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Overcoming Disclosure Reluctance in Youth Victims of Sex Trafficking: New Directions for Research, Policy, and Practice

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An alarming number of youth worldwide are victims of commercial sexual exploitation, particularly sex trafficking. Normative developmental processes and motivations across the adolescent period—the age when youth are at greatest risk for trafficking—combined with their history, make them highly likely to be reluctant to disclose their exploitation to police, who often encounter victims because they are suspected of delinquency and crime and who interrogate the victims as suspects. Little scientific and policy attention has been devoted to understanding how to question these victims in a way that reduces their disclosure reluctance and increases their provision of legally relevant information. In the current review, we describe research concerning trafficking victims' histories and exploitative experiences, juvenile suspects' and victims' encounters with the legal system, and best-practice forensic interviewing approaches to elicit disclosures from child victims. We highlight the implications of these areas for understanding the dynamics between how police encounter and interact with adolescent trafficking victims and whether and how the victims disclose trafficking details during these interactions. We close with an agenda for research to test interviewing methods for suspected victims of sex trafficking and with policy and practice recommendations for interviewers.

Keywords: adolescence, disclosure reluctance, commercial sexual exploitation, sex trafficking, interviewing

Each year, more than one million children and adolescents worldwide are documented as having been commercially sexually exploited; that is, having been manipulated or coerced into some form of sexual activity or pornography in exchange for cash, goods, or services given to a third party (International Labor Organization [ILO] & Walk Free Foundation, 2017; Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention, n.d). This exploitation is significant, given its pervasive and lifelong consequences for victims, for its effects on families and entire communities, and for the challenges it poses to justice system efforts to protect victims and prosecute perpetrators. This exploitation includes both transnational trafficking of children and adolescents, or smuggling and coercing of mostly girls, but also boys, from country to country for commercial sexual purposes (Landers, McGrath, Johnson, Armstrong, & Dollard, 2017; Reid, 2016; United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2014), as well as domestic trafficking, or youth being commercially sexually exploited in their own communities or in and across counties and states within a given country (ILO & Walk Free Foundation, 2017).

The true prevalence of commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) is extremely difficult to determine. In the United States, the number of children and adolescents formally identified as victims of domestic sexual trafficking, for example, exceeds 100,000 annually (Siskin & Wyler, 2012; Schauer & Elechi, 2014). However, this estimate likely significantly underestimates the true prevalence of commercial exploitation (Clawson, Dutch, Solomon, & Goldblatt Grace, 2009), because objective evidence (e.g., photographs, videos) is rare, unless the exploitation involves pornography. Its discovery instead is highly dependent on victim disclosure and, as we discuss here, victims may be highly reluctant to disclose, making it extremely difficult to identify them, intervene, and prosecute those who commit this crime (Baldwin, Eisenman, Sayles, Ryan, & Chuang, 2011; Greenbaum, 2016; Lindholm, Börjesson, & Cederborg, 2014).

Unfortunately, very little is known about how best to obtain clear and accurate disclosures from these victims about their

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exploitation. This lack of knowledge stands in stark contrast to the impressive body of knowledge that has emerged from research concerning best-practice interviewing strategies to elicit disclosures in other vulnerable victim populations, most notably children suspected of having been sexually abused (Andrews & Lamb, 2014; Hershkowitz & Terner, 2007; Katz & Hershkowitz, 2012; Lamb et al., 2009; Orbach et al., 2000), and to some extent, adolescents suspected of committing crimes (Cleary, 2017; Owen-Kostelnik, Reppucci, & Meyer, 2006; Redlich & Kassin, 2009). In many ways, the results of these other bodies of research are relevant to determining which interviewing strategies would be effective at eliciting disclosures from commercially exploited victims. In other ways, however, the results are limited in their applicability, given differences in the ages and type of sexual experiences between trafficked youth relative to other child sexual abuse populations, and potential differences in the way these two populations are identified and then treated by legal professionals. In light of these differences, research is needed that directly tests, in a systematic manner, which interviewing approaches are likely to yield the most detailed and accurate accounts from suspected youth victims of sex trafficking, and which approaches are not.

At the broadest level, the goal of the current review is to lay out an agenda for this much-needed line of research. Our specific aims are as follows: (a) describe disclosure reluctance in youth victims of sex trafficking, particularly developmental, motivational, and experiential reasons for their likely reluctance; (b) review how trafficked youth come into contact with the justice system, as this contact shapes the ways that they are questioned and their disclosure likelihood; (c) discuss what is currently known about forensic interviewing approaches for suspected victims of sex trafficking, and draw parallels between these approaches and best-practice questioning practices for other populations of child victims; and (d) outline key questions for future research to identify which interviewing strategies should be most effective in eliciting disclosures from youth suspected of having been sexually trafficked.

Before turning to our review, two important points of clarification are needed. First, our review focuses primarily on adolescent victims of sexual trafficking. Adolescent girls comprise the majority of known youth victims of sex trafficking, particularly those who come into contact with the legal system in domestic trafficking cases, although certainly boys are also victims (e.g., Landers et al., 2017; Mitchell et al., 2017; Reid, 2016; UNICEF, 2014). Given age differences in disclosure patterns between child and adolescent victims of sexual abuse (e.g., Goodman-Brown, Edelstein, Goodman, Jones, & Gordon, 2003; Malloy, Lyon, & Quas, 2007), it is important to consider adolescent development, including socioemotional processes that change rapidly across the adolescent transition (Braams, van Duijvenvoorde, Peper, & Crone, 2015; Jaccard, Dittus, & Gordon, 1998; Johnson, 2014), when evaluating trafficking victims' experiences and disclosure tendencies. These same processes are likely to influence the effectiveness of specific interview approaches with these victims. Thus, although we at times consider victims spanning childhood into adolescence, we emphasize adolescence as a key developmental period during which victims' motivations and behaviors generally and their trafficking experiences specifically are particularly relevant to their responses to interviewing approaches.

Second, because various terms have been used to refer to youth (and adults) subjected to different forms of CSE, it is important to define sex trafficking and related terms. *CSE*, as mentioned, refers to any form of manipulation or coercion of individuals into sexual activity or pornography in exchange for something of value. *Sex trafficking* refers to the preparation, harboring, or transfer of individuals for sexually exploitative purposes, within or across countries. When the victim is a minor (i.e., under 18 years), coercion is not a necessary legal component for behavior to be labeled as trafficking (United Nations, 2000). In the present review, we rely largely on the United Nation's definition of sex trafficking when referring to minors who have been coerced, manipulated, or recruited into or prepared for sexual exploitation (see also the William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008, 2018). When referring to broad commercial exploitation for sexual purposes (which can include pornography), we use CSE. Likewise, for specific cases or studies in which the broader term, CSE, was used and it is not possible to discern whether charges involved CSE or sex trafficking, we use the cited authors' term. We label individuals who have committed acts of trafficking or manipulated youth into CSE as perpetrators or traffickers.

Disclosure Reluctance Among Victims of Sex Trafficking

Disclosure reluctance is a significant problem across multiple populations of victims of sexual violence (Dardis, Reinhardt, Foynes, Medoff, & Street, 2018; Kelly, 2018; Lahtinen, Laitila, Korkman, & Ellonen, 2018; London, 2006; Malloy et al., 2007; Oram, Khalifeh, & Howard, 2017), and trafficking victims are likely no exception. Anecdotal evidence of reluctance in trafficking victims is replete in media cases across diverse locations in England, South Africa, Russia, the United States, Ukraine, the Philippines, the United Kingdom, and Canada (e.g., International Development, 2018; Mabuza, 2018; Shum, 2018). One case that received an enormous amount of media attention occurred in Rotherham, England; it spanned approximately 16 years and involved nearly 1,400 girls. This case was particularly shocking because of the large number of victims and the prolonged period of time during which the trafficking was taking place, highlighting the potential significance of nondisclosure by victims, the need for effective questioning approaches by professionals, and the importance of training professionals to identify risk factors and indicators of trafficking. Once the story broke to the media, news and inquiry reports mentioned pervasive reluctance in the victims to disclose their experiences (Jay, 2014). The victims described a myriad of reasons for their reluctance: threats if they told, feeling complicit in the abuse, or the shame that they and their family would experience if anyone found out. Another example comes from a coordinated sting operation across California, "Operation Reclaim and Rebuild." Over several days of the operation during one of the years it took place, more than 300 perpetrators (traffickers and buyers) and nearly 50 victims, including numerous youth under age 18, were identified. A sizable number of the victims found by the police had not, until that time, disclosed, and some only did so after several interactions with the police that seemed to have led them to begin to trust that the police were there to help (Gerber, 2019). These news reports highlight the potential for high disclosure reluctance and suggest the need for clearer guidance on detection of victims.

Developmental Processes Underlying Reluctance

Although the anecdotal examples certainly suggest that nondisclosure among youth victims of sex trafficking is a significant problem, psychological science provides insight into why it is likely occurring. One contributing factor, for example, is developmental. In the anecdotes just mentioned, as well as in a majority of legal cases involving trafficked youth, most victims are adolescents (International Organization for Migration, 2018). Adolescence generally is a time of expanding interests, identity exploration, and growing autonomy (Beyers & Cok, 2008; Erikson, 1968; Meeus, Oosterwegel, & Vollebergh, 2002), all of which contribute to a tendency to experiment with new behaviors, combined with a tendency not to tell adults about those behaviors (Hunter, Barber, Olsen, McNeely, & Bose, 2011; Yau, 2016; Yau, Tasopoulos-Chan, & Smetana, 2009). These behaviors include some that are risky, such as trying drugs, alcohol, or sexual activities, or hanging out with delinquent peers (Braams et al., 2015), all behaviors that, even if normative, might not be disclosed to adults. For example, when comparing adolescents' and their parents' reports of how frequently the adolescents engage in sexual activity, adolescents report much more frequent activity than do their parents (Jaccard et al., 1998). Similar discrepancies emerge between adolescents' and parents' reports of adolescents' exposure to other high-risk behavior (e.g., sexual assault, motor vehicle accidents; Johnson, 2014). Thus, there is clear evidence for age-normative reductions in adolescents' willingness to tell adults about some risky experiences.

A related tendency in adolescents is their increasing desire for autonomy. As a way of establishing that autonomy, adolescents sometimes explore new religious, political, and sexual views. They gradually make more independent decisions about who their friends and romantic partners are and in what sorts of behaviors they wish to engage with those individuals (Simons-Morton, Pickett, Boyce, Ter Bogt, & Vollebergh, 2010), and they gradually feel more responsible for their decisions. However, adolescents also sometimes take responsibility for decisions and behaviors into which they were manipulated or pressured, either because they fail to recognize that they were manipulated or because they do not want to present themselves as vulnerable to others' manipulations (Grandpre, Alvaro, Burgoon, Miller, & Hall, 2003).

These normative developmental processes of identity exploration and feelings of autonomy have implications for disclosure patterns in adolescent victims of sex trafficking. First, the victims may have stumbled into trafficking without being fully aware of what they were getting themselves into, for example, by being manipulated while engaging in other activities (e.g., drugs, gang activities) or through extended friend networks (Greenbaum, Crawford-Jakubiak, & the Committee on Child Abuse & Neglect, 2015). Once involved, adolescents may feel responsible for having gotten themselves into their situation (e.g., accepting a ride from an acquaintance who turns out to be a trafficker), rather than recognizing or admitting they were manipulated. Second, adolescents' desire for autonomy can reduce their cooperation in settings in which they feel their right to conceal private information has been violated. Some adolescent victims view their relationship with a trafficker as personal matter, not a safety concern ("prudential issues;" Smetana, Metzger, Gettman, & Campione-Barr, 2006), and, as such, they may not feel obligated to talk about such matters to adults. Other victims wish to maintain a bond of trust with their peer group (Rotenberg et al., 2004), which requires that they not disclose activities of that group to those outside of it. For trafficking victims, their "group" may be the trafficker and the trafficker's other victims.

Trafficking Victims' History and Prior Experiences

Beyond normative developmental processes shaping victims' disclosure tendencies, victims' prior experiences also significantly impact how they perceive and interact with adults, including legal professionals, and hence what they are likely to disclose. First, high percentages of trafficking victims have a history of maltreatment exposure and removal from home; many have bounced around foster and group home settings for years (Basson, Rosenblatt, & Haley, 2012; Brannigan & Van Brunschot, 1997; Choi, 2015; Landers et al., 2017; Moore, Houck, Hirway, Barron, & Goldberg, 2017; Williamson & Prior, 2009). Large majorities report having been sexually abused (88%, Hershberger et al., 2018; 57%, Goldberg, Moore, Houck, Kaplan, & Barron, 2017), runaway behavior (93%, Hershberger et al., 2018; 60%, Moore et al., 2017), and feeling the need to escape from tumultuous and violent home environments (Moore et al., 2017). All of these early familial and home experiences foster strong feelings of mistrust of adults who have repeatedly failed the victims (Somer & Szwarcberg, 2001). Such feelings are unlikely to end when the victims encounter law enforcement or social service professionals who ask about the adolescents' relationships, sexual encounters, illegal activities, and abuse.

Second, victims' experiences while being trafficked play a crucial role in their likely reluctance to disclose as well. For youth victims of sexual abuse generally, being closely related to a perpetrator (e.g., parent, trusted caregiver) is associated with increases in both the delay in how long it takes the youth to disclose and their risk for recanting once they do (e.g., Goodman-Brown et al., 2003; Malloy et al., 2007). Adolescent victims of sexual abuse are at particular risk for delayed disclosure, in part because of their greater understanding of the consequences of disclosure for themselves and their loved ones (Goodman-Brown et al., 2003). This understanding helps to explain high rates of nondisclosure among adolescents seduced by an adult predator under the guise of a romantic relationship, many of whom likely still believe that they are in a close relationship. Some adolescents continue to deny the abuse in the face of corroborative (e.g., text messages) evidence (Katz, 2013; Kennedy, Klein, Bristowe, Cooper, & Yuille, 2007; Whittle, Hamilton-Giachritsis, & Beech, 2015; Williamson & Prior, 2009). Insofar as traffickers attempt to foster a belief in victims early on that they are in close and long-lasting romantic relationships, similar nondisclosure processes may be operating in trafficking victims.

Specifically, traffickers often entice the victims with gifts, dates, and attention (Curtis, Terry, Dank, Dombrowski, & Khan, 2008; Moore et al., 2017; Reid, 2016), all of which are relationship-building activities designed to seduce the victims, especially girls (van Gijn-Grosvenor & Lamb, 2016). Perhaps unsurprisingly, many victims report during interviews that the trafficker (most often a man) was—or still is—their boyfriend. They express feelings of love and loyalty to him (Wolak, Finkelhor, Mitchell, & Ybarra, 2010), and some fail to recognize that they are being

exploited, continuing to perceive their relationship as consensual and special, even in the face of interventions and legal involvement (Basson et al., 2012; Ijadi-Maghsoodi, Cook, Barnert, Gaboian, & Bath, 2016; Landers et al., 2017). The adolescents therefore may resist disclosing because, per their current thinking, there is no exploitation occurring. They may instead be protective and hostile, leading to their potential treatment as codefendants in criminal activity rather than as trafficking victims per se (Anderson, England, & Davidson, 2017).

A different type of motivation, which could occur in parallel with the above, stems from the coercive, controlling, or violent nature of the trafficker–victim relationship. Traffickers often gradually isolate victims from their loved ones and induce them into compliance via threats, intimidation, and violence (Albanese, 2007; Reid, 2016). Controlling behaviors, such as withholding victims' identity documents or belongings, forcing them "to pay off debts" to the trafficker, or providing them with drugs and alcohol (Raphael, Reichert, & Powers, 2010; Reid, 2016), increase over time and contribute to secrecy and reluctance. The threats and violence can also lead to fear of retaliation if victims disclose their experiences or activities in which they have been involved. Similar fears of reporting are common in witnesses and former gang members asked to testify about gang-related activity (Browning, 2014; Finn & Murphy Healey, 1996) and victims of domestic violence (Roe-Sepowitz, Hickle, Dahlstedt, & Gallagher, 2014). This coercion, coupled with the emotional attachment many adolescents have to the trafficker, is an effective way of inducing secrecy, uncooperativeness, and evasiveness during interviews.

In addition to relationship-related processes, victims' own feelings of guilt and shame likely play a role in their disclosure tendencies. Such feelings are common among child and adolescent victims of abuse generally across a range of different types of victim-perpetrator relationships (Deblinger & Runyon, 2005; Negrao, Bonanno, Noll, Putnam, & Trickett, 2005; Quas, Goodman, & Jones, 2003; Street & Arias, 2001), and have been shown to contribute to delayed disclosures, denials, and recantations (Goodman-Brown et al., 2003; Quas, Stolzenberg, & Lyon, 2018). Such feelings are particularly strong in adolescent victims. For example, in a Canadian study of adolescents' voluntary disclosures of experiences of abuse and violence (physical, sexual), adolescents often reported not disclosing because of fear, not wanting to disrupt the family, being uncertain about who could be trusted, or out of shame (Ungar, Tutty, McConnell, Barter, & Fairholm, 2009). Likewise, in a qualitative study of adolescent victims of international sex trafficking in Europe, Lindholm et al. (2014) reported that feelings of guilt undermined the victims' disclosure, and even when the victims did disclose, their responses implied a strong sense of guilt. The authors suggested the victims' feelings of responsibility and complicity led to minimal and evasive answers.

One other aspect to consider in relation to disclosure tendencies concerns a more pragmatic component of victims' experiences, namely their reliance on the trafficker, not for romance but for basic needs (e.g., food, shelter) and amenities (e.g., phone). Traffickers, as mentioned, gradually take control of victims' lives, serving as their sole provider of necessities and material goods (Williams & Frederick, 2009). This entrapment resembles that observed in victims of domestic violence, who report feeling completely dependent on the perpetrator and hence incapable of escaping (Raphael et al., 2010; Reid, 2016). In domestic violence situations, victim nondisclosure and recantation, even in the face of physical evidence, are common (Beloof & Shapiro, 2002; Ellison, 2002; Roe-Sepowitz et al., 2014). Adolescents who perceive that their lives are dependent on the trafficker, therefore, are likely to remain silent or not report any details that implicate him in criminal acts, as their disclosures would undermine their own survival and ability to have their needs met.

Summary

Both normative adolescent developmental processes (e.g., exploring a sense of self, increasing desire for autonomy) and trafficking victims' unique experiences lay the foundation for a high degree of disclosure reluctance, even before interacting with legal professionals. As we turn to next, the way that these interactions unfold is likely an equally if not more powerful determinant of whether and what victims actually say.

Initial Legal Encounters With Victims of Sex Trafficking

Characteristics of trafficking victims' encounters with law enforcement that likely affect their disclosure include how the victims are identified in the first place and how they are questioned by the authorities. To understand the potential influence of these factors, it is useful to contrast trafficking victims' legal encounters with those of other types of sexual abuse victims.

Sexual Abuse Victims' Initial Legal Encounters

For a vast majority of child and adolescent victims of sexual abuse, the authorities' knowledge of the abuse emerges as a result of the victims' own disclosure. Child victims most often tell a parent or other adult, who initiates a report to the authorities, although sometimes children tell a friend, who tells an adult who initiates a report (Plummer, 2006; Rush, Lyon, Ahern, & Quas, 2014). Adolescent victims most often tell a friend (Priebe & Svedin, 2008; Schönbucher, Maier, Mohler-Kuo, Schnyder, & Landolt, 2012), who either reports the abuse to someone else or encourages the victim to report. Of note, adolescent victims seduced by an online or offline predator sometimes tell a friend who initiates the report. Most, though, are identified via discovery of online correspondence. Whether intentional or not, the correspondence alerts concerned adults and eventually the authorities to the abuse (Katz, 2013).

Regardless of the precise way in which the aforementioned youth victims of sexual abuse are identified, once suspected or known, they are immediately labeled and treated as victims. Actions taken by police or legal professionals focus on supporting and protecting the victims and prosecuting the perpetrators. Thus, when possible, the child victims of sexual abuse are routed to trained forensic specialists to be interviewed, ideally at child-friendly location, like a Child Advocacy Center, where services are centralized (Cross, Jones, Walsh, Simone, & Kolko, 2007; Elmquist et al., 2015). Interviewers are trained on best-practice interviewing approaches for child victims; interviews are typically videotaped to decrease the number of interviews required; and other services (e.g., medical exams, social service, therapists) are

provided, as needed, to address the victims' mental and physical health needs (Cross, Finkelhor, & Ormrod, 2005). Overall, the victims' legal encounters are designed to be as supportive as possible to enhance the children and families' feelings of support, reduce children's anxiety, and encourage their disclosure and recovery (Cross et al., 2007).

Trafficking Victims' Initial Legal Encounters

The ways in which sex trafficking is discovered and victims are identified by the authorities are strikingly different and may occur via a myriad of ways. One, for example, occurs when victims are picked up on the street for prostitution. Although U.S. federal laws and those in many other countries prohibit youth from being charged with prostitution (e.g., William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008, 2018), youth can be picked up and charged with another offense. In addition, though, prostitution charges can be made at the state level, and only some states (e.g., California) have what are often called "Safe Harbor Laws" that prohibit youth from being formally arrested and charged with prostitution. In other states, some youth can be charged. For instance, in Ohio, adolescents aged 16 and 17 can be charged with prostitution if there is no identifiable trafficker in a position of authority or no coercion used (Ohio Human Trafficking Task Force, n.d.). In a nationwide survey of police encounters with adolescent victims of trafficking, about 40% were arrested for prostitution and treated as prostitutes (Halter, 2010), a pattern confirmed in more recent reports (e.g., Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention, 2017).

In a small number of cases, medical and mental health providers report suspicions of trafficking when adolescents seek treatment (e.g., for a sexually transmitted disease) at a service facility (Greenbaum, 2014; Varma, Gillespie, McCracken, & Greenbaum, 2015). When trafficking is suspected, the provider must make decisions about whether to confront victims directly or call the authorities, the latter of which can run counter to some providers' goals of maintaining confidentiality as a way of building patient trust and encouraging individuals to seek treatment. Regardless, in these situations, the providers and not the victims are typically initiating the report (Shandro et al., 2016).

The most common manner in which trafficking victims are identified is because of their suspected involvement in delinquent or criminal behavior or gang affiliation (Halter, 2010; Newman, 2006). Police may be unaware of adolescents' status as trafficking victims until well after they are arrested (Farrell, McDevitt, & Fahy, 2010). Police bring these adolescents (suspects) into custody, sometimes in restraints, to be questioned about their alleged delinquent or criminal acts (Wilson & Dalton, 2008). The adolescents are read their rights, interrogated, and booked on other charges. It is unlikely that the adolescents fully understand their rights, even if they have had prior contact with the authorities (e.g., as delinquents in other cases or with child protection; Grisso et al., 2003; Viljoen, Zapf, & Roesch, 2007; Winningham, Rogers, & Drogin, 2018; Zelle, Romaine, & Goldstein, 2015), and this limited legal understanding likely leads to confusion, poor legal decision-making, and increased distress (Quas, Wallin, Horwitz, Davis, & Lyon, 2009), all of which may well influence how cooperative and forthcoming adolescents are with the police.

If, during the course of an interrogation with an adolescent suspect, the police come to suspect sex trafficking might be occurring, the police need to determine whether it is best to continue questioning the adolescent as an offender, or to change course and ask about the trafficking, for example, whether the adolescent needs protection or services. Police generally associate such factors as high cooperativeness and having a clean record (i.e., no priors) with one's status as victim (Halter, 2010), neither of which is true for victims of sex trafficking in these situations. They were initially detained because of their engagement in illegal activity (e.g., prostitution, delinquency, criminal activity) and are, as a result, likely hostile and evasive. Thus, police may have a difficult time changing their perspective from seeing an adolescent as a suspect to seeing her as a victim (Anderson et al., 2017). Her background and demeanor, even if in response to her initial treatment, exacerbate this difficulty, leading to the interview proceeding as a typical interrogation would, with police questioning the adolescent to garner a confession.

Overall, this process of questioning trafficking victims as suspects has significant implications, both for the victims' immediate responses in an interview and for the victims' trust and participation in a legal case against a trafficker over time. These implications are in need of more comprehensive empirical investigation.

Interrogations of Juvenile Suspects

Interviews with suspects (i.e., interrogations) are, by definition, guilt presumptive. Especially in the United States, their purpose is to obtain incriminatory information or a confession (Feld, 2013; Leo, 2008). Regardless of any further manipulations, this presumption can lead to confirmatory biases that contribute to negative outcomes. With juvenile suspects, this presumption is particularly influential (Redlich & Kassin, 2009).

Developmentally, interrogations of youth or juvenile suspects should differ from interrogations of adult suspects, given widely known age differences in conformity, responses to power dynamics, and socioemotional functioning that affect youth response tendencies (Owen-Kostelnik et al., 2006; Steinberg, 2005). However, evidence generally suggests that the type of interrogation tactics used with youth and adults are quite similar (Redlich & Kassin, 2009), and widely cited training manuals advocate using the same tactics regardless of suspect age (Inbau, Reid, Buckley, & Jayne, 2013; but see Brown, Novak, & Frank, 2009, for an exception). Recommendations include using high levels of pressure, suggestive questioning, and manipulations to help glean incriminatory details from a suspect (Cleary & Warner, 2016; Feld, 2013; Redlich & Kassin, 2009).

Two of the most common tactics are maximization and minimization. *Maximization* includes asking leading or suggestive questions, directly accusing a suspect of the alleged acts, and challenging aspects of the suspect's story that are inconsistent with what is believed to have occurred using confrontational approaches (e.g., highlighting inconsistencies, lying about false incriminating evidence). *Minimization* includes feigning friendship and support, appealing to a suspect's self-interest, religion, honor, and so forth, and offering flattery to increase suspect compliance (Feld, 2013; Redlich, Silverman, Chen, & Steiner, 2004).

Both maximization and minimization have been shown to be effective in achieving their purpose: eliciting confessions, espe-

cially from youth. But, effectiveness in eliciting confessions is separate from effectiveness at eliciting accurate confessions. Both maximization and minimization have been shown to increase false confessions from innocent suspects, more so in youth than in adults (Cleary, 2017; Kassin et al., 2010; Redlich & Goodman, 2003). These false confessions, moreover, appear to be voluntary and hence can be very prejudicial (Kassin et al., 2010). For adolescent victims of sex trafficking, who feel complicit in the sexual activities, who sometimes self-identify as prostitutes (Farrell et al., 2010), or who believe that they are in a romantic relationship with the trafficker, falsely confessing to a crime when pressured to do so by the police could be an easy and effective way of "taking responsibility" for their own actions while protecting the trafficker. In fact, even without pressure, adolescents often take the blame for others' transgressions (e.g., 59% in one study, a rate much higher than the 39% observed in adults, Pimentel, Arndorfer, & Malloy, 2015). Adolescents may also feel that denying police's claims (and asserting one's innocence) will result in harsher punishments than simply accepting the police's claims (Redlich, Shteynberg, & Nirider, in press), and, as a result, agree with the police and take the blame for illegal behavior, including behavior committed by the trafficker.

Regardless of whether a confession elicited with the use of harsh or manipulative interrogation tactics is true or not, collateral consequences of the interrogation tactics likely affect a range of aspects of the victims' perceptions and experiences, initially and over time. For one, the credibility of any trafficking details disclosed following the use of such tactics could be undermined. Attorneys, judges, and jurors appear to understand, at least with the help of an expert, that harsh or coercive questioning tactics undermine the accuracy of information reported (Kassin, Redlich, Alceste, & Luke, 2018). With adolescent victims, this information might include details about the sex trafficking. Insofar as a scientific expert or a knowledgeable defense attorney applies scientific research about the adverse effects of harsh interrogations on the accuracy of confessions to the veracity of other information reported during an interrogation, the credibility of victims' statements about trafficking specifically could be undermined.

Harsh interrogation tactics can also erode trafficking victims' trust in law enforcement even further and reduce their willingness to assist the authorities in their pursuit of justice, both in a case against the trafficker and in subsequent situations in which the victims come into contact with legal professionals. Best-practice guidelines in forensic interviews with victims at high risk of recantation and uncooperativeness (e.g., adult victims of domestic violence, victims of intrafamilial sexual abuse) recommend providing support, building a positive relationship with the victim, and fostering trust (Hershkowitz, Lamb, & Katz, 2014; Saywitz & Camparo, 2013). Interrogating trafficking victims as suspects to obtain incriminatory evidence of criminal or delinquent behavior—either against the victims or the trafficker—does little to foster support or build trust but likely does the opposite.

Even when police or other legal professionals are knowledgeable about an adolescent's trafficking history and even if they cannot charge her with prostitution, they may still treat her as an offender, considering her a prostitute who is responsible for her choices and behaviors (Halter, 2010; Macias Konstantopoulos et al., 2013; Wolak et al., 2010), treatment that could be exacerbated by the victim failing to recognize her own manipulation and considering herself a prostitute (Farrell et al., 2010). Not all legal professionals have received training on the types of coercion, manipulation, or life experiences that lead adolescents to become involved in sex trafficking, which would provide insight into why victims present themselves as having made their own decisions about trafficking or indicate that they were complicit in the exploitation (e.g., Farrell et al., 2010). Qualitative interviews of professionals across diverse locations as London, Los Angeles, and Mumbai suggest that some professionals do not recognize vulnerabilities in trafficking victims and instead place responsibility on them for their situation (Anderson et al., 2017; Macias Konstantopoulos et al., 2013).

Perceptions of adolescents as prostitutes, suspects, or offenders directly affect how they are treated. Wolak et al. (2010) compared police officers' initial treatment of three groups of sexually exploited youth in the United States: Those who had experienced "traditional" abuse, but with a form of payment; those involved in prostitution via a third-party exploiter; and those involved in what police labeled "solo prostitution." Solo prostitution youth were more likely to be treated as suspects (delinquents) than the other groups. Whether these initial perceptions extended to the interview, shaping the interaction, dynamics, questions, and victims' responses, is not known. Anecdotally, a Kansas judge recently called two girls, ages 13 and 14 years, "more aggressors than participants" in a criminal case against a 67-year-old man who paid the girls for sexually explicit photos (Gearty, 2019). In this case, the judge not only saw the girls as consenting to sexual activities, but as being in control of and manipulating the adult. Victim blaming, therefore, although potentially beginning when victims first encounter police, may remain, affecting their disclosures, cooperation, and long-term well-being, and the outcome of a criminal case against a trafficker.

As a final note, in recent years, several federal (e.g., Federal Bureau of Investigations, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and Department of Justice), state, and local law enforcement agencies have created specialized units (in police departments and district attorney offices) and task forces focused on legal investigations and prosecution of CSE and trafficking (Bureau of Justice Assistance, U.S. Department of Justice, n.d.). The questioning approaches used by these groups are not yet known, however, many have received extensive training and the units often include psychologists and social service professionals as team members, both of which could enhance sharing of knowledge about developmental needs of victims and best-practice approaches. These possibilities are in need of direct investigation.

Summary

Youth suspected of having been sex trafficked or at risk for sex trafficking come to the attention of the authorities via several different paths, though rarely initially via the victim's own disclosure. The most common way is because the victims are suspected of delinquency or crime. When this occurs, the police may question the victims using interviewing tactics common to interrogations of criminal suspects. Such tactics can undermine disclosure accuracy and credibility and foster mistrust and hostility. The tactics also make it extremely difficult to build rapport, be supportive, and conduct an interview in a manner that promotes, rather than inhibits, victims' comfort and cooperation. A comprehensive

analysis of the extent to which victims are questioned like suspects, and the consequences of doing so, is needed, as is an analysis of questioning approaches, and their effects on victim disclosures, in jurisdictions with and without specialized trafficking units.

Forensic Interviewing of Victims of Sex Trafficking

In contrast to evidence that suggests disclosure reluctance is likely quite high among adolescent victims of sex trafficking, particularly when they are initially treated and interrogated as suspects rather than victims, almost no research exists indicating how such victims are likely questioned legally. In fact, to our knowledge, only two published studies, one quantitative and one qualitative, have directly examined forensic interviewing of victims of sex trafficking. The results of these two studies—when combined with results of investigations of forensic interviews of adolescent victims manipulated into sexual relationships with an adult online or offline predator, who share similar beliefs as victims of sex trafficking about their complicity in the abuse—offer important initial insights into questioning approaches and victim responsiveness. Further, when the two studies' results are considered in conjunction with what is known about best-practice forensic interviewing of child victims, the results also highlight the crucial need for empirical attention to determine how best to elicit disclosures from trafficked youth.

In one of the two published studies, Lindholm, Cederborg, and Alm (2015) obtained transcripts of interviews by Swedish police of 24 female adolescent victims of international sex trafficking. The interviews, often conducted with interpreters, were coded for question types and victim responses. Three types of questions were identified: open-ended prompts (recall or "tell me about . . ." prompts and "wh" directives, or who, what, why, when, where prompts, e.g., "Who were you with?"), option-posing questions (e.g., closed-ended yes/no, suggestive), and summary statements (e.g., repeating what adolescents already said, offering support, or putting pressure to comply). Victims' responses were coded for the number of details provided.

Overall, 33% of the questions were open-ended, and 52% were option-posing (12% of which were suggestive). The remaining were summary statements (including supportive and pressuring statements). Both open-ended and option-posing questions were effective in eliciting details from victims. Option-posing questions, on average, were more likely to elicit disclosures than were open-ended questions, although the victims' disclosures at times were simple affirmations or denials rather than detailed narratives. In addition, the open-ended questions were more likely to lead to answers that were evasive rather than helpful (evasion occurred 17% of the time to open-ended questions and 7% of the time to option-posing questions). Evasiveness was especially high when open-ended questions probed for details about the trafficking activities (e.g., money exchange, sexual activities) or about violence experienced at the hands of the trafficker or clients, and lower when open-ended questions probed for details about context or factors that preceded and may have contributed to the victims' involvement in the trafficking. These trends, which suggest limitations in the value of the open-ended prompts at eliciting information from victims, are consistent with those findings from a few other studies of youth reporting patterns, including those that analyzed statements by adolescents about alleged Internet-related sexual abuse, by child victims of sexual abuse in forensic interviews, and by children being questioned about medical exams (Korkman, Santtila, & Sandnabba, 2006; Melinder & Gilstrap, 2009; Wolfman, Brown, & Jose, 2016). However, as with the Lindholm et al. (2015) study, whether the open-ended prompts themselves versus some other characteristic of the victims or the topic of questions was leading to the evasiveness is not yet clear.

In the second known investigation of sex trafficking, Lindholm et al. (2014) qualitatively described exchanges between police officers and adolescent victims of sex trafficking (out of a corpus of 12 interviews, two reports were selected for narrative and interactional analysis). Although the report largely concerned emerging themes in the adolescents' narratives, the description also provided insight into the ways in which the police questioned two victims and the victims' responsiveness. An excerpt, for example, described one of the victims as changing her responses several times and then not responding at all when repeatedly asked about the same topic (i.e., she first indicated she knew some individuals, then said she did not, and then said she didn't know). The authors explained the inconsistencies as reflecting the victim's evasiveness once she realized that her responses implicated her or perhaps others in specific sexual activities. Her varied responses, though, prompted the police to ask more questions, which in turn led to more evasiveness, creating a potentially destructive interaction over time.

In combination, studies raise some concerns about the value of open-ended prompts, particularly when used exclusively with trafficked adolescents or possibly adolescent victims generally. However, the samples were small, no formal interviewing protocol was followed by the police interviewers, and one of the studies was qualitative, precluding generalizations. Furthermore, in other literatures, a high priority is placed on open-ended prompts to elicit narrative responses (e.g., Lamb et al., 2009; Saywitz, Lyon, & Goodman, 2017), given that such prompts fairly consistently elicit more accurate and complete disclosures in other victim populations relative to other types of prompts (Ceci, Kulkofsky, Klemfuss, Sweeney, & Bruck, 2007; Korkman, Santtila, Westeråker, & Sandnabba, 2008; Lamb, Orbach, Hershkowitz, Horowitz, & Abbott, 2007; Wolfman et al., 2016; but see Korkman et al., 2006; Wolfman et al., 2016, for opposite trends). The effects of open-ended prompts in interviews with victims of sex trafficking, therefore, need to be studied comprehensively, along with the effects of several other factors, like victim age or the combined use of closed- and open-ended prompts (e.g., follow-ups), to assess how each shapes victims' reporting tendencies. Until such studies are conducted, recommendations for strict adherence to specific protocols or question types to elicit details from trafficking victims are premature.

Future Research Recommendations

Well-established, empirically-supported forensic interviewing protocols already exist that outline best-practice questioning strategies to elicit accurate and complete disclosures from child victims of sexual abuse (see the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 10-Step, and Narrative Elaboration Training; Hershkowitz et al., 2014; Lamb et al., 2009; Saywitz et al., 2017; Saywitz & Camparo, 2013). Although the specific approach

and phrasing of questions and follow-ups vary slightly across protocols, all recommend rapport building, providing noncontingent social support, and using open-ended recall and follow-up prompts to elicit narrative responses from children about salient and distressing events that they experienced or witnessed. Such strategies do not always elicit disclosures, but they have been consistently shown to increase the likelihood of disclosure of victimization experiences and transgressions (Hershkowitz et al., 2014; Quas et al., 2018), the amount of detail youth provide about negative experiences (Anderson, Anderson, & Gilgun, 2014; Cleveland, Quas, & Lyon, 2018; Hershkowitz, 2009), and youth's reported comfort during interviews (Ahern, Hershkowitz, Lamb, Blasbalg, & Winstanley, 2014). Such strategies have also been shown to reduce errors, and, as a result, are less likely than other approaches (e.g., selective reinforcement, option-posing questions) to raise concerns about the credibility of children's reports (Castelli, Goodman, & Ghetti, 2005; Hershkowitz, Fisher, Lamb, & Horowitz, 2007; Quas, Rush, Yim, & Nikolayev, 2014; Rush, Quas, et al., 2013). Finally, the same strategies appear to confer benefits in interviews with youth suspects, who have been found to provide a greater amount of detail when questioned using open-ended recall and follow-up prompts in a supportive manner than when questioned using suggestive prompts in an interrogative manner (Hershkowitz, Horowitz, Lamb, Orbach, & Sternberg, 2004).

Given strong empirical evidence supporting the use of the aforementioned approaches to improve forensic interviews with children, a relatively straightforward recommendation for future research might be simply to test whether these same strategies are useful when questioning suspected victims of sexual trafficking. Findings from such a test would reveal whether best-practice protocols for children generalize to adolescent, particularly trafficking, victim populations. However, the unique risk factors in the lives and relationships of victims of sex trafficking, combined with their typical encounters with the police, make their needs in forensic settings understandably complex. As such, direct application of best practices for interviews with child victims to adolescent victims of sex trafficking is unlikely to yield uniformly positive results. Instead, more sophisticated research is needed that takes into account adolescent development and trafficking victims' experiences when designing and testing interviewing approaches. Four important directions for this research are described here.

The first and perhaps most pressing need is for systematic research documenting current approaches to forensic interviewing of victims of sex trafficking. That is, although there are multiple reasons to suspect both high levels of disclosure reluctance in the victims and their likely initial treatment as suspects rather than victims (Anderson et al., 2017), very little is known about how their encounters with legal professionals actually unfold. It does seem that victims remain in the hands of law enforcement (Wolak et al., 2010), and victims are not routed to specialized interviewing centers, as often occurs with child victims of sexual abuse (Cross et al., 2007). A worthwhile place to start, therefore, would be to document how often adolescent victims of sex trafficking, compared perhaps to adolescents who experience other forms of sexual abuse (e.g., pornography, seduction by an online predator), are questioned by a trained forensic interviewing specialist versus an investigator without specific training in interviewing or in child and adolescent development. It would also be worthwhile to evaluate training, perceptions, and experiences of officers in special trafficking or sex crime units (e.g., Los Angeles Police Department, 2019), and compare their approaches to those of officers not in specialized units and to interviewers who question other populations of suspected child victims.

Regarding the interviews themselves, it will be important to investigate how they unfold, including how police build rapport, what types of questions police ask, whether adolescents are treated more like suspects or victims, and how they respond. In a survey of 20 law enforcement and 10 social workers who had experience with commercially sexually exploited young people (age unspecified), most indicated that they built rapport gradually across multiple interactions (Ahern, Sadler, Lamb, & Gariglietti, 2017). The value of this type of rapport building and its frequency of use need to be ascertained. Likewise, the types of questions victims are asked, and which questions elicit disclosures of legally relevant details, should be identified. Overall, an initial evaluation of what is actually taking place would reveal the extent of police knowledge of child and adolescent development, predictors of disclosure reluctance, trafficking victim history, and similarities and differences across youth victim and suspect populations, which are all relevant to how police ask questions and interpret victims' responses (Meyer & Reppucci, 2007). This evaluation would also identify strategies police already have that are useful in encounters with trafficking victims at building rapport, eliciting disclosures, and perhaps even maintaining victims' engagement in a case over time.

Of importance, initial investigations of current practices need to go beyond simply documenting the ways in which police question suspected victims of sex trafficking (e.g., type of questions asked). The tone, as interrogative (similar to that used with juvenile suspects) or supportive (similar to that used with child victims), and on what topics police focus their questions would be enormously valuable to identify. Lindholm et al. (2015) suggested that victim evasiveness varied depending upon the topic under discussion. Victims were more evasive when open-ended questions asked about sexual activities and violence, but less so when questions asked about the context surrounding their experiences. Thus, complex investigations of questions, topics, and responsiveness are needed. Such investigations would provide a much-needed foundation from which follow-up research could test which interview approaches are more versus less valuable at eliciting specific types of details.

A second and equally important direction for research is to identify, using rigorous and creative experimental designs, mechanisms underlying adolescents' willingness (or not) to disclose personal experiences to adults. Several novel investigations of motivational factors underlying children's disclosure tendencies have been conducted (Lyon et al., 2014; Stolzenberg, McWilliams, & Lyon, 2017). For instance, children have been given vignettes that describe transgressions, requests for secrecy, or different disclosure recipients, and have been asked questions about likely disclosures of the character in the vignettes, including to whom and the consequences of disclosure for the character and others (Lyon, Ahern, Malloy, & Quas, 2010). Children have also been induced to commit a transgression or witness a transgression and were subsequently given secrecy inducements not to tell (Quas et al., 2018). Of interest has been the conditions under which children do and do not disclose (Gordon, Lyon, & Lee, 2014; Pimentel et

al., 2015; Talwar, Lee, Bala, & Lindsay, 2004). Similar designs could be created for adolescents to tease apart how feelings of complicity, autonomy, fear, and loyalty affect their disclosure tendencies and how to encourage disclosures in adolescents amid the most influential of these feelings.

Third is the need to test the effects of variants of rapport and support on adolescents' disclosures, comfort, and cooperation. Hints from practitioner surveys suggest that the authorities interact with trafficking victims repeatedly and rapport is built over time (Ahern et al., 2017). These interactions should be examined directly, as should the content of rapport-building conversations. For instance, conversations that build on adolescent development, such as those that deemphasize authority or that promote autonomy, might be more valuable at fostering rapport and trust (and predict subsequent disclosures) than conversations on topics included in standard best-practice instructions for children (e.g., truth–lie discussions, conversations about past activities; see Saywitz, Larson, Hobbs, & Wells, 2015). Also, adolescent-friendly contexts that promote a safe but mature environment may put adolescents more at ease and provide support in a manner that is developmentally appropriate relative to contexts that are child-focused and hence unlikely to be appealing to adolescents (for an example of approaches that uniquely appeal to adolescents, see the Canadian Child Abuse Association, 2018, court preparation program for teens). Finally, the effects of rapport building and support may need to be examined in a culturally sensitive manner, taking into account not only the race, ethnicity, and language of the victims, but their cultural and familial background, which shape their disclosure tendencies (Yau et al., 2009).

Fourth and finally, the effects of different questioning approaches (e.g., high proportion of closed-ended questions, interrogative tone) on adolescents' perceived credibility in trafficking cases need to be tested. Adults, including jurors, are sensitive to suggestive interview tactics and rate children's reports as less believable when more versus fewer suggestive questions are asked (Castelli et al., 2005). Adults, with the help of experts, also recognize that harsh or manipulative interrogation tactics may lead to false reports and vary their verdicts accordingly (Kassin et al., 2018). Insofar as experts identify interviews with victims as interrogative, any information they provide during the interviews might be questioned or considered noncredible. Theoretically, this could include information about trafficking. Future research on perceptions of interviews and the credibility of adolescent victims' disclosures would be of considerable value.

Policy and Practice Recommendations

Although a critical goal of our review was to highlight the need for more comprehensive research focused on interviewing strategies for suspected adolescent victims of sex trafficking, two key practical recommendations can already be made based on existing knowledge. The first is a clear need for legal professional training on adolescent development, and how developmental processes play out in interactions with adolescent victims of sex trafficking. The second is greater attention to understanding the types of sexual abuse adolescents are more versus less likely to endure, as these experiences shape in profound ways their reactions to questioning—by any authority figure—about the abuse, their role, and its consequences. Adolescents are at significant risk for having been manipulated into trafficking, but also into a relationship with a sexual predator. These experiences lead to a complex set of motivations that need to be understood to respond effectively in a way that ensures the victims receive much-needed services and perpetrators are successfully prosecuted. Legal professionals cannot treat all adolescent victims the same and cannot equate them with child victims or, in the case of trafficking victims, with juvenile suspects. Differences in development, experiences, and needs all shape victims' reactions to the authorities. Greater knowledge about adolescent victims, and better integration of science, policy, and practice can already provide considerable guidance to help professionals identify and intervene on behalf of these highly vulnerable populations of victims with unique challenges and needs.

Conclusions

In closing, a subset of highly vulnerable adolescent victims of sexual abuse, namely those who have suffered sex trafficking, are likely extremely reluctant to disclose. These adolescents, because of their personal histories, abuse experiences, and relationship to the perpetrator, are likely quite skeptical and untrusting of adults, including legal professionals. This is especially true when the adolescents are initially treated like suspects who engaged in criminal activity or as prostitutes. Novel interviewing approaches are needed to improve identification of these victims and increase their willingness to disclose and provide legally relevant details about their experiences. Doing so will ensure that they receive crucial services to facilitate their recovery and ensure that those who exploit these victims are stopped from doing further harm. Additional research testing such approaches, and improved communication between and training of both scientists and practitioners, will go a long way toward identification of and interventions for youth who have been the victims of sex trafficking.

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Call for Nominations

The Publications and Communications (P&C) Board of the American Psychological Association has opened nominations for the editorships of *American Psychologist, History of Psychology, Journal of Family Psychology, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology: Personal Processes and Individual Differences, Psychological Assessment,* and *Psychological Review.* Anne E. Kazak, PhD, ABPP, Nadine M. Weidman, PhD, Barbara Fiese, PhD, M. Lynne Cooper, PhD, Yossef S. Ben-Porath, PhD, and Keith J. Holyoak, PhD are the incumbent editors.

Candidates should be members of APA and should be available to start receiving manuscripts in early 2021 to prepare for issues published in 2022. Please note that the P&C Board encourages participation by members of underrepresented groups in the publication process and would particularly welcome such nominees. Self-nominations are also encouraged.

Search chairs have been appointed as follows:

- *American Psychologist*, Chair: Mark B. Sobell, PhD
- *History of Psychology*, Chair: Danny Wedding, PhD
- *Journal of Family Psychology*, Chair: Annette La Greca, PhD
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- *Psychological Assessment*, Chair: Stevan E. Hobfoll, PhD
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Nominate candidates through APA's Editor Search website (https://editorsearch.apa.org).

Prepared statements of one page or less in support of a nominee can also be submitted by e-mail to Jen Chase, Journal Services Associate (jchase@apa.org).

Deadline for accepting nominations is Monday, January 6, 2020, after which phase one vetting will begin.