviews, and member checking– to foster the trustworthiness of my presentation of the results in the next chapter. I wanted to honor the richness of my participant's retelling of their experiences as they are the only experts of their own stories. Through my own reflexivity as discussed above and asking clarifying and follow-up questions during my interviews, I was intentional of not letting any of my own assumptions impact my interpretation of what my participants shared during our conversations. This intentionality carried through my decision to do three rounds of data analysis as and to foster more credibility in my findings (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

My two-fold purpose of member checking (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Rossman & Rallis, 2017) added another layer of credibility to my study. First, I sent each participant a transcript of their interviews to give them the opportunity to clarify any discrepancies in what they meant to communicate or share more information they may have thought of after the fact. Second, I sent participants a list of themes identified from data analysis and again, invited to share any pivotal points or themes that they felt were missing. While several girls and WOC advocates responded thanking me for following up, as promised, none of them had any corrections or clarifications. All of these were forms of triangulation which Santos et al. (2020) stated,

> is one of these strategies for improving qualitative studies involving different perspectives, used not only to increase its credibility by involving the use of two

> or more methods, theories, data sources and researchers, but also to enable the understanding of the event under different levels, thus considering the complexity of the study. (p. 656)

Having two groups of participants and multiple forms and rounds of analysis created the opportunity for stronger objectivity in some regards as "we pool our many partial truths towards understanding" (Fine et al., 2003, p. 195) this human rights issue of DMST.

Boundaries of Inquiry

As discussed above, this study has evolved over the last several years–first connecting with organizations to facilitate a youth participatory action research (YPAR) project with girls of color who were either involved in the juvenile-justice or child welfare system and/or were DMST survivors. Due to difficulty in acquiring parental consent and concerns from organizations, it shifted to a photovoice study in schools. However, during all of this, the Covid-19 global pandemic complicated those plans…so here we are! Because I had committed to a reflexivity from the beginning, I realized that the things I was unapologetically committed to from the onset of this dissertation were raising awareness about DMST in schools and forefronting the voices of Black and Brown girls.

What type of school did participants attend? Do they come from 2-parent households? Have they experienced childhood sexual abuse or system involvement, the two primary exacerbating factors for sex trafficking? The list of potential demographics to describe participants is limitless. What about their family structure? What about the systems they may be involved in? Again, all these often lead to a discussion and analysis

of personal “risk factors,’’ rather than a systemic analysis of all the ways these systems have the potential to make Black girls feel seen and heard or invisible and silenced.

Those factors often lead us to discussions over what type of school is “best,” which interventions are most effective, although for another study and discussion, are important, but often fail to see young people in their full humanity. Other than their age and identity as Black girls, which were the two qualifications for participation in this study, I chose not to inquire about any other demographics for one reason alone....I wanted their voices to stand alone and speak for themselves. Despite any trauma they may or may not have experienced...despite any system involvement or the lack thereof, schools and other systems have the potential to be healing-centered and affirming spaces.

Lastly, centering research around a purely digital study raised the concern of not being able to build a rapport by being physically present with the girls and WOC advocates. All our lives over the last two years have been predominantly virtual through this pandemic, therefore they at least had an increased level of experience, if not comfort, with the virtual nature of our Zoom interview. While I made sure to let both groups know they could be unfiltered and to come in whatever way they were most comfortable, I think the virtual nature allowed especially the girls to be relaxed in their own environments. Some of the girls had their camera off, others came on screen sitting at their desks or kitchen tables, had their hair wrapped, were in pajamas, lying down on the couch exhausted after work, another had a puppy in her lap, and another’s little sister kept popping in--which of course allowed for conversation about these parts of their lives throughout the interviews. What I was concerned with originally ended up helping facilitate *kitchen table talk* moments throughout the interviews.

Ethical Concerns

According to Edwards and Mauthner (2002), researchers must account for any ethical concerns that may arise throughout the entirety of the study. These ethical concerns have implications for the following components of studies: research design, risk/benefit assessment, and informed consent (Banister & Daly, 2006). Especially due to the sensitive nature of discussing DMST and any potential feelings or past experiences it may have brought up for the girls, I was intentional in both my recruitment and interview process. As shared above, I used purposive and snowball sampling for the WOC advocates and for the girls. However, in order for girls to participate in the study, they attended a virtual information session with the mentor/educator/counselor that informed them of the study. The purpose of this session was 3-fold. First, I wanted their first time meeting me to be with an adult in their life they already trusted so they would feel comfortable and know it was a safe space and that they were free to be their full selves. Second, since I did not know the girls' prior knowledge on DMST, I wanted to make sure they were all beginning the interview with some common knowledge on the crisis. Third, since I only conducted one interview with the girls, I did not want to engage in a conversation about the crisis with their mentors present for the first time in case it brought up any past experiences of potential trauma for them. Lastly, one of the first questions I asked was if they had someone they would feel comfortable reaching out to if our conversation triggered anything for them or if there was something they heard they wanted to work through or discuss more. Even though none of the girls shared that anything came up for them that they wanted to process more, I checked in with each one

of them at the end of their interviews and reminded them to reach out to the mentor who originally referred if they needed any support.

Subject Cost and Compensation

This study did not involve any cost to the girls or WOC advocates. I did compensate them with $20 gift cards of their choice by the end of the study.

Chapter 4

Presentation of Findings

In this study, I conducted interviews with 10 Black girls and 13 women of color (WOC) activists about the ways in which Black and Brown girls are silenced, how that leads to disproportionate exploitation through DMST, and how schools and other systems can play a role in prevention and creating spaces where their humanity is affirmed. In this analysis, I will present themes based on their responses about the ways in which Black and Brown girls are dehumanized and both groups' recommendations for humanizing them–especially as it relates to DMST prevention. As I share themes and findings from these 23 interviews, my goal is to paint a "meaningful emotional whole" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 5) picture through the individual words and cumulative experiences of both groups of my co-creators, the girls and advocates. My presentation may feel messier and certainly longer than might be expected; however, as an interpretive bricoleur, I present this "montage sequence not sequentially, or one at a time, but rather simultaneously" (Cook, 1981, p. 172).

While the girls represented a variety of schools and WOC crossed many fields of study and practice, I will present the three themes that emerged around dehumanization:

1. Silencing through:
    a. adultification
    b. sexualization
    c. criminalization
2. Lack of safe spaces:
    a. physical

b. affective

3. Turning a blind eye:
    a. intra-community silencing, and
    b. failing to talk about things that matters

Next, I will present systemic recommendations by the advocates and the 5 themes that emerged from both in terms of school-based recommendations and creating spaces that affirm the humanity of Black and Brown girls.

1. Non-school systemic recommendations (advocates)
2. School-based recommendations (girls and advocates)
    a. Educational training
    b. DMST education/awareness
    c. Sex ed/consent
    d. Healing-centered
    e. Accountability

While I stayed committed to the methods of analysis laid out in the methodology, I also wanted to be intentional about both my theoretical framework and the heart of humanizing Black and Brown girls. Therefore, the first section of this chapter will frame my findings and themes (listed above) in a few key ways. First, I am going to paint a picture of these girls and advocates by creating a brief profile for each group–based on their own words and experiences. Second, I will use quotes from them both, especially the girls, often, and maybe even more than usual for a dissertation. It is not because I couldn't decide which to pick, but rather an intentional choice to forefront the girls' voices because as Brené Brown (2021) said, "In order to empathize with someone's

experience, you must be willing to believe them as they see it, and not how you imagine their experience to be." This leads me to the third focus of the introduction, which will be girls' responses to a seemingly simple question, "How did we fail you?" which will not be quantified or categorized, but rather just starting this journey through the themes of this chapter with their experiences, as shared by their own voices. Similarly, to how we begin, I will close this chapter with the girls' affirmations in their own words. So, let us briefly get to know both the WOC advocates and girls now.

Honoring Their Experiences: Profiles of WOC Advocates and Girls

WOC Advocates

The first few questions I asked the advocates were to tell me about their field of study and their why…a little bit about what led them into (and kept them) in their field/role. Not only did they share their career paths, but they shared their hearts. They shared many of the experiences of traumas that led them to a place where they wanted to help Black and Brown girls find their own voices and spaces. Of course, they shared ways in which they'd seen Black and Brown girls be silenced through various fields, as will be presented through these results. However, they went beyond and shared some of the ways in which they personally had been silenced through various experiences. Some of them also shared their own journeys of healing, and the invaluable wisdom and insight they have gained along the way. While this chapter and dissertation will not focus on those specific stories and responses, I want to honor their voices and experiences here in this space by saying I did not take one word they shared for granted and will hopefully use it in another work one day.

The WOC advocates whom I interviewed for this study represented a cross-section of different fields/roles and therefore each looked at the sex trafficking crisis from a different lens, as represented in Table 3. Those fields encompassed the following systems and sectors: education, social work, mental health, juvenile justice, legal system, pediatrics/medicine, and church. I assigned each of the advocates pseudonyms in this chapter that represented both an attribute I felt connected to their role, along with their role/field itself. The only times I will refer to them as solely (WOC) advocates are when I'm referring to multiple advocates at once.

Table 3

WOC Advocates' Pseudonyms and Fields/Roles

	Pseudonym:	Position	Specific field/role/focus
1.	Imani	[anti-misogynoir] theologian	Anti-racist feminist theologian; co-founded a podcast by and for Black women about gender, race, and politics, and culture from a theological lens.
2.	Justice	DMST lawyer	Anti-trafficking lawyer; works for national anti-sex trafficking organization focused on changing both laws and culture to impact girls of color
3.	Destiny	Survivor educator	Sex trafficking survivor. Leads anti-trafficking organization focused on curriculum for sex trafficking survivors
4.	Sage	Ed policy lawyer	Former lawyer passionate about 1) the intersection of education policy and law; and 2) making sure that people have the tools/resources to grow, learn, develop and support purpose-driven work
5.	Hope	Social worker	School Social Worker. Used to work with Teen ELECT for teenage mothers and founded a mentoring program for girls of color.

(continued)

	Pseudonym:	Position	Specific field/role/focus
6.	Journey	LPC	Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC). Her own experiences of trauma led her to become a therapist herself to provide safe other girls/women of color with the safe spaces to work through their trauma that she never had.
7.	Alika	DMST mentor	Founder of a program focused on anti-trafficking rescue efforts and mentorship for girls of color; Provides sex trafficking trainings in juvenile justice facilities, churches, and schools
8.	Azhia	Consent educator	Background in community psychology. Works for an organization that equips educators to engage in conversations with their students promoting consent culture.
9.	Haven	Nonprofit counselor	Provides mental health services to DMST and domestic violence survivors; Seeking grant funding to open a shelter for both. Passionate about and focused on providing support for girls and women of color. Provides sex trafficking trainings in schools.
10.	Joy	School Counselor	Former teacher. School Counselor with over 25 years of experience in education. Passionate advocate for her students and fighting for equity in her schools. Started multiple extra-curricular groups: student-led advocacy, Girls on the Run, 5K, career days, & more.
11.	Serenity	Trauma therapist	Social Worker. M.A. in Counseling, Trauma Studies. Experience working with and facilitating individual/group counseling young people in group homes/foster care/juvenile justice settings.
12.	Harmony	Sex educator	Supports educators in addressing gender and sexuality, advance implementation of sex education curriculum and how to address gender-based violence.
13.	Dr. Shaffiah	Pediatrician	Pediatrician; loves working with patients of color and their families and advocating for children in her practice; Actively supports a global anti-trafficking nonprofit organization.

All their personal and professional perspectives added value to our exploration of both the ways in which Black and Brown girls have been dehumanized across systems and how to best engage schools in becoming healing-centered and acting as a protective

factor in the lives of Black and Brown girls, as all these systems intersect–which leads us to meet the girls.

Girls

As stated in the previous methodology chapter, I chose to select names of African origins as pseudonyms for each of the girls with meanings that signified my hopes for all Black and Brown girls...that they would see themselves in this light and that each of the systems they interact with, especially schools, would affirm each of these meanings for them (valued/worthy, loved, safe, full of life, beautiful, precious, bold/courageous, justice, gift, and wishes/desire). In describing how they saw themselves, the girls overwhelmingly shared positive or simply descriptive traits that showed a strong sense of self. After asking how their year was going, which led to conversations about Covid-19 and/or heightened racial tensions in the country, the first question was simply, "In three words, how would you describe yourself?" It was not a question asking about their strengths or areas of growth, but rather simply how they see themselves.

Collectively, the girls described themselves as ambitious (x2), creative, kind, reserved, thinkers, shy/quiet until you get to know them (x2), outgoing (x2), resilient, amazing, optimistic, outspoken, unique, driven, resourceful, intelligent (x3), beautiful, remarkable, self-motivated, hardworking, proud, caring (according to Heba, "the mom" of her friend group), and passionate! They viewed themselves overwhelmingly in a positive light, which is important to note, especially in terms of their perception of how others see them. When asked how they thought their peers and educators would describe them in comparison to how they described themselves, half replied it would be the same. Habibah, Tahiya, and Jasira all explained that their response largely depended on the

teacher and the class. The more comfortable they felt in the class, particularly around that individual teacher, the more vocal and engaged (and playful according to Tahiya) they were in class.

Even more telling was what they wish others knew about them, which fell into two themes: 1) their character (4/10) and 2) their needs (4/10), although several overlapped both. Almost half (4/10) of the girls shared they wished others saw them in a more positive light. Habibah shared that she wished her educators and peers knew how kind she was and that she likes to listen to learn from others, rather than speaking up all the time. Mona shared she wished her educators and peers knew how much she enjoys making people happy and she and Jasira wished they knew how big of a heart they both had. Half of the girls stated that teachers would describe them differently based on how comfortable they were in the class; that they were more outgoing and engaged in class when the teacher made them feel comfortable. Ironically, based on many of their conversations, their lack of engagement in class was often taken as not wanting to be involved, when it was simply because they weren't in an environment where they felt comfortable being fully themselves. Even though the girls shared specific educators and experiences that affirmed them, their responses indicated that our educational system overall did not make them feel seen and heard, but rather forgotten or dismissed--especially when it comes to these issues.

While the girls' identity, socioemotional health, and experiences in their families, communities, and all these systems comprise the entirety of their external experiences, school is the only space they all have in common as a potential protective healing and empowering space...to help counter their experiences in any other environments and

systems or even to re-affirm them if all those experiences are positive. However, according to the girls' and advocates' responses, their experiences in school are too often quite the opposite, further exacerbating their marginalization. While the cross-system of all these experiences impacts them, it's important to look at these in their entirety in terms of the way they express feeling seen/heard or invisible/silenced. The way they internalize these interactions and spaces can make girls more vulnerable to exploitation or be preventative and protective.

After asking the girls what they saw as the biggest challenges facing girls in their schools/communities, their knowledge of sex trafficking and whether their schools ever discussed DMST, sex education or consent–all of which will be discussed later in this chapter, the interview continued by exploring the girls' perspectives of how their school and other systems failed them.

"How Did We Fail You?"

I asked them to answer the following question, "If you were to write a letter to former/current teachers/counselors/principals from your school(s) sharing what you wish they knew about you, what you needed, what would you want to say in response to the following question? 'How did *we* (systems set up to educate, support, and protect you fail you?'" The following were their responses to the question, grouped into 3 categories: (a) the irrelevance of school/failure to talk about things that matter, (b) a lack of safe spaces to process the things that they deem important/care about, and (c) Black girls aren't believed and supported enough.

The Irrelevance of Schools/Failure to Talk About Things That Matter

[Uzima] They didn't prepare me for the world. High school in general does not prepare you for the world. I don't need to know about the Pythagorean theorem, I need to know how loans affect my credit score, how I can make my credit score better, how I can figure out financial aid, things like that. Because guess what? They don't even... They barely even prepare you for college…

[Jasira] I guess I would say be more vocal about things that are going on in the real world… And have lectures and seminars…Trafficking as well, but other things that are like life necessities, like how to deal with money, credit and stuff like that…And more adults that are relatable and understanding of different situations and that are trustworthy. That's pretty much it I would say.

[Uzima] Yeah, so I would probably tell them that they didn't teach me about myself, so my history, where I came from, just females in general. There are so many males in history, barely learn about females in history… yeah, they didn't teach me about myself, they did not teach me about women's history, how I am an independent woman. Thankfully, I have my mom in the house to tell me about that, like simple things like that, that make a woman who they are that they need to know.

[Heba] That they didn't give us the proper education, the proper resources…They didn't create a safe place to talk about these things…That's all you have to do is talk, I feel like. They focus and put emphasis on the wrong things…This one crime, sex trafficking, that it's so common, they never taught us how to kinda notice it, I feel like. Cause I feel like they put so much effort from

middle school to high school on telling us what drugs are, what guns are, and then we have whole assemblies meeting people who have been in prison, and they don't do the same thing with sex trafficking or the fact that it is a crime...Why they don't talk about it? I feel like 'cause to them it's like a taboo type subject and they would rather think that it doesn't exist when, like we said, it's something that's more common than we think. So I feel like it's kind of taboo to talk about that topic and we try to just make it like if we don't talk about it, it doesn't exist…That's all you have to do is talk, I feel like...They focus and put emphasis on the wrong things…You can tell us about gun safety, drugs, and bullying over and over and over but they never taught us how to actually protect ourselves. This one crime that's so common and affects us more than anyone, they never taught us how to even kinda notice it!

[Mona] Going back to maybe history class, how did history class fail me, not paying really attention to Black history month, they're not going over anyone of color, basically. That's how it felt. In history class, not learning about my race, it makes me feel like my race isn't important.

Lack of Safe Spaces/Focus on Mental Health

[Sharifa] Mostly what I would say is, you failed to give us a safe space where we can talk about these stuff, these things, these problems, these issues without feeling some type of shame, you never pulled all the girls aside or even broke it up into groups and said, "Okay, so and so group is going to meet this day and we'll be in a safe space, whatever you talk about will not be talked about anywhere else. Everybody's name will be... Nobody's going to nothing. It's like

what goes in Vegas, stays in Vegas, basically…Everything's confidential. There's nothing ever going anywhere."

[Habibah] Assemblies were really helpful for me back in the days, or small groups, specifically for women within the school. I think that would be pretty cool. Bringing in survivors from those type of situations, to tell girls about what they've been through. Not just assemblies. What else? I say conversation within the classrooms, just bringing it up more often, making it known that it's a thing, yeah, 'cause not opportunities to be able to talk about it, yeah. I would add guidance counselors that I guess are more involved and easier to contact, and I'd make classes, like certain courses that boys and girls have to take for their own safety, that's required. Just about everything; relationships, trafficking, online friends, because I know a lot of people have to be safe with that. How to express themselves, just stuff like that…I feel like it should be separate.

[Aziza] I would say not allowing us the spaces to talk and not be judged, telling us to stay safe instead of telling the boys to mind their business or well, just telling people, "Respect boundaries." 'Cause it's not always just that people are a part of the trafficking system, but like establishing the, "It's not your fault. It's their fault because they're not... They don't understand your boundaries." I would also say... Well, I guess this kinda goes with talking to your peers about stuff, but not having anyone young to talk to. I don't wanna... I don't wanna be like, "Oh, old people can't understand this." But they're more...I feel like they're more inept to judge us because…I feel like being young is definitely a disadvantage when trying to speak out. So yeah, not being able to talk to people

like you about what you're going through, not telling people about boundaries and how you don't go out of the boundaries, and not being able... Well, yeah, not having anyone. I will say not having a professional that's also within their age group to talk to about stuff…Just personally, for my school, it's hard. You never see the process or the attempt to make things better. They always say that they will or sometimes they just randomly happened but you never see the process, and you're kind of rarely a part of it.

[Tahiya] I would add guidance counselors that I guess are more involved and easier to contact, and I'd make classes, like certain courses that boys and girls have to take for their own safety, that's required. Just about everything; relationships, trafficking, online friends, because I know a lot of people have to be safe with that. How to express themselves, just stuff like that…I know my school kind of censors a lot of stuff, that could be a part of it so they're not making someone uncomfortable.

[Uzima] That for the most part, they didn't check on me enough, making sure that I was okay mentally, physically, all that. It was kind of like if you seem okay then you're okay. Unless you're breaking down crying, then there's no need to worry.

Black and Brown Girls Aren't Heard/Believed/Supported Enough

[Gamila] Black women were often swept under the rug with a lot of things, just simply going back to slavery, we are swept under the rug. We're forgotten about. I feel like we're the most forgotten about race in America if you ask me…definitely, and I feel like it's sad and it's unfortunate, but it's the truth

and is what we're living in, unfortunately....At the end of the day, we're all women, and we all deserve to be treated correctly, so I feel like definitely addressing that and making it known. I feel like, to be honest…we're never gonna be able to be on the same level as important as it will be as a white woman doing something versus a black woman, even though we're just as important and we matter just as much. I feel like just the way America is and the way the cycle of the school system works. Unfortunately, we're not heard as much as we should be heard...I feel like that's kind of a difficult question, because I feel like women are oftentimes not heard, and that's how we start off failing. This whole system that we live in runs off literally men, and if we're to be specific white men, and I feel like that's something I wish could change. I feel like women aren't as important, and I feel like that's where we fail, we fail women, we fail women every day. So that's what I really think.

[Adla] I would want them to know they should have provided more help. They should work on providing more help in the school systems for girls, especially Black and Brown girls. I think they should. I don't really know what help can look like to a high school extent, but I don't think that most high school females are as comfortable as the school system thinks we're just talking to a counselor at school. And I think that plays a really big part. 'Cause like I said, I will... You never know how a situation can flip on you and I think that... Yeah, yeah. You could be getting help, but it cannot turn into getting help anymore, because something that you wanted to get help for, now you're in trouble for or anything. I haven't experienced this personally, so I really don't know how to

> give a good example…What I could think of the best is maybe being afraid that you're not gonna get help or that they're going to give you help but you don't know how the situation is gonna end up, you know what I mean? I think that they are just perceived as Black and Brown, not just girls. I think they're perceived as black or brown, and I think that can play a part too. I think that if you're in a school where the administrators are predominantly white, I don't know that you're gonna get the help that you need immediately or as efficiently as somebody who was not white.

As seen in their responses above, the girls largely felt as though their schools failed to talk about things they felt mattered/that greatly impacted their lives or give them safe spaces to learn about and process both what was going on in the world around them and their own lives. It failed to fully see them. The following section will explore the ways in which schools and other systems dehumanize Black and Brown girls, according to both the WOC advocates and the girls.

Dehumanizing

As presented in the introduction and literature review, tackling the crisis of the sex trafficking industry and its disproportionate exploitation of Black and Brown girls in the US is multi-faceted and requires education/awareness and reform juvenile justice/law, child welfare, medical, and education systems on so many levels. This section will explore the 3 themes of dehumanization present in their responses: silencing, lack of safe spaces, and lack of DMST awareness. Lastly, this section will explore a thread that is woven across all the themes and systems…turning a blind eye to the exploitation of Black and Brown girls.

Silencing

In describing their experience of working with and advocating for Black and Brown girls, all of the WOC advocates described ways in which systems didn't fully see or hear girls—the ways they didn't fully see or affirm their humanity. Their examples ranged from large cultural movements to individual interactions across systems. The advocates cumulatively mentioned that gender and racial disparities among Black and Brown girls are still left out of mainstream conversations within the Me Too Movement and Black Lives Matter. Sage, the ed policy lawyer, described how there is still a scarcity model when it comes to supporting young people,

> just the amount that we invest in the promotion and support of Brown and Black boys in some of these places. And that's not to say they don't need it, because they need it. But all too often, we comment on these things from a mentality and mindset of scarcity.

Building on that idea, Justice, the DMST lawyer, described how Black and Brown girls are still largely left out of even mainstream "Black Lives Matter" conversations, taking over #SayHerName hashtags to be more inclusive rather than using the opportunity to draw attention to the fact that Black women and girls often experience violence (without justice) at rates that are rarely discussed. Justice expounded on this by saying,

> I think it's like, in terms of who gets the attention, who is held accountable, it's problematic across the board, but I think when we look at who's the person causing the harm versus who's being impacted, particularly if the person impacted is a woman or girl of color, I think it changes the conversation. I think it changes

the concept of accountability, and who's being held responsible for the harm, if there's even acknowledgement that harm has occurred.

While many of the examples fell within three themes of adultification, sexualization, and criminalization, they are obviously not and rarely mutually exclusive. Therefore, as stated above, this introductory section may also share some examples of silencing by turning a blind eye or re-traumatizing young people by not fully seeing or hearing them. This turning a blind eye to assault to the marginalization of Black and Brown girls was a thread that ran through many of the participants' experiences of silencing across systems and in different ways. While I will expound more on that later, this section will describe the three ways that Black and Brown girls are often silenced: adultification, sexualization, and criminalization.

Adultification. Many of the WOC advocates described how Black girls are often seen as older than they are and then respond to them accordingly. They shared that white girls are seen more as victims especially when trafficked by Black men, whereas Black girls are seen as running away or choosing "the life." Journey, the LPC stated "that the world in general sees black and brown girls…as though they are older than what they are and so you're taking away that innocence from them in a sense of expecting that they are." As a result, the advocates suggested that Black girls need less protection than their peers and are often blamed for their attitude and even for their own victimization.

Sage, the ed policy lawyer, described that there is a level of tough love all too often used with Black and Brown girls–the idea that they need to learn to keep their guard up by thinking the world doesn't care about them.

There's this element of tough love... Instead of drawing you in and building you

up and supporting you, I'm going to prod at your weaknesses, break you down and make you see...that the world doesn't care about you. And the more I make you see that, hopefully, it heightens your defense for you to understand that, and so then you will now say, "Oh, the world doesn't care about me, I should take this a little more seriously." That doesn't work. Breaking people down and wearing people thin and putting people on the margins of community doesn't make them feel like they can have a trusted individual to call upon when some of these predatory experiences happened to these young women. And so that's the scary part. We're just like, "You know what, let me teach you what this hate looks like, so when you encounter it it's familiar." But instead, we're just hating people. It's not... We don't do that in any other place where it's like, "Let me keep poisoning you so that you know what poison tastes like when it comes around you." It's just like, "What?" What? In what world did that work? It's like, "No, you're just gonna poison them." It has a direct impact. And so I think that that is how I've seen people treat Brown and Black girls when it comes to some of these really vulnerable situations. And the more vulnerable the girl, the deeper the toughness of the love. And I think that that is a... That's really scary 'cause if nobody's with me then everybody's against me. And we don't exercise that support and allyship in a way that's intentional and pronounced and that girls can actually feel confident in when they actually need to call upon it.

Every single advocate expressed that in their experiences across systems, Black and Brown girls are often not truly heard or valued and are often easily dismissed largely because they are not seen as children. Whether not believed when reporting sexual assault

to school administrators or being allowed to fully tell their side of the story when coming in contact with the juvenile justice system, advocates described they are simply not seen as children. According to the WOC advocates, these experiences of adultification look different depending on who they're interacting with and what systems they're engaging with–often leading to sexualization and criminalization.

Sexualization. Several of the girls reported that schools often blamed Black and Brown girls as being a distraction based on the way they dressed or acted, rather than holding boys accountable for their actions and often disrespect. Heba described an example of this, saying,

> I feel like it's always been there since middle school in terms of the dress code and things we can or cannot do, and how, I guess, teachers and administrators view us. I think...I feel like... I feel like they view a lot of girls, especially I guess you can say Black girls, Black little girls. I feel like they view us as just like we're doing things to get a boy's attention...I feel like dress code has always been so dumb, and you hear about the cases where in other schools, you can't wear certain things because it's a distraction. A distraction for who, right? And it's like they rather us... They rather us conceal ourselves or they rather us change who we are in order to keep the boys out of trouble.

While Heba's response was about the dress code, several other girls echoed this sentiment in different ways…all of which the advocates also spoke to as they reflected on their own experiences.

Most of the advocates described examples of the girls being sexualized, simply because others often do not perceive them with the same innocence as their peers. Several

advocates noted that Black and Brown girls are often looked at as "fast," leading girls who are victimized to be too easily unseen and disregarded. Imani, an anti-misogynoir theologian, breaks down the *microlevels* of sexualization towards Black and Brown girls that feed into sex trafficking,

> So someone might think, sex trafficking, that's a very obvious example of dehumanization. It is, but also, what leads into that? What feeds into that wicked system, right? Is it not…stereotyping Black women as sassy, as Jezebel, as fast, or as promiscuous? Is it not the adultification of Black and Brown girls; seeing them as older than they actually are, and treating them as older than they are? And if these young girls are sexually assaulted, blaming them for the assault, "Well, what did you have on? What did you wear? Why were you with…?" So all these things are examples of dehumanization. And so it does come as a shocker, I think, to people within and outside of the community, when you actually break it down to the micro levels, even the things that we're saying to little Black and Brown girls. 'Cause we're not immune to that. We have to make sure that the messaging that we give Black and Brown girls is affirming and age-appropriate, right?

Sage, the ed policy lawyer, shared an experience concerning a 15-year-old girl, who I'll call *Myah* here, that led her to leave her job at an urban school district and her career in education for the time being. At a school board meeting, *Myah's* mother, reported that a male teacher told her 15-year-old daughter who was wearing Spandex leggings, "You're lucky I'm not a pervert from a halfway house, or I would be looking at you like this" as he sticks his tongue out and he pants like a dog." The advocate said she "did the documentation and followed the letter of the law." Even after a throughout

investigation, the response from the male leaders of color was, “it’s not like he got any sort of sexual gratification from this” and just resulting in a short suspension for the teacher and much harassment by other students for *Myah*. Through the investigation, other women who had graduated 10 years prior shared similar stories by this teacher commenting on their clothes, hair, and sexualizing them. During an interview hearing to show support for the girl as a witness, a woman shared that she’d experienced something similar in college…by that same educator’s father–continuing the cycle of sexualization. She described how there are too many people controlling the levers that oftentimes don’t give a shit about Brown and Black girls.” These same people in positions of power make choices that not only adultify and sexualize young girls, but this often leads to their criminalization and entry into the juvenile justice system.

Criminalization. More than half (7/13) of the WOC advocates described ways in which they had seen Black and Brown girls criminalized through systems, many of which through schools. One described that the policing of black children in large public schools often happens when staff (or school police) too often misread or misunderstand their behaviors as a challenge to their “authority.” Justice, the anti-DMST lawyer shared that there the huge disparity in the numbers of Black girls criminalized,

> And so when we looked at that, it’s like, the rest of girls within a 10-year period had increased, I think it was 86-87%, the arrest of Black girls were 30 times the rest of both, not just white girls but white boys as well, which I think says a lot, because again, that intersectional piece, I think people often compare girls to girls and boys to boys, but that’s what we were seeing like, “Wow, it’s not just white girls but white boys even.”

Justice shared that these experiences largely stemmed from sexual abuse and trauma, versus the community violence for Black boys.

Journey, the LPC shared her experience working in schools and how these pathways from sexual abuse to prison were often exacerbated by school systems for Black and Brown girls. She often sees their expression of emotion, often as a result of experiences of sexual abuse and trauma, be interpreted as disruptive and problematic, leading to labeling of students or self-contained classrooms where they are treated as if they are incarcerated already rather than getting the support they need. She describes how her complaints about the retired police officer in charge of the classroom putting his hands on students often were dismissed as "This guy knows how to work with these kind of kids…Oh well, these kids have to be handled this way, they have behaviors, they have to be handled this way." As she tried to advocate for them and pull families in, there was even more pushback from the school rather than support. Similarly, Joy, the school counselor's experience resonated with this as well, "I can't tell you how many girls I've seen tackled to the ground by a school police in situations, whether they were in a fight or not, just the amount of aggression that I've seen, and that I've never seen for a white girl in schools and in populations that have both." Furthermore, she shared that in her 10 years as a PSC and 20 as an educator, she has seen Black and Brown girls met with more harshness of punishments, prevalence of suspension and removal from classrooms than helping them heal from the root causes of their pain or trauma (all in middle school). She describes witnessing a 7th grade student being taken out of the building in handcuffs for ripping down multiple bulletin boards in the hallways as she stormed out of class. No danger. No threat. Yet police were called anyway. This example leads to how schools,

among many other potential places in their lives, are often the antithesis of safe spaces for young people, especially Black and Brown girls.

Lack of Safe Spaces

Every single one of the girls shared how in some form or another, there aren't enough safe spaces set up to talk through or even address difficult situations in school. They identified (physical and affective) safety and relationships as the biggest challenges in their lives and the lives of most other teenage girls. Physically, several of the girls reported that they were constantly worrying about their physical safety, feeling exhausted from having to constantly be aware of their surroundings and never being able to fully let their guard down.

The girls shared that relationships were one of the biggest challenges in their lives and those of their peers. They stated that unhealthy relationships, especially with boys can lead girls down the wrong path, where they begin to feel like they need that person. In turn, they can easily let disrespect slide and ignore red flags (both physical and affective) because of their desire to be accepted. Furthermore, Uzima shared that this idea encompassed all types of relationships, that as long as you're getting/staying in relationships–whether professional, romantic, or platonic [Adla]–trying to be someone else, you'll never be able to explore your own identity.

The girls also identified mental health as one of the other biggest challenges of their own lives and those of their peers. They said they often felt like they couldn't fully be themselves, including keeping things to themselves until the point they feel like they can't anymore– but by then, it's already so much worse. Uzima shared,

> That for the most part, they didn't check on me enough, making sure that I was okay mentally, physically, all that. It was kind of like if you seem okay then you're okay. Unless you're breaking down crying, then there's no need to worry.

To make matters worse, most of the girls stated that Black girls especially aren't heard and believed enough, which makes it hard to stand up for themselves. Mona summarizes the sentiment of most of the girls by describing how hard it is for girls to speak up and stand up for themselves at times because they often don't feel like they have enough power, saying,

> I feel like being heard; a lot of girls are not heard enough. Sometimes girls wanna speak up for themselves, but they just can't. That's a real big challenge...When girls can't stand up for themselves. Maybe like...Like if something happens at home, they can't stand up for themselves because they just don't have enough power...like they're not believed…Not saying that they don't have enough power, which that every person does, but they feel as they don't have enough power, which just keeps them quiet.

Adla described how these experiences where their attempts to reach out for help are ignored, or even turned back on them exemplify this lack of safe spaces in schools. She shared,

> I don't think there's enough space that is set up honestly, I don't. I don't think they provide enough resources, and I don't think the kids feel comfortable enough going to certain administrators because, honestly, you never know how a story can change too. Sometimes, a student does decide to go and get help, and they don't... They're not given help, even though they took... It takes a lot to go get

> help, and then when you decide to go get help, you're still not getting help fast enough, you know what I mean, that's not... But I definitely don't think there's enough spaces, I don't think ... There's not enough comfortable spaces where students feel comfortable going into something without feeling like there's gonna be repercussions or anything. I know there's certain laws that are in place for things like when situations happen, if you're drunk, you will get in trouble or whatever. But I don't think there's enough safe places for high schoolers or college students to do things like that.

The girls expressed that these experiences like the one Adla described above in which they or their peers aren't believed lead many girls to stay quiet rather than reaching out to adults in school for help. Almost half of the girls mentioned wished educators knew how much they needed support in different ways, Aziza sharing that sentiment saying,

> I'm normal and I hurt too. … It's just, there's just a lot of stuff that people don't know about me, and so they can't make correct assumptions. If I were to tell someone my story, and how I got here, the full thing, because honestly, no one's heard it before if they weren't in it, they'd be like, "Oh, gosh, you're deeper than I thought."

The majority of the girls also shared how much they and their friends needed a space to unpack what was going on in the world, whether it was Black Lives Matter or sex trafficking–neither of which most of the girls felt like their schools and educators were equipped for. The next section details the level of training advocates received across

various fields and whether their programs provide training to equip them for helping young people navigate challenges.

Lack of DMST Awareness

Girls' Awareness. As mentioned in the methodology section, the girls watched a brief survivor story of a young woman named Oree during recruitment meetings where she shared how she was groomed, victimized, and escaped. Most of the girls reported that before watching the video, their only knowledge of sex trafficking, accurate or not, was through social media (x3), church (x1), television/movies (x7), news (x1), and family (x1). None of the girls ever learned anything about sex trafficking from their schools– whether through speaker, assembly, class or assignment. After watching Oree's story, they were surprised by the average age of victimization (12-14yr), how quickly it happened, the recruitment and grooming process, and lastly, that so many people turned a blind eye to what was happening to her.

Lastly, regarding education about trafficking and relevant issues, I asked about whether they received comprehensive sex education, including discussions on consent and healthy relationships. In terms of sex trafficking, 8/10 girls shared they had a brief lesson in health about sex education in health class. However, of those 8 girls, 6 made it clear that it was solely a presentation about the anatomy of sex, protection…with no room for discussion about any of it. Consent and healthy relationships were discussed even less. Sharifa and Mona each remembered only one lesson concerning these topics, also sharing there was no room for discussion here either, just a brief presentation in each of their health classes. Heba mentioned seeing something on TikTok about how

consent/rape culture should be a mandatory part of sex ed based on how often it happens. Uzima shared,

> People get really quiet when it comes to consent. It's like, "Oh, no, that's a hush-hush topic. Let's not rattle the snake...I feel like it's 'cause it's like how people talk about politics. Those think it's like there's so many ways to categorize that. And I just feel like it's not.

Tahiya, Aziza, Heba, and Mona all shared that there were always more about drugs or bullying, even though they knew consent should be talked about more in school. This lack of education about both DMST and consent completely align with the lack of relevant training that advocates had across all fields as well.

WOC Advocates: Training and Mandatory Courses/Studies. What I thought would be a simple response about the amount (or lack thereof) of training on DMST and its racial and gender disparities resulted in thoughtful responses not just about the disparities, but also about how we, as a whole society, need a shift in mindset, rather than just education and awareness, and the ways in which they feed into sex trafficking and the dehumanizing of Black and Brown girls.

All of the advocates reported being aware of the ways in which Black girls/women are silenced across systems, and the disproportionate sex trafficking of Black/Brown girls, yet all of them agreed that it wasn't a focus in their fields of study/practice, except for 2 of the 3 advocates who are directly engaged in anti-trafficking work. Even an organization focused on equipping educators to teach young people about rape culture/consent didn't address sex trafficking.

Across all WOCA's responses, they unanimously stated that there was no

educational training in their specific fields of study…never in law school, seminary, pediatrics, community psychology, gender studies, sexuality and women's studies, education, school counseling, or even counseling (including trauma therapy) and social work. Dr. Shaffia, the pediatrician shared that while there was no mandatory training on sex trafficking in medical school, "in the pediatric world, it's pretty novel, it's a novel understanding, we're only really seeing literature within the past five or six years of its effects on adolescents." Even during her whole Masters in Trauma Studies, Serenity, the trauma therapist stated, "In my 60 credits, there was no sex trafficking. There was complex trauma, there were sexual abuse, there was domestic violence. We had a whole class on domestic violence, there was no human trafficking. Not once." Journey, the LPC echoed the sentiments about the lack of training in the mental health field, saying, it was seen as "if this is something that you wanna specialize in, then you look into that…it wasn't a part of the program…but within the field, more clinicians are demanding training."

Firstly, 10/13 WOC advocates expressed that a large problem was the myths around what it often looks like in communities. While there is a growing awareness, much of the information out there is still sensationalized through media, movies, and scandals. According to Destiny, the survivor educator,

> They'll think it's like the movie, Taken, or they'll think that it's like the Wayfair scandal, "Kids are being sold online." And they're not seeing it still as in their community or that their own child could be a victim. And they're not seeing it still as in their community or that their own child could be a victim.

The false narratives of girls primarily kidnapped walking down the street, images of

being handcuffed to a bad, and even labeling minors as “prostitutes” all feed into the problem.

All of the WOC Advocates learned about sex trafficking outside of their studies, either through being in their fields of practice or through relevant community/ministry involvement. Even working for an organization focused on equipping educators to discuss consent with young people in schools, Azhia, the consent coach, shared that there was no explicit conversation about sex trafficking or exploitation. While it is more of a conversation through specific church ministries, community organizations, anti-trafficking orgs and even schools, there is still some confusion about what it actually looks like in the U.S., much less the knowledge of/concern over the disproportionate impact on Black and Brown girls.

Awareness/Urgency of Racial/Gender Disparities Within DMST: Responses From the Field. All the WOCAs stated that the fact that Black and Brown girls seem to be disproportionately targeted as the reason that people don’t care as much about the issue and specifically why especially the racial and gender disparities of DMST are not forefronted as much. Destiny, a former trafficking survivor, summed up the sentiment by stating that while “people probably know that Black and Brown girls have it worse, but is there like a large uproar or something to stop it? Probably not.” Several of the advocates also noted that even though many children are missing within the Black and Brown communities, they often don’t make the news or appear in Amber alerts because they are more often than not labeled as runaways or not reported. Within each of their respective fields, the advocates shared experiences that highlighted the lack of DMST awareness, prevalence of myths, and lack of urgency/concern over its gender and racial disparities.

I will start this section here by sharing the expertise from Justice, the lawyer advocate whose job is directly connected to fighting DMST through policy, focusing on girls of color. Her organization's two-fold goals are a direct response to the above lack of training/awareness and urgency that span multiple systems:

> Part of our work is trying to shift the culture as well as policies that allow girls to be criminalized when they're victimized. And so the culture piece is important because the reason that people are enacting harmful laws or harmful practices, or maybe there's something that's helpful that they aren't actually doing, it's because of some type of mindset.

One such law is the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act, whose aim is to improve the justice system's response to youth with provisions in place to help reduce the criminalization of trafficking survivors by screening youth who come in contact with the system for trafficking and diverting them away to get the services they need instead. According to her, their other goal is to humanize girls of color by helping people see Black and Brown girls as children, changing narratives fueled by bias and racism and challenging/changing the policies that allow them to be criminalized when they've been victimized. Their commitment to humanize Black and girls of color is a direct response to the ways in which systems dehumanize and exacerbate both their entry into sex trafficking and their further marginalization and trauma.

Sex Trafficking Task Force & Juvenile Justice System. From the moment sexual exploitation is even suspected to the moment it is confirmed, and there should be care, the advocates share multiple ways in which Black and Brown girls are continuously dehumanized and marginalized even further. Alika, the DMST mentor/advocate, shared

multiple stories exemplifying this dehumanization when working with different systems at all different stages. She described several rescue efforts, calls from girls and families, and calls with police and detectives. The majority of the girls are Hispanic and predominantly African American, but this one particular case she shared involved a 14-year-old White girl. As with all cases, she sent a picture of her to the Sex Trafficking Task Force (out of the Attorney General's Office). The difference is that this time the detectives showed up within the hour rather than the weeks it usually took with other cases…about which she confronted them, saying,

> Do you know how many pictures and how many incidents of little Black and Hispanic girls that I have sent to your office, your phone, and the delay in the response? This is the first little White girl that I've sent you, and you guys are sitting here right now. This is unbelievable.

Justice shared how the lack of training and harmful practices within the juvenile justice system criminalize trafficking survivors by incarcerating them for distributing drugs and burglary when the root cause is that they were forced to do those things by their trafficker. Haven, the nonprofit counselor, aligned with her response, describing the lack of awareness even amongst correctional officers. She recounted doing a presentation to women of color correctional officers who were not aware of the extent of sex trafficking and how it happened:

> And then because there really is no safe place for these girls, they're put into JJC. And so now the victim is now being victimized for being sexually exploited. So awareness just needs to be had from all avenues, especially those who are overseeing the youth.

The ways in which Black and Brown girls are retraumatized and marginalized even further within system after system leads to the need for more support and culturally sensitive mental health services.

Mental Health. Regarding the disproportionate exploitation of Black and Brown girls, Journey, the LPC stated, "it's sick the mental gymnastics that they do to justify their ignorance in that way," both in terms of how it happens and its prevalence. She likened it to the opioid crisis, in both the attention it gets and the attitudes surrounding it, stating that as long as sex trafficking predominantly impacts marginalized communities, others won't give it the attention it deserves.

Serenity, the trauma therapist shared that she learned about DMST through her first job in the field as a youth counselor. Even there, she learned about it through her client before she even had any training. Serenity stated the reason it is not discussed as much even in the field is that,

> sexual assault is an issue that seems a little bit more mainstream…that white people can relate to. I think human trafficking…disproportionately affects Black and Brown people…people who are poor, who have less education, lower SES…by and large. And so I think that when those factors are pointed out, it makes a little bit more sense as to why sexual assault, that can happen to Katie up the street, that seems a little bit more like a spotlight on that.

While it is important, there are often no clinical mental health professionals in schools to address young people who have been sexually assaulted. Therefore, professional school counselors are often the first line of defense in schools, however, their training is not much better in terms of exploitation.

Education: School Counseling. Joy, the school counselor, reported that there was no training in either her Bachelors in Education or her Masters in School Counseling. There has been no mandatory professional development in her 10 years working as a PSC in a large urban school district for educators. She also recounts an experience where school staff and administration found out a student who had been truant at a hotel where she had been staying a few blocks aways, and overwhelmingly responded by stating, "Oh, it's her older boyfriend and she's just fast. She's just fast and that's all she wants to do." She stated,

> I think there should be work around what it looks like, because I know we're seeing it all the time and calling it something else. While we're talking about bullying for the 100th time, we can have that conversation too.

These sentiments of victim blaming, sexualization and adultification create even less a sense of urgency when navigating these scenarios in which Black and Brown girls are being victimized and possibly exploited.

Nonprofits. Alika, the DMST mentor, who shared her experience of working with the Sex Trafficking Task Force and police above shared the same lack of urgency when working with schools. After a sex trafficking presentation at a school in southern New Jersey, a teacher handed her an envelope with the names of several students she knows are being trafficked. When asked if she notified the authorities, she says she had not because she didn't know what to do. So rather than feel a sense of urgency to figure out what to do, she kept notes on each one! Just like with the detectives, she asked her "But I wonder if one of these kids would have lost their lives because you waited" to which she replied she simply didn't know what to do…so she simply was taking notes instead

"because no one wants to be liable, no one wants to be confronted or questioned. Everybody's scared to say there is a problem when there actually is a problem." This same erasure of the issue and essentially Black and Brown girls shows up similarly across fields.

Pediatrics. Within the pediatric profession, the impact of sex trafficking on adolescents has only begun to show up in the literature within the last 7 years or so, as shared above. Dr. Shaffia, the pediatrician, described that while there isn't a clear understanding of the racial inequities of DMST within the medical field, that it had a lot to do with implicit bias of medical providers in even recognizing the warning signs as such. She states that while there is an understanding that African American girls experience disproportionate adverse childhood experiences, however, since they are hyper-sexualized compared to their white peers, they are often too easily dismissed for their perceived actions or attitude, "cause a lot of times, especially black and brown girls, manifestations of anxiety and depression can come off as anger issues or attitude issues, or just being... And that could just be dismissed." She shared that some of her teenage patients who went to the emergency room (ER) with anxiety attacks "were kind of just dismissed, like, 'Oh, you're fine.' And then I see them in the office, and I realize that they're not fine. And really, they didn't have that safe space to be heard in an ER setting."

As reported by the WOC advocates, there is clearly no training around DMST and how to navigate experiences of sexual assault across fields. If that was the main issue, that would seemingly be a quick fix, however, the reported lack of DMST training/awareness and sexualizing/blaming girls, while also overall displaying an

overwhelming lack of urgency to the crisis by all those who are supposedly entrusted with supporting them create a dangerous combination for Black and Brown girls.

Turning a Blind Eye: Reflections of White Supremacist Misogynistic Culture

Just like the above example, many advocates described that the issue wasn't just a lack of education/awareness, but turning a blind eye to sexual exploitation, especially of Black and Brown girls, and all the things that feed into it. While turning a blind eye wasn't a central theme of dehumanization, it was too important not to ignore as it was a thread woven through all systems, as stated in this chapter's introduction. For example, Harmony, the sex educator, described how often she would see boys pushing girls around in the hallways or grabbing them inappropriately. While she was there to provide training to staff and young people, she often saw that educators did not always see how problematic those behaviors were or know how to intervene even when they did.

Other examples of turning a blind eye were much more explicit to sex trafficking. As Alika said, "the silence starts long before trafficking occurs." The DMST mentor recounts a case at a school where multiple girls complained about a male principal entering the girls bathroom, opening stalls, touching and assaulting them. The moms took it to Facebook, hoping that a public outcry would get a response. After no response from the school after meetings with several administrators, her mother called the police. Almost 1 year later, nothing had happened. She stated that it's not just a lack of awareness, but rather, turning a blind eye and caring more about the reputation of the principal perpetrator than the safety of those girls. Hope, the social worker, shared that "education is one of the biggest culprits when silencing our black and brown kids…I don't believe this system was ever created for *them*…I don't think that it was created for

our kids who have to go through traumas…challenges every day." She said educators send messages to young people just as much by things they address and don't address.

When reflecting on this very idea presented by Hope, Adla processed shock when recalling the video of Oree's survivor story, saying,

> I didn't realize how quickly that can happen, and it makes sense because I always read and see about so many girls that get kidnapped and trafficked, and it made me ask like, I'm her age like. What did she miss? What didn't somebody tell her or was she just like me and just ended up having a vulnerable conversation with somebody? But it was during when she actually got out there, no one stopped her...No one did anything to help her. And that was crazy to me 'cause I was like, "Woah, I don't..." and a lot of people say like, you don't know what happens until you're in that situation, but are you kidding me, can you see this little girl being dragged by somebody, we're just gonna sit there and act as if we don't see it happening?! I'm confused. So that was a big thing for me too, in that she didn't get any help and no one offered her any help!"

Adla expressed her disbelief over how many people turned a blind eye throughout her story … from never asking her if she was okay, to literally turning a blind eye as she is physically being dragged, and then still having to ask for help after escaping her trafficking.

> Another example was shared by Alika, who stated that many turn a blind eye because they're African American and Hispanic girls, they think that's our culture. They think that since slavery, we were always used for that, so they think that it's normal for us to be involved in sexual acts with family members.

She described an experience where she was providing a sex trafficking prevention for girls at a charter high school in a large urban school district. After asking the girls if they were or knew someone who may be a victim of sex trafficking, she said almost half of the girls (100/200) raised their hands. At the request of the principal, she met with as many girls as were willing and reached out to the Human Trafficking Task Force of the city where was school was located. That led to many more presentations throughout that city and hundreds of calls to her organization for help. When she reached out to the police department about a particular apartment complex which was known for sex trafficking, the response was "Well, we don't go unless we have a call." Even after telling the officer that she got calls and eye-witness reports about "a little girl about 12 or 13, she was pushed out of the apartment next to her on the 10th floor, and all she had was panties in her hand" and calls from other residents reporting similar combined drug and trafficking activity, they refused to respond. Not only do systems render Black and Brown girls invisible, but there is often a silencing that happens within their own communities that is talked about even less.

Intra-Community Silencing. Haven, a counselor who founded a DMST advocacy nonprofit, works with girls in residential placements. As a survivor of domestic violence herself, she shared the importance of having a safe place to stay in crisis, because like her, she said Black and Brown girls often aren't believed around sexual violence. However, she said,

> There is a large statistic of sexual abuse that takes place with these children, and some of it is within the homes, or it could be without…And so the dysfunction within the homes, and so just looking to connect, looking for that boyfriend that

> will make them feel wanted...Within our community, there's that saying, "What goes on in this house stays in this house." And so that's what they do, they stay within, they keep it within the home. And being told, with someone on the street that, "Hey, you did it with others for free, so what's the difference? You might as well let us put you out there and make some money."

Sage, the education policy advocate, shared how the silencing of and lack of prioritizing Black and Brown girls within their own communities perpetuates even more violence towards them. She says,

> Brown and Black women are expected to join the cause when it comes to race. We stay on the front line protecting Brown and Black men and boys, because it feels like they are persistently and constantly under siege and perceived as dangerous, but who is protecting us? Sometimes the people that we are in community with and protecting are also the people that are perpetrating violence against Brown and Black women and girls…and also often we just ignore one of them, and I think that that is problematic too, especially when we get to places like these schools, that are...I also think that there is like, some of the adults are perpetrating this and we don't feel comfortable enough as adults calling one another in or calling one another out on some of the BS we've done to kids, like... And that has to change. I think failure to report these things has to bear a consequence, right? And it has to bear a consequence that is unbiased. I think people should be held accountable... And all too often, like predators aren't predators for the day, there is history there. Decades. It's a legacy. Who are the allies that young women need this to actually take hold and for them to feel

empowered and not just like they have to take breadcrumbs off of a bigger table? I don't know.

If they are often erased even within their own communities and movements at the expense of anyone else who might benefit, who will fully see them and fight for them? Even the girls seemed to be aware of this. Gamila shared this recognition of the erasure of Black women by saying,

> Black women were often swept under the rug with a lot of things, just simply going back to slavery, we are swept under the rug. We're forgotten about. I feel like we're the most forgotten about race in America if you ask me, and I feel like if it involves, for example, if we're gonna take example, I don't know if you're familiar with who Ted Bundy is, but he's the body who was hurting a bunch of white women, right? And we hear about him all the time, he's like a national person, everybody knows about him, but nobody ever tells stories about a man who targets black women and who hurts black women. He doesn't have a documentary, he doesn't have those type of things, and I feel like black women are swept under the rug, definitely, and I feel like it's sad and it's unfortunate, but it's the truth and is what we're living in, unfortunately…At the end of the day, we're all women, and we all deserve to be treated correctly, so I feel like definitely addressing that and making it known. I feel like, to be honest, I feel like it's never, we're never gonna be able to be on the same level as important as it will be as a white woman doing something versus a black woman, even though we're just a support and that we matter just as much. I feel like just the way America is and the way the cycle of the school system works. Unfortunately,

we're not heard as much as we should be heard.

Gamila's statement leaves no room for debate that things need to change…that we need to create spaces that counter the silencing and dehumanization of Black girls across systems…rather than perpetuating their marginalization and increased exploitation to DMST.

Humanizing

While the first half of the results section above speaks to the silencing and dehumanization of Black and Brown girls across fields that exacerbates their vulnerability to sex trafficking, this section will share the ways in which these systems, especially schools, can play a protective role instead. This section will share the recommendations for DMST prevention, as shared by the girls and WOC advocates. However, before that, it is worth noting again, as stated in the introduction and literature review, that there is no prevention without addressing demand. Justice, the DMST lawyer, summed it up, saying,

> I think for sex trafficking, definitely addressing demand, because you know the reason…it's important that while we wanna make sure that people aren't punished for the sake of punishment, and that vulnerable people are given the supports they need, I think we also got to remember that there are people who are harming kids, including paying to rape kids, and those people need to have some form of accountability. We can't sanitize what happens to them. It's harmful, it's another form of erasure. And so I think especially with, in all forms, especially with sex trafficking, making sure that the people who are paying to rape kids, the people who are fueling that demand, that there is some type of accountability.

With that said, in order to combat the erasure of Black and Brown girls and their exploitation, there must first be a recognition that there is an issue by those who work with young people.

So while that systemic reform is largely needed as well, the advocates unanimously recognized the need for creating healing-centered spaces and systems for Black and Brown girls that affirm the voices, identity, and worth of Black and Brown girls in systems that are actively doing just the opposite of that. This section will outline the need for humanizing spaces, recommendations for systemic reform, and school-based recommendations, according to both the girls and WOC advocates.

The Case for Humanizing Spaces

The urgent to create humanizing spaces for Black and Brown girls can be a matter of life and death when it comes to domestic minor sex trafficking. However, as evidenced by the responses from women and girls above, the silencing cuts across so many parts of their lives, with the potential to impact their sense of self and worth, as discussed in Chapter 1 and the literature review. Sage described this internalized oppression, saying,

> And so the thing is, their voices are silenced, but after a while, just by them being a community with one another and observing what happens to those that do speak up, they start to silence themselves. And so, it's like the internalized oppression is so deep that people start to believe that that is what they are deserving of, and there aren't enough examples of times that it's gone right for us to pull upon, for people to be like, "Yeah, it's worth it. It's worth it for me to speak up, it's worth it so that it doesn't happen to the next young woman.

In order to combat this internalized oppression on top of the ways in which

systems overly silence Black and Brown girls, I asked both WOC advocates and the girls to share how the systems in which they work/collaborate could better serve girls of color and both them and the girls to share their school-based recommendations–as they relate to DMST prevention.

WOC Advocates' and Girls' Recommendations for DMST Prevention

In this section, I will report the recommendations for DMST prevention, from both the girls and WOC advocates. The first section will share the advocates recommendations for systems, in both preventing DMST and better serving girls of color. The next section will explore the 5 themes that emerged from both the girls' and advocates' recommendations for DMST prevention: 1) educational training/programs, 2) DMST education/awareness, 3) sex education and consent, 4) healing-centered, and 5) Accountability and resistance. First, let's explore the advocates' recommendations by systems.

Advocate Recommendations for Systems. The following chart (4.3) outlines the WOC advocates' responses about non-school based recommendations, as they will be presented in depth in the next section, from the following two questions:

- ➔ How can we collectively, more specifically your [fields/spheres of influence], combat sex trafficking in your own community and play a role in prevention?
- ➔ How do you think the *profession/system [or other fields you've worked with/in] can better serve girls of color?

Table 4

WOC Advocate DMST Prevention Recommendations by System/Field

System/Field & Advocates	Recommendation
Juvenile Justice System	➔ to train judges about what trafficking is, to help them really have a better understanding of who those young people are who've been trafficked, their experiences, as well as their role as judges, as what they can do to protect that child from detention. ➔ Cultural shift to NOT see detention as protective, but rather traumatic ➔ Make system involvement (if needed at all) the very last resort ◆ Address biases and racism that perpetuate unnecessary system involvement
Law enforcement/Legal system	➔ Train police since girls are still arrested for prostitution and treated like criminals at 14 yrs old rather than as victims. ➔ Federal laws that mandate training around trafficking prevention/awareness or laws geared towards making it a requirement or providing funding for schools to engage in those areas. ➔ End demand for exploitation and hold people who are literally paying to rape kids accountable
Pediatrician/medical profession	➔ Educational seminars with girls ➔ Train school nurses, ER, school psychologists on red flags from a health perspective
Social Work	➔ checking in more ➔ attendance beyond paperwork ➔ wellness checks ➔ closer relationships with families and young people ➔ Provide more support for both ➔ More shelters
Mental health	➔ School-based trauma-informed yoga therapy or dance-based program for girls who've experienced sexual trauma ➔ Clinicians getting comfortable going out of their bubble and partnering with schools more. ➔ clinical mental health practitioners in schools that look like/understand community and young people they're serving

(continued)

System/Field & Advocates	Recommendation
Church	➔ Calling out misogyny and racism ➔ Actively fighting for Black/Brown girls/women ➔ Accountability in leadership
All systems	➔ DMST Awareness ➔ Accountability: not turning a blind eye from the biggest to smallest situations that silence Black and Brown girls/women ➔ Address biases and racism ➔ Mindset shift ➔ Remove shame around discussing healthy relationships, consent, abuse, and sex trafficking

While there were specific recommendations for each system, there were also several that aligned with all of them. These four recommendations were a call for more DMST awareness, more accountability/not turning a blind eye anymore, addressing biases and racism, and a mindset shift for all systems and individuals who work with young people, especially Black and Brown girls. Justice described this by stating,

> I think also, the big thing for all of these is addressing the root causes. Again, before a kid comes into contact with the justice system, before they have issues at school, while yes, the school needs to respond better, there's probably other things that are going on. And so I think really having a social infrastructure in place, having a changed culture in place so that these young people are getting, and their families, are getting the supports that they need before they even... I guess when they're initially being made vulnerable, before they really start experiencing marginalization or more marginalization, I think is the main thing across the board.

While schools do not have the power to change any of these other systems, they

do have the power to create a space that combats the marginalization Black and Brown girls face, rather than exacerbating it.

Participant-Based Recommendations for DMST Prevention in Schools

In this section, I will share and explore themes that emerged from asking both advocates and girls how schools can engage in DMST prevention (both) and helping girls feel safer and more heard (girls). While both groups highlighted different areas, there were 5 clear themes that emerged from their cumulative responses to several questions.

Table 5

School-Based DMST Prevention Recommendations and Corresponding Questions

Interview Protocol Questions	Themes
Girls 1. If you knew what you shared could lead to actual student-based recommendations for schools, what specific things would you want to see happen to help prevent sex trafficking and keep girls safer? 2. What do you think school could do better to help you and other girls feel safer and more heard? WOC Advocates 1. How can schools engage schools in combating DMST in their own communities and playing a role in prevention? 2. What do you think needs to happen in order to address/break these cycles of system involvement and exploitation?	1. Educational programs 2. DMST Awareness/education 3. Culturally Responsive Comprehensive Sex Ed, including consent 4. Healing-centered schools a. Girls' groups b. Trauma c. leadership 5. Accountability & Resistance

When applicable, I will share the girls' responses first, then those from the advocates. The first theme that emerged was the need for more educational training/programs for nurses and professional school counselors.

Educational Training/Programs.

School Nurses. Knowing what to look for in terms of not just socio-emotional factors, but also physical changes is key is preventing trafficking. Three of the 13 advocates also recommended training for school nurses, noting that survivors often have multiple doctors/hospital without any health professional screening for DMST by asking the right questions and knowing what to look for during the visits. According to the advocates, training for school nurses should include noticing sudden or subtle shifts in appearance over time, such as branding tattoos, bruising, and signs of addiction. Another recommended area for more specialized training was for school counselors.

School Counselor Training. Four of the advocates recommended the need for more specialized training for school counselors around the crisis of DMST. They cumulatively suggested the following as need for training for school counselors:

- To be able to teach young people through seminars about what safety looks like and how to be more aware of their surroundings
- (Along with administration) How to handle situations that don't sexualize, criminalize, and/or unnecessarily push especially girls into the child welfare or juvenile justice system. The school counselor advocate shared the necessity of having those hard conversations both in Master's programs and in school-level policies/training.
- Intersection of teen dating violence & sex trafficking (One advocate shared finding from a particular study that stated 80% of school counselors had never had any training in teen dating violence, even though 60% of girls reported experienced abuse/violence in their relationships)

- The prevalence of homelessness specifically among LGBTQ youth in terms of depending on partner for housing and acknowledging home with caregivers isn't always safest place
- connecting young people to resources at their fingertips: bookmarks with teen dating and domestic violence hotline

As discussed earlier in this chapter, there is also a need for training on specifically what DMST is, so that they can both educate young people about it, as well as know the warning signs.

DMST Education/Awareness. As established throughout the entirety of this study, there is a lack of awareness and education about DMST, even with young people who are most vulnerable. All 10 of the girls and all 13 advocates unanimously agreed that some type of education about the crisis should be mandatory for all students and educators (inclusive of counselors, teachers, and administrators).

Girls. Cumulatively, the girls suggested the following options to educate young people about DMST: required class/lecture, articles/pamphlets, DMST survivor-led schoolwide assemblies, and using social media to educate and reach students and their families. In regard to DMST being a part of a required course, Adla shared the following,

> If you could put this in capitals, THERE NEEDS TO BE A MANDATORY WORKSHOP ON SEX TRAFFICKING IN SCHOOL THAT HAS TO BE IN THE CURRICULUM…AND THE WORST THAT CAN HAPPEN IS THAT YOU COME OUT AND NOW YOU KNOW ABOUT SEX TRAFFICKING. THEY NEED TO TALK ABOUT…WHAT HAPPENS TO WOMEN AND GIRLS IN THIS COUNTRY…AND HOW MOST MEN GET AWAY WITH IT

AND MAKE PROFIT OFF OF IT. JUST LIKE YOU TALK ABOUT WHAT ARE THE DO'S OR DON'TS, BIRDS AND BEES, LET'S TALK ABOUT THAT…BECAUSE IT'S ABOUT THAT TIME. IT'S BEEN ABOUT THAT TIME, BUT I DON'T SEE IT GETTING ANY BETTER…SO I DEFINITELY THINK THERE SHOULD BE A MANDATORY SOMETHING.

Several of the girls suggested using social media to educate and young people and their families about DMST.

Advocates. The advocates cumulatively shared the need for DMST awareness to be provided in schools, including the following: warning signs, dispelling myths vs the reality of "the life," mandatory curriculum in either health or social studies class, posting on social media, and educating families starting in elementary school. In educating about DMST, consent must be a central part of the conversations as well, according to both girls and advocates.

Comprehensive Sex Education, Including Consent. Both girls and advocates recommended that sex education and consent should be involved in schools, not as singular lessons in a health class. Rather, they should be presented in ways that allow for discussion and questions, removing any shame from those conversations.

Girls' Recommendations. Similarly to DMST education above, the majority (7/10) of the girls stated that not only should sex education be mandatory but it needs to include conversations around healthy relationships, consent, and rape culture. Several shared how needed these conversations are and how tired they are of the "boys will be boys mentality," as Uzima stated, "Boys are going to be men soon in high school, so let's teach them how to be respectful men." The girls shared these conversations also needed

to include how to spot warning flags, not just in relationships, but when you're at a party or meeting new people. Referencing Oree's story, Adla said girls need to know,

> What is a safe space? How can you tell if you can confide in somebody? Maybe when you're at a party and there's liquor and wrong things like that, maybe that's not a safe space to be? What type of people should you be around that wouldn't lead you to that? How can you tell who has…or doesn't have your best interest? You know what I mean? What should you do when you feel uncomfortable in a public place? What are your first steps? How do you get help? When you're not in a safe space, how do you work your way out of that space where you're not comfortable? Because we can talk about being in a party in front of people and how they see yourself all the time, but when you're really with somebody and it's just you and that person and you're really in a situation where you're uncomfortable, when you feel like you're at danger, you're in danger, what are some ways you can excuse yourself? I feel like that's really big... I know I already said that, but I feel like as a high schooler, my mentality is that I don't wanna go out like the lame girl. I don't wanna be rude, I don't wanna be lame, but like, "Excuse me, I don't feel comfortable". You know what I mean? So yeah, definitely, and for guys too. That's what I'm saying, it should be a course, this could be for girls and guys, 'cause guys can be put in uncomfortable situations as well.

Heba echoed this feeling, saying, "I feel like you could talk about drugs all day long…in every class, and how it affects you and your body and your health and your mind, but you don't teach us how to stay safe." The advocates overwhelmingly agreed

with the need for comprehensive sex education in schools, specially creating spaces for discussions around healthy relationships and consent.

Advocates. More than half of the advocates recommended sex education and consent in schools. However, Harmony, the sex educator, recommended the value of schools hiring external and critical sex educators because they can take more risks in conversations with young people without worrying about backlash/getting fired by the school district. She also has her certificate in Gender, Sexuality, and Women's studies, so while this critical perspective of sex education was only shared by her, I felt it was important enough to include,

> You have to have an understanding of gender-based violence, anti-Blackness and what it means for the lives in your areas of privilege and how that may prevent you from seeing Black girls as victims. Schools do need to have collaborations, but they need to have a specific lens…on intimate partner violence. A lot of their approaches are victim blaming and lack actual agency for survivors. Sometimes we may have unrealistic expectations, and you... It's okay for you to have a different expectation than your partner, but the problem becomes when you try to coerce or control your partner's behavior because of your expectations. Like "Oh, if you wanna be a real man, this is what you have to do"...with some talk about gender performance and about how we can be abusive to partners, because we have these expectations of their gender. That's not a requirement in comprehensive sex education.

This advocate shared that an intersectional feminist approach is important in conversations around sex education and consent because it frames the conversations with these elements in mind:

- ➔ how girl may experience anti-Blackness
- ➔ culturally relevant and culturally responsive
- ➔ ways in which your different identities and social constructs impact your relationship.
- ➔ Counter lens on violence that's too often victim blaming and lack of agency for survivors
- ➔ How coercion by partners can lead to DMST, such as "Well, I housed you because you were struggling and your parents kicked you out, and so you need to pay me, so you need to be friendly to my friend, just that's all I'm asking for."
- ➔ Empower/equip young people to advocate for themselves.

In order to equip Black and Brown girls to advocate for themselves, they must be in spaces where they feel safe and heard and that facilitate their healing.

Healing-centered. In the first half of this chapter, I shared the lack of safe spaces for Black and Brown girls. Therefore, all of the girls and advocates recommended increasing socio-emotional support in schools in various forms. These included access to more resources within the school and connections to community agencies–for any issue, but especially sexual assault and health. Before I share those recommendations, I want to share how three of the girls, Habibah, Tahiya, and Heba described environments that make them feel safe in schools.

> Just an adult figure that shows that they care, shows that it would be okay, if they told them that…Just sharing knowledge on the subject, knowing that it happens and that it's okay to talk about it, it's not this taboo thing that nobody goes through like it happens to a lot of people so... Yeah, and like knowledge on the situation, not treating it like, it's something you can't talk about. (Habibah)
>
> She just created an environment in the class where you felt like you could say anything... I don't really... It just comes with the teacher, like you just know, you just feel safe, like I can talk to you about X, Y, and Z, and you wouldn't judge me, or you'd do something to help me too as well and give me advice. I feel like you just know. Based on the teacher, or the counselor or a dean. It's hard to put it into words, you know when you feel safe, ya know, and you know when you feel heard. Putting people, like in those schools that actually care. Like, makes a big difference. (Tahiya)
>
> I guess they allow us to kinda be ourselves. Like my French teacher was always the type to say, "I'm not gonna let you fail my class, if you need help, tell me." And that really made me comfortable with her and, whenever I was confused or something, she's like, "It's fine, I get it." She never I guess... I guess she didn't say... These teachers never invalidated how we felt, or even if we were struggling in their class, they wouldn't just overlook it, you know what I mean? So it's definitely not only me having them several times, but the kind of atmosphere they create in their classroom. (Heba**)**

The girls had several recommendations for the types of healing-centered spaces they need in school to feel and be safer.

Girls' Healing-Centered Recommendations. The girls shared the importance of both confidential individual and group support, so they know they're not alone and can begin to get help they need. With all of these recommendations, Jasira stated that there has to be related and trustworthy adults in charge for them to really feel like they can open up, whether they were educators or mentors (preferably more that looked like them). There was also a theme amongst the girls about needing their educators (teachers, counselors, and administration) to care more about them on a personal level than just academics–through both individual interactions and structural support. On an individual level, Aziza shared that most young people, at least girls, just want educators "to know who they are and what they're dealing with without preconceived notions, and how you can provide the best education for them emotionally and academically."

Gender-Specific Groups. Almost all (9/10) of the girls stated the need for gender-specific groups, particularly girl groups, to express themselves and to focus on helping those who have experienced trauma, as expressed by their words.

[Uzima] So it's like an all-female class. Maybe an all-male class to teach them, just because my shoulder is showing, doesn't mean you need to look at it. Simple stuff like that. Boys will be boys. I'm tired of it. Boys are going to be men soon in high school, so let's teach them how to be respectful men. Let's teach women how to respect themselves and to also know their boundaries, things like that…So if you're in a class with female teachers, with all females, you guys will start talking about experience more, start talking about boys, maybe this boy did something, maybe these two females are talking to the same boy, and he's playing them. And it brings out an open conversation for you to feel comfortable and for you to feel like it's okay to talk about this, whereas if

you're in a class with females and males, you're scared that Jimmy is gonna go tell Johnny in the next class, and now all your business is around the school because Johnny told Timmy and Timmy told Samuel, all that. And even for boys, it might be a good reliever for them just to talk about boy stuff, how they talk about it on the game. And then I feel like males need to also learn how to talk about their feelings, especially Black men, because they don't talk about their feelings. So I feel like if males are in a class with male teachers with a whole bunch of males, they'll be able to learn that it is okay to cry, it is okay to talk about your feelings, it is okay to feel, things like that. And then they can also learn about men will be men and men need to respect women. [chuckle]

Trauma. Even though Heba was the only girl to expound on the importance of these spaces for young girls who have experienced sexual abuse, it was important to mentione here as childhood sexual abuse is the most common exacerbating factor for DMST. She says,

> Definitely focus on the young girls, who experience sexual abuse and... Especially even within their families, and when you hear stories about girls who have been molested and things like that, they always... The one common thing is they felt like they'd get in trouble telling somebody because that's what the person abusing them said would happen, or they said that they thought they might get hurt. And I feel like in school, they really need to narrow down and focus on the young girls and provide them with that safe space to talk. I feel like that's the first thing, because most girls who get molested, it happens for years, and they feel like they can't tell anybody. It just takes one person for them to get comfortable with and talk to.

Advocate Healing-centered Recommendations. Safe spaces looked different to each of the advocates, but they collectively included creating spaces where girls have the opportunity to explore their identities, more fully know their worth, truly be truly heard, heal, ask for/receive support, effect change (if they want to), dream and find their passions. Hope, the social worker also talked about "creating that safe space in an unsafe space" for some of her students, which looked like creating safe words or questions in virtual breakout groups for them to let her know they really needed to come to school and see her during the pandemic. According to the advocates, safe spaces also look like giving them opportunities to process what is going on in the world around them "and then us as adults being quiet enough to listen" and even further implementing those things they want and need–whether it's a student-run fashion show, a girls group, after-school program, talks on entrepreneurship, or anything else. While establishing and running an intensive outpatient program for young people who had suicidal ideations and attempts, Journey, the LPC, stated that "there's something magical about girls being together in a group and being able to just share their experiences and being able to share just their thoughts around things" in both removing shame and raising awareness to things they have become desensitized to. Other than creating healing-centered spaces for girls to process and heal, both several advocates and girls mentioned the need to see themselves as leaders.

Leadership Opportunities/Agency. Four of the advocates (Justice, Sage, Joy, and Destiny) and two of the girls (Aziza and Mona) mentioned the need for leadership opportunities in school or having equal decision making decisions about school programs and policies. These opportunities, according to several advocates, would give girls

opportunities to lead, be seen, know their worth and learn agency. Several girls and WOC advocates shared that girls often weren't getting the support they needed even when they're asking for it, often because there aren't enough structures in place to prioritize and hear their concerns. Joy, the school counselor, recommended not only providing young people with support and activities, but listening to what they need in all these areas ("academically, socially, emotionally, arts") and giving them opportunities to co-create them. While Black and Brown girls need opportunities for leadership and agency, the next recommendation is more accountability for those who hold positions of power.

Accountability & Resistance. The last theme of school-based recommendations from both sets of participants girls outlined the need for more accountability and follow-through from schools especially around sexual assault and addressing school system's resistance in engaging in conversations about DMST.

Girls' Recommendations. On a district-wide level, Adla shared,

> I'm not sure how the whole school district works out money-wise, but I would definitely tell them that plenty of schools invest their money into different things. This (*DMST) is definitely something that should be a mandatory investment, the course. And they have a lot of power. And I mean, yes, the school district holds a lot of power alone everywhere. Is this at the top of their list? Obviously not. And if not, why isn't it? You know what I mean? Because I feel like maybe they feel like there's things that are more important. I don't know what could be a little bit more important than girls that could be their students that get trafficked.

While they highlight the need for priorities on a district-wide level, they also describe a need for accountability for both staff and students on a school level. According

to Aziza, schools need to,

> not sweep things under the rug, you never see the process or the attempt to make things better. They always say that they will or sometimes they just randomly happened but you never see the process, and you're kind of rarely a part of it. But in terms of trafficking, they might say, "Oh, we're going to... Oh, we're going to incorporate that into the health curriculum." And then you might not see it for three years or it might just be like, "Oh, we're still trying. Oh, we're still trying." And you don't know how they're trying or what they're doing to try. You just hear that they're trying...It's more like, 'Sit back. It's gonna happen.' And then we sit and sit and sit and sit [chuckle].

Another level of accountability needed was on an individual level. In their list of school-based recommendations, the girls stated that there needs to be much more accountability about jokes and actions related to sexual assault. Heba summed up the sentiment from most of the girls' responses about this, saying,

> Telling them right from wrong. Yes, I know boys get molested too, and I don't wanna kinda single them out like they don't go through sexual abuse too. But nowadays, you got boys making jokes about rapes and it's not funny at all. It's very insensitive and disgusting. And I feel like if they were properly educated on what it is and how it affects people, then they wouldn't be making a joke or making it light hearted. This is actual people's trauma...But yeah, and I feel like especially in high school, you guys can talk about protection all you want, but you guys aren't really talking about what we need to be talking about, which is abuse and in toxic relationships as well, and just something that covers everything.

> Because again, in school, I feel like we should also have... That should also be another place or another resource to talk to somebody and get information, because kids or parents send their kids off to school to learn, and some of them might expect kids to learn this in school when really we don't. And sometimes the parents are too afraid to talk about it as well.

In addition to educating about DMST, having comprehensive sex education that involves conversations about healthy relationships, consent, and rape culture, more than half of the girls (6/10) noted that holding boys accountable on a daily basis rather than sweeping things under the rug is just as important. The advocates largely shared recommendations that aligned with the girls, but also shared the need for schools to stop resisting engaging in these conversations.

Advocates. Advocates largely agreed that across the board, schools need to move past resistance and acknowledge that gender-based violence happens all too often and engage in conversions to plan how to address it. Both the girls and advocates felt as though schools were resistant to these "hush-hush" topics, however the advocates described several reasons for this resistance around discussing DMST:

- ➔ Unawareness of what it looks like/myths of being held against will and crossing borders
- ➔ Don't wanna address it because it's touchy & they still think it's a global issue, don't realize how young it happens and are worried about pushback from families who often don't want to think about the risk of their child being vulnerable to trafficking.
- ➔ Schools don't want to acknowledge things because then they have to take

responsibility for addressing it: disclosures and liability

➔ Idea that Black and Brown girls are "fast"

Conclusion

In conclusion, I want us to end right where we started…by listening to the girls' voices. I have spent the last 60 pages, exploring the themes from everything the advocates and girls shared with me in terms of the ways in which Black and Brown girls are dehumanized, and their recommendations in how to humanize them more–of course all framed around their disproportionate exploitation through sex trafficking and recommendations for prevention. Part of DMST prevention is combating the ways in which systems and culture overall dehumanizes Black and Brown girls and creating spaces for their healing. After exploring all these themes, why do I want to close this chapter this way? Because we need to focus on and see their full humanity…and listening to them is a great start. So let's close this chapter doing just that. No themes. No explanations. Just the power of their voices and affirmations in light of everything you just read.

"My name is Sharifa and I am brave, ambitious, and creative. And I am enough."

"My name is Habibah and I am brave, I am resilient and I am unapologetically me."

"My name is Tahiya and I am smart, brilliant, and confident."

"My name is Uzima and I am amazing, intelligent, and enough."

"My name is Gamila and I am strong, intelligent, and unique."

"My name is Aziza and I am determined, passionate, and where I'm where I'm supposed to be."

“My name is Jasira and I am intelligent, free-spirited and bold.”

“My name is Adla and I am intelligent, smart, and resilient.”

“My name is Heba and I am worthy of love, able to do anything, & stronger than I think.”

“My name is Mona and I am passionate, outgoing, and ready to see what the world has in store for me.”

Chapter 5

Discussion of Findings

As I complete this journey upstream through this dissertation, my hope is that ending the last chapter with the girls' affirmations reminds you that this was/is not some deterministic exploration to explore the fate of Black and Brown girls specifically from *urban* communities. On the contrary, the purpose of this journey upstream was to explore and understand the ways in which they are silenced in order to combat the forces that make them more vulnerable to DMST and to create healing spaces, especially in schools, that will, in Tarana Burke's words, "give them tools to counteract the messages of worthlessness the world would inevitably put on them" (Brown, 2021).

Utilizing the combined conceptual framework of Critical Race Feminism and a Feminist Narrative Counseling Model, I explored the intersectional experiences of both race and gender to more fully represent the experiences of girls of color, across systems and other contextual factors, which are often minimized when solely focusing on race or gender alone (Davis, 2008). This lens was critically important in order to explore the staggering and disproportionate rates at which girls of color are victimized through sexual violence and more specifically, DMST. Due to the underground and underreported nature of the crime, statistics are constantly changing. Many statistics were shared in Chapters 1 and 2, but here is a snapshot of numbers from the DMST crisis:

- 200,000+ children are victimized through sex trafficking annually (Kelly, 20209) and up to 325,000 are at risk of being victimized (Estes & Weiner, 2002).
- The average age of girls victimized through sex trafficking is 12-15 years old (Morris, 2016; NCMEC, 2020; Selah Freedom, 2019).

- 1 in 4 girls in the U.S. will be sexually abused before turning 18 years old, and only 12% of child abuse is even reported to authorities (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2015).
- Approximately 40-45% of DMST victims are Black (Thorn, n.d.).
- A study in Los Angeles found that up to 92% of girls who were incarcerated and were exploited through DMST identified as Black (Boxall, 2012).
- According to Polaris Project (Polaris, n.d.), 27% of DMST cases reported to National Human Trafficking Hotline involved familial trafficking, which can exploit children as young as 5 years old.
- 98% of 2014 survivor respondents were girls and 55% were recruited/met their trafficker via social media, website, or app (Thorn, n.d.).
    - Furthermore, there has been a 45% increase in online forms of DMST since the Covid-19 pandemic began (Polaris, n.d.).
- From 2010–2015, there was an 846% increase in reported DMST cases (NCMEC, 2016).

This discussion will take a look back at our journey upstream, highlighting some of the literature to further make sense of the findings presented in Chapter 4. More importantly, I will provide implications for future research and practice through a School-based Framework for Sex Trafficking Prevention to keep that 846% increase in reported DMST cases from rising even higher in the years to come.

Illuminating Conversations with the Girls and WOC Advocates

I explored the disproportionate exploitation of Black and Brown girls through DMST using the lens of the silencing that happens which makes them more vulnerable to

exploitation. The purpose however in exploring the ways in which schools and other systems are complicit in exacerbating the crisis specially for girls of color is to discover how they can conversely and collaboratively play a role in prevention. This dissertation focused on answering the following three research questions:

1. What are the self-identified (by the girls) and observed (by WOC advocates) ways in which Black and Brown girls have been silenced (and/or empowered) through their experiences in and interactions with various systems (i.e. schools, child welfare, juvenile justice, law enforcement)?
2. What recommendations do the WOC advocates and girls have for educators/schools (and systems overall) in playing a pivotal role in sex trafficking prevention? In equipping/empowering the voices of Black and Brown girls?
3. What is the experience of WOC advocates in combating sex trafficking and advocating for Black and Brown girls within schools and other systems in which they work and interact/collaborate?

In the previous chapter, I shared results from individual interviews with my 23 cocreators in this study: 10 girls and 13 WOC advocates across a range of fields. We wove back and forth between their experiences to explore the ways in which they have seen/acknowledged Black and Brown girls be silenced – and how those exacerbate their vulnerabilities to DMST. However, the goal was not to stay there, but to imagine how especially schools could become healing-centered spaces that counter this silencing through embracing and affirming the humanity of Black and Brown girls instead.

Discussion of Key Findings

At the onset of this study, I expected to co-construct a list of "solutions" with the girls and WOC advocates I interviewed to help create a roadmap for engaging schools in response to silencing they experienced that was a little clearer cut than I discovered. I expected to discover silencing. After all, this study was not an unbiased exploration as it was focused on uncovering the *ways in which Black and Brown girls are silenced* that lead to their vulnerability to DMST. However, the themes of silencing through adultification, sexualization, and criminalization across all the fields surfaced quicker and more explicitly than I expected. The threads of turning a blind eye to sexual violence and the lack of/need for spaces that affirm the full humanity of Black girls ran through the entirety of this study.

The Irony of Adultification

Black girls are adultified when they are perceived as less innocent, more responsible for their actions, and needing less protection. At the same time, they are not afforded the leadership opportunities, autonomy, and respect that typically align with adulthood. If you attribute adult-like qualities to them, one would hope that at least the flip side was true and that meant they were given leadership opportunities to reflect that as well. According to both research and the experiences shared by the girls and WOC advocates, that could not be further from the truth. The double-edged sword is that the respect is not there either as a result of being adultified.

In *Surviving R. Kelly* (2019), one of the jurors in the case was asked about why he did not find R. Kelly guilt after hearing multiple girls and young women take the stand and tell story after story of the sexual abuse/exploitation they experiences at his hands.

Even after watching a video of R. Kelly engaging in sexual acts with a girl under the age of 18, which should seemingly be conclusive evidence of rape, his response was, “I just didn’t believe them. I didn’t like the way they dressed or looked” (Bissell et al., 2019). This juror’s response signifies the dangers of adultifying and sexualizing girls based on assumptions that they are the ones responsible for their own actions and essentially influencing others’ actions. While this may seem like a more extreme example of adultification and sexualization, the reality is this juror’s sentiments echo much of what the girls and WOC shared as well as what has become much more mainstream conversation through both the resurgence of the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements. As shared by the WOC advocates and girls in Chapter 4, girls of color are seen as being “too fast” when “dating” a much older man or engaging in what they attribute as “risky sexual behavior” as in having multiple sexual partners. However, the knowledge of girls having much older “boyfriends” or staying at hotels with them should raise red flags of victimization, rather than the assumption that they are “too fast” or responsible for their own choices. Even though they are seen as responsible for their own choices when it applied negative attributes to them, the girls and WOC shared how often Black and Brown girls were not afforded he respect attributed to adulthood by often feeling dismissed/not believed, not given a seat at the table to share their needs or lead in conversations to enact change in their schools, and often not believed. Although raising awareness of the sex trafficking crisis more specifically its disproportionate impact on Black girls is critical in order to shift policies or engage in prevention, it is just the first step.

Beyond DMST Awareness: Acknowledging and Addressing the DMST Crisis

My findings challenged my assumption that a solution was as simple as a roadmap that largely had to do with more people becoming *aware of DMST*, which is a necessary step, but it also presented the need for a complete shift in culture in relation to *acknowledging and addressing* the ways that girls of color are systematically set up to fail via their adultification, sexualization, and criminalizing that contributes to their disproportionate exploitation of Black and Brown girls through DMST. According to WOC advocates, no fields represented and discussed (education, counseling, juvenile justice, social work, trauma studies, pediatrics, and theology) covered the topic of sex trafficking in degree programs. The ones that did were presented as electives. Even when they did receive training on DMST, it rarely acknowledged Black and Brown girls' increased vulnerability to and experiences of sexual violence. Majority of the advocates learned about the crisis through crisis when they entered the field–where they encountered girls who had already been exploited or became familiar with organizations who worked with survivors.

The more I listened to their experiences, I also realized the extent to which the silencing happened across all forms of abuse and sexual violence for Black and Brown girls, and, even at the most basic level of providing opportunities to learn accurate information about sex education and consent. So what do we do with this sentiment? How do we negate it as hopeless and instead channel that work into engaging schools in DMST prevention–which all of the girls and WOC advocates agreed was important? I am choosing instead to align this work with Justice, the DMST lawyer advocate, in recognizing,

> that part of our work is trying to shift the culture as well as policies that allow girls to be criminalized when they're victimized … because the reason that people are enacting harmful laws or practices, or maybe there's something that's helpful that they aren't actually doing, it's because of some type of mindset.

Before laying out this dissertation's key implications for practice, let's take a brief look at three cultural shifts that must be addressed for schools to engage in DMST prevention and combat sexual violence, rather remain silent or complicit:

1. Turning a blind eye
2. Intra-community silencing
3. Who's connecting the dots?

Turning a Blind Eye. This adultification leads to attitudes towards girls of color that contribute to people turning a blind eye towards sexual violence–conflating it instead with their risky behaviors. *Turning a blind eye* became a theme during recruitment for this study that ran through every phase and interview in one way or another. As discussed in Chapter 3, the girls watched a short video about a survivor named Oree recounting pieces of her story. During our interview, Adla, one of the girls recalled Oree's story and pointed out,

> A lot of people say, like, you don't know what happens until you're in that situation, but are you kidding me, can you see this little girl being dragged by somebody, we're just gonna sit there and act as if we don't see it happening?!

While maybe not as vivid as this story, the girls and WOC advocates shared stories of how educators and community members simply turned a blind eye to sexual violence of girls they either witnessed or strongly suspected.

Joy, the school counselor, shared being dismissed when trying to advocate for girls who she was told were "just fast." Police and educators dismiss reports of one of her students found at a hotel down the street from school, attributing it to her "being fast." Alika, who runs a girls mentoring and anti-trafficking nonprofit, shared multiple experiences with law enforcement who didn't prioritize cases with girls of color, and others who flat out said that they did not enter certain apartment buildings unless called knowing it was a hot spot for trafficking both drugs and girls. She shared experiences at schools where educators/counselors/admin reported instances of suspected trafficking/known abuse with her after hearing her trafficking presentations, but hadn't done anything about it for various reasons. Harmony, the sex educator, shared how she saw girls of color assaulted in hallways at schools where she worked in front of educators and administrators with no consequence. Rather than go out of their way or better yet create policies to address these incidents, the girls and advocates shared how often incidents of sexual violence/harassment were often swept under the rug with either false promises of justice or of blatant disregard for the situations altogether.

While many educators and other professionals and community members do not believe girls of color who have been sexually violated, others simply turn a blind eye– choosing not to be inconvenienced or intervene. Many obviously care and try to advocate for girls but run up against either people in positions of power who dismiss it or there aren't the proper policies and protocol to go through in order to get young people help. Of course, there are many reasons why people don't speak up, but based on stories shared by both the girls and WOC advocates I interviewed, much more accountability is needed in every system in terms of compliance in reporting incidents and for leaders to be held

liable when they are enacting sexual violence themselves. In the previous chapter, one of the advocates, Sage, shared a story an educator sexually harassing girls at his schools for decades, and finding out his father had done the same for a few decades prior in the same community. There were reports that girls and parents had come forward, while others struggled with the victimization silently. But there was no accountability. This should not come as a shock in light of reports that out of every 1,000 suspected sexual assault perpetrators on trial, 70% of those released will be arrested for committing another crime before their case is even closed (RAINN, 2022). Perpetrators who never see the inside of a courtroom or receive systemic consequences for their crimes are undoubtedly even more enabled to continue victimizing young people. Turning a blind eye has a multiplied effect beyond the one incident that is being ignored or dismissed. It has the potential to turn into decades of abuse if not addressed directly. And more importantly, a missed opportunity to prevent who knows how many other girls' victimization as well.

Intra-community Silencing. This dissertation has focused on the silencing of Black and Brown girls and their disproportionate oppression across multiple systems that leads to their increased vulnerability and exploitation through DMST. With critical race feminism as one of the foundational theories on which this study is grounded, I began this study with the undeniable fact that racism is of course one of the ways in which girls are silenced across systems. While that may be true, I'd be remiss not to address the silencing and misogyny that happens in one's own community. We, as human beings, often have a hard time holding space for two seemingly conflicting ideas about each other, but we must be willing to address the paradox of even people and communities we are a part of if we truly want to see transformation happen.

When discussing the trauma that stems from or is exacerbated by Black girls' criminalization in schools, Bettina Love stated that "When we talk about racism, we talk about it in terms of statistics and numbers," she said. "But we don't talk about what happens when you have to go into a school where nobody in that building believes you, or believes in you." (Green et al., 2020, para. 12). What about when that same sentiment applies in your own families and communities? How much more does that lead to internalizing the traumas girls experience when others see what they're going through, but don't do what is in their power to intervene, address it, or offer support?

> White women and Black men have it both ways. They can act as oppressor or be oppressed. Black men may be victimized by racism, but sexism allows them to act as exploiters and oppressors of women. White women may be victimized by sexism, but racism enables them to act as exploiters and oppressors of Black people. Both groups have led liberation movements that favor their interests and support continued oppression of other groups. Black male sexism has undermined struggles to eradicate racism just as white female racism undermines feminist struggle. (Hooks, 1984, p. 7)

This statement by the feminist scholar activist bell hooks describes not just the erasure of Black girls from research and policy, but the intra-community silencing that contributes to their continued exploitation through DMST. Reese (2017) stated that it is typically African American young men who recruit, groom, or kidnap Black and Brown girls, they overwhelmingly "sell" girls to affluent White, educated, married/attached men. This sets the stage for "a question of credibility between a politically charged white offender and a vulnerable brown victim," which typically ends in the silencing and

blaming of the one who needs protection (Reese, 2017, para. 12). According to RAINN (n.d.), the 93% of children who have been sexually victimized knew their perpetrator—about 59% were acquaintances and 34% were family members. Furthermore, the 2018 National Crime Victimization Survey found that most offenders were the same race as victims–62% for White people and 70% for Black people (Morgan & Oudekerk, 2020). In addition, as presented in this chapter's introduction, the rates of familial trafficking among children sexual exploited is 30%, race unspecified. (Sprang & Cole, 2018). While all forms of DMST can happen in any community, Reid (2016) found that youth from rural communities were more likely to be trafficked by family members, as opposed to urban environments where it was typically through school peers (Dalley, 2010), and feigned friendships and boyfriends (Perkins & Ruiz, 2017). These numbers in addition to the silencing and additional oppressions that Black and Brown girls experience demand that we must have these conversations within our own schools and communities of color first.

In her powerful memoir, *Unbound*, Tarana Burke (2021) recounts working for a community organization in Selma whose robust work and legacy in the Civil Right Movement have been written about by historians. However, one of those leaders, Rev James Bevel, one of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. 's top strategists who helped lead the Birmingham Children's Crusade and the Selma to Montgomery March, was also a serial child molester. Burke stated that while she would never want to taint the importance of his or his family's legacy, it is also important to recognize that

> in movement communities, we have a habit of lionizing folks without calling them to account when they fall short. What is the point of a movement for

liberation if we can't reflect the same dignity and accountability between each other that we are demanding from people outside our communities? (Burke, 2021)

Similarly, how can we say we're committed to creating equitable schools for students of color when we fail to acknowledge and address something that is victimizing our Black and Brown girls at alarming rates?

This section is not meant to prove anything or to even necessarily be backed by educational research as much of these conversations do not make it into history books or journals. However, it is meant to provide an example that illuminates how long the needs of Black and Brown girls have been sidelined in the fight for racial justice and the need for an intersectional lens when advocating for communities of color, because the silencing that happens inside and outside communities and systems that further silences and marginalizes Black and Brown girls. So, if those who have committed their lives to the fight for racial justice aren't always concerned with the exploitation of Black and Brown girls, who's connecting the dots?

Who's Connecting the Dots? As shared above concerning how often people turn a blind eye to sexual violence and the many ways in which Black and Brown girls are silenced, there are many reasons why people don't speak up. However, after reviewing the literature and further reflection on my conversations with the girls and advocates, I realize it was just as much about connecting the dots–in the literature, in advocacy, in schools. No one is expected to be an expert on everything, but there are so many missed opportunities to raise awareness of DMST, especially in communities which are impacted the most. Even in the research on consent and the push to include it in CSE, I did not find one mention of DMST. The DMST crisis and those who it predominantly victimized are

largely invisible in research and initiatives around consent. Even an organization whose sole focus is equipping educators to combat rape culture through including consent in their sex ed programs doesn't include sex trafficking in any of its content!

Hope, the social worker, is very knowledgeable about DMST and pours her all into every young person she encounters, which I know based on firsthand experiences working with young people alongside her. She is so committed to advocating for young people she left her house at 2am to go meet a student in crisis who had just been abused by her mother and left in the street with barely any clothes on…fast forward and she ended up officially adopting her. She had so many ideas to get together to educate the school/community about DMST–but hadn't yet. Justice, an anti-trafficking lawyer, has been a part of amazing work on a national scale that predominantly focuses on girls of color in DMST and juvenile justice. They do such amazing work from a critical systemic lens that is absolutely humanizing in the ways it addresses the criminalization and disproportionate exploitation of Black and Brown girls. She stated that schools are such an important piece of the puzzle in terms of the puzzle, yet it is still largely missing from the conversation and their work. Governmental organizations share that anyone can be victimized through trafficking and that there is no profile. While that is true to an extent, the numbers that show its disproportionate impact on different groups, such as Black girls specifically from urban communities, in this dissertation's focus, paint a different picture.

I shared many of these examples in Chapter 4, so why bring them up here again? I bring them up to shed light on how many missed opportunities there are to engage schools in conversations around sex trafficking, and the ways they can play a role in prevention. Many anti-trafficking organizations don't talk about the extent to which

Black girls are exploited through trafficking. Only 11 states of the 40 who require comprehensive sex ed mandate conversations around consent. Even an organization whose sole job is to engage schools in conversations around consent doesn't talk about DMST. Who then is connecting the dots in practice?

Considerations for Sustainable Systemic Change

Every single one of the WOC advocates I interviewed seemed genuine about their passion to advocate for Black and Brown girls and women–it was personal to them. Every single one acknowledged the need for a culture shift in schools, as well as their role in prevention. However, none of them are in positions of power in their fields or specifically in education to create sustainable change. Many of them are busy downstream pulling girls out of the river through their work, in one way or another. Haven, the nonprofit counselor, is currently working on acquiring grant funding to build a shelter for girls who have suffered sex trafficking or domestic violence because survivors need options for safe shelter outside of the juvenile justice system. She shared how most of the research on trafficking is on interventions for survivors, rehabilitation, identifying signs AFTER they've already been trafficked. She shared that it is much more than just needing a safe space as it takes years for them not to return to "the life" sometimes because of the emotional manipulation and fear tactics involved in exploitation.

Now that we've traveled upstream and worked our way here, what do we do with all this information? Sustainable change will not happen overnight or with a few warrior WOC advocates who fearlessly advocate for girls of color. Even those who have connected the dots are not in positions of power within the education system to impact

change in a sustainable way. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (n. d.), human trafficking is the fastest growing criminal industry in the world, tied with illegal arms after drug dealing. Therefore, efforts for DMST prevention must go beyond "good will" or "above and beyond'' efforts of a few passionate educators, counselors, or advocates and include systemic change across all systems because "now is the time to unite, to act and put an end to this crime, collectively and permanently" (ECPAT, 2018).

Recommendations for DMST Prevention

In this final section, I lay out recommendations for the following systems/communities to play a pivotal role in combating and eradicating sex trafficking: (a) noneducational systems, (b) schools, (c) individual educators, and (d) research communities/academia.

Non-Educational Systems

In Chapter 4, I presented the recommendations that the WOC advocates shared in order to create systemic DMST prevention and change for girls of color in the respective fields in which they have worked in and collaborated. While Chapter 4 describes more recommendations in detail, let's briefly look at how many spaces we can create to better protect and support our girls! Laws and policies are only effective if those who are meant to use them to protect and advocate rather than create further harm. Within the juvenile justice and legal system, training needs to happen across the board (for law enforcement, attorneys, judges, and entire teams in juvenile justice centers) in order to ensure that police and those in juvenile justice settings see girls arrested for exploitation-related issues as victims rather than engaging in criminal activity. In addition, two culture shifts

must happen within these systems to combat DMST.

1. Not seeing detention as protective, but rather further traumatizing.
2. Put more energy into ending demand for exploitation by criminalizing traffickers and rapists more than the young people they exploit and victimize.
3. Advocate for Safe Harbor laws in every state.

Collaborating together across fields would bring a deeper understanding of the DMST crisis from multiple perspectives, as well as create more opportunities for healing and prevention. Social workers can be change agents in preventing DMST though providing more wellness checks, advocate for more shelters, building stronger relationships with children and their families to provide more holistic support. Similarly, pediatricians, school nurses, and emergency room (ER) medical professionals are poised to play a significant role in prevention if they are able to recognize physical, mental, or emotional warning signs or signs of sexual abuse. The medical field must provide implicit bias training to doctors and nurses in order to combat the dismissal of girls of color when presenting signs of physical or emotional distress.

Lastly, churches and mental health organizations can also significantly play a role in prevention by engaging by learning about and addressing sexual violence and exploitation directly. Churches must call out misogyny and racism from the pulpit and create accountability in leadership for those who either perpetrate or enable sexual violence in their congregations and communities. They can also partner with local anti-trafficking organizations to come speak at a service and learn how they can directly get involved. This can't be in isolation, as churches must actively be on the front lines of actively fighting for Black and Brown girls and women. Too many practitioners (in any

field really) do not take the time to understand the contexts and communities in which they serve. If mental health practitioners took the time to listen and learn from community members first, they would be able to create healing-spaces more fully for young people and understand what DMST contextually looks like. Their expertise, in addition to expanding their knowledge on DMST and cultural knowledge of communities would make them even more powerful advocates for girls of color. Partnering to provide in-school services for young people would remove barriers for young people and families in seeking mental health services. Providing school-based group seminars would help remove the stigma around mental health in communities of color by meeting them where they are–in schools. There truly is a place for everyone fighting DMST, either directly or indirectly. However, in order to do that, we need to truly build a village around our girls of color. And what better place to enact for our young people than in and through schools.

Chapter 1 laid out a conceptual framework that described how girls of color specifically whose lives are marginalized at the intersections of race, gender, and poverty and who have experienced childhood sexual abuse/trauma are more vulnerable to sex trafficking. According to Epstein et al. (2017), Black girls are already adultified and therefore seen as more responsible for their decisions, more sexual, and needing less protection. Criminalization of their behaviors, from school pushout starting in preschool, to arrests based on their exploitation–which are all often a result of trauma– catapult them into the juvenile justice system at alarming rates. The present study, according to girls and WOC advocates, confirmed the literature on the ways in which Black girls experience adultification, criminalization, and sexualization and the need for every

system to play a role in fighting sex trafficking.

School-Based Sex Trafficking Prevention

As presented in Chapter 1, both the U.S. Department of Education and The Center on PBIS published reports in 2021 providing 3-tier models for preventing trafficking at the school level. (Asefnia et al., 2021; Office of Safe and Supportive Schools, 2021). They both include training staff and students on *risk factors* and warning signs, social-emotional learning, and healthy relationship education, and putting policies/protocols in place for responding to confirmed and/or suspected trafficking cases and building collaborations with other community organizations. In comparison the USDOE report on addressing human trafficking overall, the more specific focus of the 2021 PBIS report, entitled "Addressing the Growing Problem of Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking of Minors through PBIS," leads to more interventions focused on mental health and school connectedness for prevention and screening/assessment tools for mental health practitioners in schools (Asefnia et al., 2021). While it acknowledges the need to address the "stigma associated with DMST and potential implicit biases or blame and shame associated with you who are at risk or victims of DMST," (p.10) it simply states it as a challenge rather than building implicit biases training into the framework (Asefnia et al., 2021).

These 2021 USDOE (Office of Safe and Supportive Schools) and PBIS (Asefnia et al., 2021) frameworks provide key interventions and the fact that they are recommended by two national governmental and educational organizations provides a long-overdue and promising future for engaging schools in DMST prevention. However, in light of the literature and study presented in this study so far, they still miss the mark

for addressing DMST among Black and Brown girls. First, neither report acknowledges their disproportionate exploitation. Secondly, while both stress the importance of creating positive school culture and connectedness, neither address the ways in which schools can play a role in exacerbating the crisis. Schools must first acknowledge and then create a systemic response to resisting the ways in which they themselves can pushout and *silence* Black and Brown girls in order to prevent rather than exacerbate their vulnerability to sexual exploitation.

So where do we go from here? The following Transformational School-Based Model for Sex Trafficking Prevention Model for Girls of Color will lay out this dissertation's implications for school-based practice and prevention. It is grounded in critical race feminism and feminist narrative therapy, a review of the literature, and the experiences shared by my cocreators. As shared at the beginning of this dissertation, this proposed framework also represents my unwavering belief that every space where voices have been silenced represents the opportunity to create a radically different healing space to truly hear and value them and resist the silencing forces around them.

A Transformational School-Based Sex Trafficking Prevention Model for Girls of Color

Figure 4

Proposed DMST Prevention Model Components

Premise of this Model:

Sexual violence is violence.

DMST is a form of child abuse.

We must stop turning a blind eye to all forms of sexual violence and behaviors that enable it.

We must separate misogyny from racism, name it, and call it out.

All 8 components are interconnected and necessary for transformative change.

While this must be a school-wide effort with administrator leadership, professional school counselors are poised/equipped to champion its coordination.

Table 6

Proposed DMST Prevention Model Components

Component	Elements
DMST Education	➔ DMST awareness training for students, staff (PDs), and parents, respectively ➔ Assemblies, smaller seminars to allow for discussion ➔ Mandated in 5 states already ➔ Student-led awareness campaigns at school and on social media ➔ Contextualize for specific groups/populations
Comprehensive Sex Education (CSE) & Consent	➔ CSE is mandated in 40 states, consent only mandated in 11 ➔ Must be culturally responsively and explicitly address sexual violence and consent, not just healthy relationship skills ➔ Digital safety to resist online recruitment and explicit picture. ➔ Partner with community orgs to provide in-school critical CSE and engage in discussion with young people
Healing-Centered Community	➔ Build up healing-centered practices/culture/spaces to counteract shame, internalization of racism, oppression, and abuse. More mental health support, both in schools and through collaborations ➔ Safe spaces for young people to process things that are important to them (peer-to-peer and mentor/adult-to-student) ➔ Create gender-specific groups to discuss relationships, consent, and build communication skills in an environment they can process out loud – then come together as whole groups ➔ Prioritize culturally sustaining social-emotional learning (SEL). Give young people space to explore their identity through journal prompts, etc.
Policies & Protocols	➔ Like in USDOE & PBIS models, policies/protocols are needed in place in order to report suspected/confirmed cases of sex trafficking like child abuse protocols. ➔ Use XI for cases of sexual harassment (student-to-student or adult-to-student) when sexual assault when doesn't fall under indicants to report to state child welfare agency, such as peer-to-peer harassment ➔ Revising dress code policies
Restorative Culture	➔ Implement restorative practices through training all staff and students ➔ Critique and revise discipline policies considering research on criminalizing Black and Brown girls (and students) ➔ Create leadership opportunities for girls of color to address prevalent & relevant issues in schools ➔ Revise attendance policies to include more wellness checks, as truancy is one of the most common status offenses that leads young people into juvenile justice

(continued)

Component	Element
Culturally-Sustaining	➔ Center students' strengths, cultures, realities, and histories so they see themselves represented in curriculum, classroom, and conversions and to foster sense of self worth ➔ Create spaces for student to explore their interests and passions ➔ Center joy in classrooms/schools, especially with students of color ➔ Equip students (and staff) how to understand and disrupt oppression ➔ Hire more educational professionals of color
Cross-System & Community Collaborations	➔ Tap into cultural knowledge of communities & expertise of community partners ➔ Partner with DMST advocacy organizations to provide trainings ➔ Partner with agencies who provide support around youth homelessness ➔ Have promotional materials (fliers, posters, etc.) with hotline numbers/websites and resources readily available in offices. Put it online. In existing newsletters. Make it accessible to the whole school community. Students. Parents. Staff.
Aligned with (ASCA) National Model	➔ Most effective as a schoolwide effort supported by administration and staff. ➔ PSCs are poised to play a key role as advocacy is aligned with ASCA 2019 standards, competencies, and mindsets ◆ e.g., Mindset B-SMS 9. Personal safety skills; B-SS 8. Advocacy skills for self/others & ability to assert self, when necessary (see Appendix for more details)

This model is not meant to be an exhaustive guide for implementation, but rather to guide a conversation about how to engage in DMST prevention as a school community. Most districts, schools, and educators are inundated with interventions to implement. While many are important to holistically support students, academically and socio-emotionally, this model is not meant to be a series of performative tasks to check off a list. Let us circle back to the purpose of this journey for a moment. DMST is one of the largest organized criminal industries in the world-- that is literally fueled by the majority of our girls' and young people's vulnerabilities and trauma. We don't need to all be experts around DMST or CSE/consent, but we do need to be committed to resisting oppression, creating healing-centered spaces, and tapping into a multitude of resources to help in this fight. Too much is at stake. We need to be just as strategic and determined as

traffickers in creating villages around our girls of color that do everything in our power to create healing-centered spaces where they feel seen, and they are heard. One that is restorative. One that is rooted in love. We, as a community of educators, counselors, scholars, and advocates, must do everything in our power to fight with and for them.

In order to truly engage in prevention and effect change in this area, we need transformative spaces. There is a reason that "accountability" is the center of this model. Rather than putting the burden of responsibility on young people, it focuses on transforming the adults, environments and systems in their lives that will then equip them with the tools they need to resist oppression and thrive. This will require reflection, first challenging our own implicit biases and then each other's. We need to hold ourselves and our schools, both as a system and as individual educators, accountable to counter rather than further criminalize, sexualize and adultify Black and Brown girls in our interactions with them. We must see our role as educators as prioritizing young people first and interventions, content, and timelines second. Whether administrators, classroom teachers, counselors, school nurses, or classroom aides, we must hold ourselves and each other accountable to not ignoring red flags and words or actions of, or contributing to sexual harassment and sexual violence. I truly believe that schools can make such a difference in preventing DMST from victimizing even more young people, but it will take all hands on deck.

"So What Can I Personally Do?"

While you may read this and want to do something now but think, "I'd love for my school to embed this into our plans, but it's just not going to happen right now." While DMST may seem like too big of a human rights issue to tackle, the beauty is that

there are so many moments before they get to that point where we can interrupt these *cycles from trauma to confinement* mentioned throughout this dissertation. Better yet, we can create healing-centered spaces to keep them out of that circle maze altogether! As an individual educator, school counselor, or advocate, there is so much you can do! As shared in the introduction, most survivors share that no one asked them if they were okay while they were being groomed or victimized and still attending school. So prioritize relationships with your students. If someone looks off, take a moment to check in and simply ask if they are okay. Many survivors say they didn't know the language of sex trafficking or what to call it, but they would have known how to answer if someone took the time to ask them if they felt safe. Here are several actions you can take in your own classroom or school to advocate and actively fight against DMST.

1. Cultivate relationships with your students and their families, coaches, mentors.
2. Take advantage of SEL days/periods to embed your own curriculum with DMST awareness. If you don't have them, create opportunities for young people to process and reflect on their own experiences and what is happening in their worlds and the world at large. Add journal prompts. Integrate humanizing SEL into curriculum. Use it as an opportunity to strengthen your work rather than as an add-on.
3. Look for local anti-trafficking agencies in your school's community or city to attend seminars/webinars or get resources.
4. Have your students create PSAs and create in-school and online awareness campaigns to educate their peers. They will see warning signs/learn about DMST with their peers long before we will as educators. So, equipping them with tools to

advocate for one another is powerful!

5. Champion sex trafficking prevention in your school community.
    a. Reach out to see if any other staff want to create a professional learning community (PLC) to create a plan of action.
    b. Reach out to school nurse and health educators to see what CSE looks like. If it doesn't exist or address consent, look for local organizations who provide those services and coordinate it
    c. Present it to administrators with relevant state mandates and ways to incorporate it in your current existing frameworks, PD days, and processes.
6. Lastly, don't let having the "perfect" words hold you back from speaking up. Continue to address inappropriate sexist and racist comments because silence sends just as loud a message as our actions. Reach out to other advocates in the building to learn how to better address these incidents at the moment.

The more you educate yourself through books, websites, and documentaries about the DMST crisis, the more comfortable and effective you'll become at both addressing situations as they arise and championing the cause in your own school/building!

Contribution to Scholarship

Specifically, this dissertation aligns with existing research that the adultification, sexualization, and criminalization of Black girls increases their vulnerability to DMST. However, it takes it a step further to bring schools to the forefront of this conversation. This proposed Transformational School-based Model for Sex Trafficking Prevention of Girls of Color adds to the existing USDOE (2021) and PBIS tiered models for school-

based human and DMST trafficking prevention (Asefnia et al., 2021) by providing a new critical, much-need systemic lens for address the disproportionate sexual exploitation of Black girls.

- ➔ Rather than an individualistic lens, it acknowledges the ways in which schools can exacerbate young people's vulnerabilities to sex trafficking, especially girls of color.
- ➔ It provides a systemic lens to hold the whole school community accountable for resisting a culture of sexual violence through policies, protocols and implicit biases training. The lack of education on sex trafficking in mandatory coursework across educational programs in especially counseling, social work, pediatrics and other fields represented is alarming and makes school-based prevention programming even more imperative.
- ➔ includes comprehensive sex education and consent as mandatory seminars or courses where dialogue and discussion are encouraged, rather than singular lessons that tend to happen in schools (according to girls and WOC advocate and my experience). This can take place in health classes, in collaboration with school nurses and professional school counselors, or by partnering with community agencies who provide in-school critical sex education, including consent, with young people.
- ➔ Explicitly addresses the ways in which schools criminalize and sexualize Black and Brown girls through revising dress code and discipline policies.
- ➔ Conversely, that systemic lens also focuses on a healing-centered approach to foster school environments that affirm Black and Brown girls.

Lastly, regardless of its focus on girls of color, this model can be contextualized for use in all schools in any community (suburban, urban, or rural) and with any populations. While this study focused on the disproportionate exploitation of Black and Brown girls through trafficking, data shows that youth across all races and communities are impacted. Therefore, specific barriers and supports must be included to make the framework most meaningful for youth people and most effective in helping schools play their crucial role in preventing sex trafficking.

Implications for Future Research

As stated, many times through our journey upstream to this point, girls of color are often left out of conversations central to students of color in terms of research and policy. Over the last decade, there has been an increased attention to Black girls in research and the ways in which they are criminalized and adultified through schools, from their own much-needed perspective (Annamma et al., 2019; Epstein et al., 2017; Morris, 2016; Winn, 2011; Wun, 2016). Research forefronting the voices and experiences of Black and Brown girls across systems (schools, juvenile justice and child welfare systems) will be critical in better understanding their experiences and how we can continue to reimagine schools as affirming spaces for them. Similarly, the voices of youth who have experienced homelessness would shed light on specific ways to support them, in terms of prevention and intervention, even on a school level.

Girls/Survivor Voices

More specifically, research on DMST is still in its stages in infancy and has yet to catch up with this focus, rarely mentioning Black and Brown girls as more than risk/hazard factors or attributing their disproportionate exploitation to their dysfunctional

environments. There is research on treatments and counseling for survivors, but often from nursing, social work, or mental health fields. More recently, several scholars have noted, as is the focus of this dissertation, that the intersection of systemic oppressions exacerbates their trauma(s), making them more vulnerable to DMST. In its human trafficking resolution, the American Psychological Association (2017) recommended that research about trafficking include participants who have been directly impacted by this modern-day slavery. More trauma-informed, ethical, participatory research needs to forefront the voices of those directly impacted and involve them as equal stakeholders. Rather than putting the burden of responsibility and blame on individuals who are impacted the most by injustices, critical PAR focuses on conditions that created them in the first place by asking "what are the policies, institutions, and social arrangements that help to form and deform, enrich and limit, human development" and "how do people resist the weight of injustice in their lives?" (Torre et al., 2012, p. 179).

Asking these questions would allow us as a community of scholars to contextualize the DMST crisis from the perspective and needs of different groups. Girls of color, who are undocumented, are even more vulnerable due to the lack of systemic supports in their lives based on fears of deportation. More research needs to illuminate their vulnerability to sex trafficking and ways in which schools in particular can provide resources and intervene when necessary. This is even more of a reason for schools to focus on prevention, as it can take years for girls to escape their exploitation.

Exploring Recruitment Further to Prevent Initial Entry Into DMST

While much of the research on DMST mentions the emotional manipulation and coercion behavior that is enacted to groom young girls into sexual exploitation, there are

not as many examples of how it happens from their perspective. Those anecdotes are told in documentaries and on advocacy websites–however, they are missing from the already limited scholarship on DMST. There are, however, survivor-led prevention programs whose input and voice is missing would add great value to research. Creating collaborative researcher-participant relationships where research is co-constructed with and for participants as a means of advocacy, empowerment and redistributing power would undoubtedly lead to a better understanding of young people's experiences of grooming in ways in which the partnership is empowering rather than exploitative. Furthermore, learning about their schooling experiences prior to and during exploitation would also allow schools to play a more intentional role in prevention. More research about the role of social media in young people being lured online with false promises of luxury, love and/or security is needed, as the Polaris Project (Polaris, n.d.) reported that online recruitment for DMST has risen 45% during the pandemic! Regardless of whether girls are exploited through promises of fame through social media, love by an older "boyfriend," support by a "mentor/sister," or forced/sold into sex trafficking by family members, schools can make an impact in prevention. Therefore, research must also explore the resistance of schools to engage in advocacy and awareness around sexual violence and DMST.

Explore the Resistance of Schools/Administrators

In my experiences as a school counselor, outpatient therapist, and nonprofit leader, one of the barriers to addressing DMST and sexual violence among girls of color specifically in schools was the hesitancy of administrators to engage in conversations. Research is needed to understand the resistance of schools to actively engage in DMST

prevention, even through collaborating with outside agencies and anti-trafficking organizations. Is it because they feel ill-equipped to handle the conversations that will arise if they approach talking about DMST? Are they worried about the pushback from families? Or does it have more to do with the same attitudes which lead girls to be sexualized, adultified, and criminalized more in schools? That lead them to be seen as fault and engaging in risky behaviors, rather than as being victimized through childhood sexual abuse, sexual harassment, and sexual violence?

Conclusion

As shared in this introduction to this chapter, the silencing of Black and Brown girls renders them invisible not just through research and policy, but also through a dismissal of a crisis that enacts violence on them at disproportionate rates. We started this journey learning more about the extent of the DMST crisis, the number of Black and Brown girls who fall through the cracks far too often, how many systems intersect to further criminalize, sexualize, and adultify them, and how turning a blind eye further exacerbates their exploitation. I have taken you on a journey upstream through the review of literature across DMST, education, juvenile justice and child welfare systems; exploring both the ways in which Black and Brown girls are silenced through these systems as well as the hope of reimagining schools as affirming spaces through several healing-centered practices. I have shared how reimagining schools must include a commitment to committing schools as spaces where the full humanity of Black and Brown girls is honored, and they are given spaces to lead.

If most people were honest with themselves, we have all, explicitly or implicitly, turned a blind eye to sexual violence at one time or another. And conversely, there is a

place for everyone in this fight. We all need to speak up more. To stop sanitizing sexual violence when we see it. To stop trying to make it more palatable to discuss. To stop trying to pretend that turning a blind eye doesn't make us complicit in it as well. We need to start asking the right questions. And asking whether it is outside the scope of schools is not where we need to start. Schools have assemblies and programs about gangs, drugs, suicide prevention, bullying and many others that would just as likely be "outside of the scope of academics." In my 20 years working in or with youth-serving institutions, I have never heard anyone push back on needing to address child abuse–in training/PD, creating policies/protocols for addressing it, or even providing supports for young people impacted. However, that is far from the case when addressing sex trafficking. As I shared in the introduction, even within this study, I encountered obstacles from schools that did not want to be engaged in even conversations about sex trafficking prevention without first changing the same to a more toned-down version such as "Girls Leadership" or something along those lines. But why is that?

Justice, the anti-DMST lawyer, described how the conflation between sex and sexual violence creates obstacles to engaging certain communities in spaces in these conversations. Either the media glamorizes it, or other spaces sanitize and downplay the violence. In order to really affect change in this area, it needs to be explicitly stated that we are talking about violence. Enacted in a sexual way. But violence, nevertheless. We need to see it as that. As rape. As abuse. As exploitation. DMST is "a transactional form of child sexual abuse…*which is* a useful conceptual definition for associating DMST with child abuse, rather than aligning it with prostitution" (Hartinger-Saunders et al., 2017, p. 195). Anything short of acknowledging it as such minimizes it and will lead us to

undoubtedly having conversations about how we turned a blind eye…years or even decades from now. Trying to subsume its prevention through another name or program will only enable communities to sanitize it further, allowing us all to continue to dismiss it and those it impacts the most.

There is certainly a place for schools to engage in combating a culture of sexual violence and DMST–I would even argue that it is one of the greatest missing links in its prevention. The implications for practice presented above would undoubtedly create a better school culture, as well as educational outcomes and school connectedness for all students, not just Black and Brown girls. If we reimage schools to create spaces for healing, forefront girls of color as leaders whose voices are heard and elevated and create a culture that resists the silencing they all too often experience–I truly believe schools could become transformative spaces that set the tone for what will and will not be expected. I truly believe that fostering environments that have zero tolerance for perpetrating or dismissing sexual violence would be healing and transformative for everyone. For girls, and all young people, who have been abused and silenced for far too long, whether by others or the shame that was never meant for them to carry. For boys and men who have grown up in a culture surrounded by toxic masculinity and for everyone who has been conditioned to accept or enable it. For educators who may have even experienced sexual violence themselves.

My hope is that through being on this journey upstream through the last five chapters, you begin to understand what's at stake if we continue to ignore DMST and what's possible if we start asking the right questions about how to prevent it from further robbing so many of our girls of their childhoods. That we do everything we can as

educators and counselors to combat DMST and create environments where Black and Brown girls can freely express their laughter, joy, brilliance, leadership and creativity and where all their gifts and talents will be fostered, and their humanity will be affirmed. That we see our jobs as educators, activists, researchers, scholars, and mentors as removing barriers from their lives so that they can thrive. As creating spaces for them to thoughtfully critique and reflect on the systems they navigate and the ways in which they impact their lives/society in order to resist rather than internalize oppression. Most importantly, what if the underlying construct in all these systems was to systematically create safe spaces for them while letting them know that we see them, that we hear them - simply because they are worthy of being seen, worthy of being heard, worthy of being loved, and worthy of respect - simply because they are worthy. Period. I'm planning on camping upstream for a while to engage schools in combating DMST and fostering environments that fully affirm the humanity of our Black and Brown girls–and I invite you to stay here with me because they are "worth so much more than all my words could say--No one and nothing can take that away.

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Appendix

Aligned 2019 ASCA Standards, Competencies, & Mindset to Proposed School-Based DMST Prevention Model

*****Directly quoted from:

American School Counselor Association (2019). *ASCA school counselor professional standards & competencies*. Author.

ASCA Professional Standards & Competencies

*Responsibility falls on:

- School counselors
    - Self-assess their own mindsets and behaviors.
    - Formulate an appropriate professional development plan
- School administrators
    - Guide the recruitment and selection of competent school counselors
    - Develop or inform meaningful school counselor performance appraisal
- School counselor education programs
    - Establish benchmarks for ensuring school counseling students graduate with the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to develop a school counseling program.

PROFESSIONAL FOUNDATION

- **B-PF 3. Apply legal and ethical principles of the school counseling profession**
    - c. Adhere to the ethical and statutory limits of confidentiality
    - d. Fulfill legal and ethical obligations to families, teachers,

administrators and other school staff

- e. Consult with school counselors and other education, counseling and legal professionals when ethical and legal questions arise
- h. Engage in continual professional development to inform and guide ethical and legal work

- **B-PF 5. Use ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success standards to inform the implementation of a school counseling program**
  - b. Prioritize ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success standards aligned with school improvement goals (*See relevant ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors below)
- **B-PF 6. Demonstrate understanding of the impact of cultural, social and environmental influences on student success and opportunities**
  - e. Collaborate with administrators, teachers and other staff in the school and district to ensure culturally responsive curricula and student-centered instruction
  - f. Understand personal limitations and biases, and articulate how they may affect the school counselor's work
- **B-PF 7. Demonstrate leadership through the development and implementation of a school counseling program**
  - f. Use leadership skills to facilitate positive change for the school counseling program
  - h. Serve as a leader in the school and community to promote and

support student success

- **B-PF 8. Demonstrate advocacy for a school counseling program**
    - b. Advocate responsibly for school board policy and local, state and federal statutory requirements in students' best interests
    - c. Explain the benefits of a school counseling program for all stakeholders, including students, families, teachers, administrators and other school staff, school boards, department of education, school counselors, school counselor educators, community stakeholders and business leaders
- **B-PF 9. Create systemic change through the implementation of a school counseling program**
    - Use data to identify how school, district and state educational policies, procedures and practices support and/or impede student success
    - c. Use data to demonstrate a need for systemic change in areas such as course enrollment patterns; equity and access; and achievement, opportunity and/or information gaps d. Develop and implement a plan to address personal and/or institutional resistance to change that better supports student success

DIRECT AND INDIRECT SERVICES

- **B-SS 1. Design and implement instruction aligned to the ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success in large-group, classroom, small-group and individual settings**
    - b. Assess cultural and social trends when developing and choosing

curricula

- e. Create lesson plans identifying activities to be delivered, standards to be addressed, to whom activities will be delivered, how they will be delivered and how data will be assessed to determine impact on student outcomes
- g. Engage with school administrators, teachers and other staff to ensure the effective implementation of instruction

- **B-SS 3. Provide short-term counseling in small-group and individual settings**
  - Provide support for students, including individual and small group counseling, during times of transition, heightened stress, critical change or other situations impeding student success
  - Explain the impact of adverse childhood experiences and trauma, and demonstrate techniques to support students who have experienced trauma e. Respond with appropriate intervention strategies to meet the needs of the individual, group or school community before, during and after crisis response
- **B-SS 4. Make referrals to appropriate school and community resources**
  - Maintain a list of current referral resources, consistent with school and district policies, for students, staff and families to effectively address academic, career and social/emotional issues
- **B-SS 5. Consult to support student achievement and success**

- a. Gather information on student needs from families, teachers, administrators, other school staff and community organizations to inform the selection of strategies for student success
- b. Share strategies that support student achievement with families, teachers, administrators, teachers, school staff and community organizations
- c. Consult with school counselors and other education and counseling professionals when questions of school counseling practice arise
- d. Facilitate in-service training or workshops for families, administrators, other school staff, teachers or other stakeholders to share school counseling expertise

- **B-SS 6. Collaborate with families, teachers, administrators, other school staff and education stakeholders for student achievement and success**
  - a. Partner with others to advocate for student achievement and educational equity and opportunities

PLANNING AND ASSESSMENT

- **B-PA 2. Identify gaps in achievement, attendance, discipline, opportunity and resources**
  - a. Collect and analyze data to identify areas of success or gaps between and among different groups of students in achievement, attendance, discipline and opportunities
  - b. Review, disaggregate and interpret student achievement, attendance and discipline data to identify and implement interventions as needed

- c. Create goals based on student, school and/or district data to close the achievement, opportunity and/or information gaps

- **B-PA 5. Assess and report program results to the school community**
  - d. Collaborate with members of the school counseling team and with administration to decide how school counseling programs are assessed and how results are shared
  - f. Use presentation skills to share effectiveness data and results of action plans and activities with administrators, advisory councils, teachers, faculty and staff, families, school boards and stakeholders
- **B-PA 7. Establish agreement with the principal and other administrators about the school counseling program**
  - b. Discuss school counseling with the principal and/or supervising administrator to formalize delivering, managing and assessing the school counseling program
  - c. Explain and model the appropriate role of the school counselor and the organization of the school counseling program
  - e. Advocate for the appropriate use of school counselor time based on national recommendations and student needs
- **B-PA 8. Establish and convene an advisory council for the school counseling program**
  - a. Determine appropriate education stakeholders for representation on the advisory council
  - b. Develop effective and efficient advisory council meeting

agendas to inform stakeholders about the school counseling program

ASCA Mindsets and Behaviors for Student Success

Taken verbatim from:

American School Counselor Association (2021). *ASCA student standards: Mindsets and behaviors for student success*. Author.

Mindsets

- Category 2: Behavior Standards School counselors provide culturally sustaining instruction, appraisal and advisement, and counseling to help all students demonstrate:
    - B-SMS 9. Personal safety skills
    - B-SS 8. Advocacy skills for self and others and ability to assert self, when necessary