

Youth Engagement in Preventing Sexual  
Exploitation and Human Trafficking:  
An exploration of promising practices.

A White Ribbon Initiative



Acknowledgments: This paper is the product of collaborative thinking among several individuals who are dedicated to ending violence against women. This is not an easy topic to discuss and it is likely that conversations regarding sexual exploitation and human trafficking will not result in complete agreement. Starting the conversation and engaging youth in this topic is the aim and goal of this work.

### **PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS**

Raheena Davis (Fair(e) Enough Inc.)  
Ian DeGeer, Phd (can)

### **CO-INVESTIGATORS**

Humberto Carolo, Todd Minerson

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### **CONTACT**

Humberto Carolo, Executive Director, White Ribbon  
36 Eglinton Avenue West, Suite 603, Toronto, ON M4R 1A1  
[hcarolo@whiteribbon.ca](mailto:hcarolo@whiteribbon.ca) | [www.whiteribbon.ca](http://www.whiteribbon.ca) | 416-920-6684, x 15  
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## Preamble: Scope of the Report

This report is concerned with the issue of human trafficking and prevention related activities. More specifically, this report focuses on the issue of sexual exploitation as one aspect of the human trafficking umbrella. The goal of this report is to provide further context on this issue in order to assist educators in engaging boys and youth in prevention-related discussions regarding sexual exploitation and human trafficking. This report provides an overview of the human trafficking and sexual exploitation literature and reviews the ways that young men and boys might be engaged in this issue. It is designed primarily for secondary school teachers to assist them in incorporating this dialogue into their work. This document may also assist organizations or individuals who work with boys, youth and men and want to engage this topic as part of their work.

White Ribbon Canada works to inspire men and boys to help end gender-based violence. As male allies, we recognize the important role that men and boys have in working to end all forms of violence against women and girls. White Ribbon Canada recognizes that there is continuous debate within women's and sex trade rights movements about a woman's agency and ability to become involved in sex work/ sex trade and other aspects of the sex industry in a manner that is healthy and self-determined.

We acknowledge that currently there are varied opinions within the women's movement as to whether all forms of sex trade, sex work, pornography, and other sex-based industries are exploitative. It is generally recognized that the epidemic objectification of women's sexuality and bodies across society worldwide includes exploitative facets of sex trade and pornography, which have harmful implications to women and girls everywhere. It is vital that the women's movement and the sex-trade rights movements continue this important dialogue and conversation.

At White Ribbon, we believe that what unifies each side of the debate is that any form of exploitation, trafficking, or unequal power in transactional relationships must end. Men can play a pivotal role by ensuring their beliefs, attitudes, and actions, and those of other men and boys, advance us towards an equitable society where women and girls, and men and boys, exist free from violence and exploitation. We also want to encourage male allies to help foster healthy sexuality that embraces equality and is void of coercion, exploitation, duress and violence.

## Introduction

Violence against women and girls<sup>1</sup> continues to be a significant social issue facing our society. Many feminists, anti-violence advocates and activists have been working on this issue for the past four decades. Much of the work done by these individuals and organizations has been the building of awareness regarding the root causes of violence towards women including, but not limited to, physical violence, sexual violence including rape and sexual exploitation and issues related to sexism and oppression of women.

While raising consciousness and building awareness of the violence perpetrated against women has been necessary in order to maintain awareness of it as a social issue, there has increasingly been an interest in focusing on prevention-related activities. No longer is the issue of violence against women seen only as a woman's issue, instead there has been an understanding that ending violence against women must include working with men. It is well understood that men commit much of the violence perpetrated against women (Flood, 2011). Therefore, prevention programs inspiring healthy masculinities must be part of the overall efforts to end violence against women.

This report focuses on sexual exploitation of women as part of the human trafficking umbrella. The area of sexual exploitation typically involves males who exploit or traffic women to other men. Issues related to misogyny, power and patriarchy play similar roles in sexual exploitation as might be found within other forms of gender-based violence (Burque, 2009). The topic of sexual exploitation is rarely discussed in the context of prevention when considering the lives of young men. Given the relationship between young men, their gender and sexual exploitation, one promising prevention practice central to this paper is the engagement of young men regarding sexual exploitation as a means of educating them about the issue. This helps us go beyond awareness raising and therefore grounds education in action, leading to sustainable behavior change.

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<sup>1</sup> In this document, violence against women is used to be inclusive of both women and girls.

## Human Trafficking

Human trafficking may take many forms, from subtle to overt behaviours. Given the breadth and depth of activities associated with human trafficking, there are challenges to providing a concise definition. Much of the current literature relies upon the use of legal definitions to provide context and scope to the discussion regarding this issue. The most consistently referred to legal definition is located within the *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons* (United Nations, 2000), otherwise known as the Palermo Protocol. Article 3 of the Palermo Protocol defines human trafficking as:

...the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation or the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs (United Nations, 2000, p.2)

Human trafficking often involves a series of stages. These include: recruiting, grooming, transportation, detention, exploitation and sometimes re-trafficking. (Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi & Lozano, 2002). Those who engage in human trafficking may come from any aspect of society; however, there is often a criminal element operating in the background, often funding trafficking operations. Recruitment methods by traffickers are often systematic in nature and typically involve the gradual removal and control of every level of an exploited person's sense of self-sufficiency. The most common tactic that is utilized is referred to as '*Selling the Dream*' that involves befriending and manipulating a person into a trusting relationship with a trafficker. Once trust is established, the trafficker skillfully and strategically abuses and exploits the person until she or he has no control over any of the choices in her or his life.

### Other ways to identify and talk about Human Trafficking

Human trafficking can take many different forms. Most individuals might think that human trafficking involves only the forced movement of individuals across borders or the buying and selling of individuals. However, human trafficking involves many other kinds of exploitation. These include, but are not limited to,

forced and exploitative labour, forced and exploitative sex work, and the illegal buying and selling of organs.

Human trafficking can involve any individual from any socioeconomic sphere. However, most often, individuals who are trafficked come from the most marginal and oppressed groups in our society.

This report focuses on sexually exploitive nature of human trafficking. Sexual exploitation may include, but is not limited to, forced engagement in exotic dancing, forced sexual activity, appearing in video or real-time pornography, and being photographed (Burque, 2009). Often these activities occur without the consent of the individual. Individuals who are trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation are primarily women and girls, although boys and young men can also experience sexual exploitation (McIntyre, 2005). The literature suggests that Aboriginal youth (male and female) are over-represented among sexually exploited youth (Barrett, 2010).

#### **Sexual exploitation as a gendered issue:**

Entry into sexual exploitation as a result of being trafficked is often gendered in nature. Girls and boys are trafficked in ways that reflect their gender and their experiences. Girls and young women are often preyed upon, recruited and retained over longer periods of time. Their entry into the sex industry is often not of their own volition and the result of a grooming process. In contrast, many sexually exploited male youth may be forced to enter the sex industry out of desperation but find themselves trapped in an exploitative situation where they do not have self-determination.

## Contributing Factors associated with Human Trafficking

Engaging male youth in discussions regarding Human Trafficking and sexual exploitation in particular requires understanding the layers and complexities that are often associated with causal explanations of these issues. This section reviews significant influences, and factors that provide context to understanding sexual exploitation as a social issue. It is believed that having a general understanding of these factors will enhance the ability to engage male youth in a prevention related discussion of sexual exploitation.

### Ideas related to masculinities

An excellent starting point for any prevention work with male youth is to help them unpack ideas surrounding masculinities. There has been considerable work done in the area of gender and masculinities as it relates to both men and boys. This section explores masculinity as it primarily relates to adults. These concepts are relevant to youth as developmental markers and as potential influences that impact the socialization of male youth. Many authors and experts in the field of masculinities have undertaken to understand masculinity and gender and how these are developed and reinforced within society. It is generally accepted that masculinities and gender are socially constructed concepts (Berkowitz, 2004; Burque, 2009; Connell, 2005; Flood, 2011; Katz, 2006). The socially constructed nature of masculinities suggests that any prevention work that is done must begin with understanding the experiences of men and youth as they are shaped within society and how masculinities can assist or hinder/reinforce patterns of male oppression and domination over women.

Connell's (2005) work in understanding how the masculine self develops and the ways in which masculinity can be problematic through perpetuating sexual exploitation is an important starting point when working with male youth. These concepts can vary across time, social spaces and culture. As such, Connell believes that the most accurate way to consider masculinity is as a social practice that is constructed overtime and similarly, may change over time. Men, boys and youth are all subjected to specific ways of socialization into their own masculinities according to their culture, race, and age (Connell, 2005). This is an important component of the socialization process because it infers that masculinities are constructed and can be altered either through peer association, education or through personal change.

Connell extends the importance of masculinity as a social construct through considering that there are multiple types of masculinity that impact how men engage in relationships and experience power. Connell believes that masculinity is best considered as a relational construct. As a result, she offers four types of masculinity that account for men's positioning in society and relation to one another. These include hegemonic masculinity, subordinated masculinity, complicit masculinity, and marginalized masculinity.

Hegemonic masculinity is the terminology that most appropriately contributes to understanding the gender relations associated with sexual exploitation. According to Connell, hegemonic masculinity can be understood as the pattern of practice(s) that allow men's dominance over women to occur (2005, p. 77). Hegemonic masculinity is a historically mobile relation that occurs across time in an effort to sustain patriarchy. Hegemonic masculinity does not necessarily mean violence, rather it is a way of achieving ascendancy through culture, institutions and persuasion (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). In this way, most men might benefit from the existence of hegemonic masculinity, despite the fact that few might enact the power and control required to sustain it. Hegemonic masculinity is normative in nature and requires other men to position themselves in relation to it.

Not all men occupy or enact hegemonic masculinity. There are other types of masculinities that operate in relation to hegemonic masculinities. Men and youth who benefit from the presence of hegemonic masculinity without enacting the masculine dominance are typically regarded as showing a complicit masculinity (Connell, 2005). Their ability to benefit is associated with being male and the presence of the subordination of those who occupy less powerful groups. Subordinated masculinities are often utilized to refer to the masculinities of gay men who, as a result of the relation to the dominant masculinity (hegemonic) experience oppression (Connell, 2005). Marginalized masculinities are utilized to highlight the "interplay of gender with other structures such as class and race" (Connell, 2005, p. 80). Marginalized masculinity also always occurs in relation to the dominant masculinity (hegemonic) and is typically utilized to structure conversations that examine institutional oppression, racism and poverty.

### **Toxic Masculinity**

Following the ideas related to hegemonic masculinity and its role in the development of the male self, it is important to understand the role that toxic masculinity may play in the promotion and endorsement of sexual exploitation by

male youth. Toxic masculinity is useful in discussions about gender and forms of masculinity because;

... it delineates those aspects of hegemonic masculinity that are socially destructive, such as misogyny, homophobia, greed and violent domination; and those that are culturally accepted and valued (Kupers, 2005, p. 716)

Toxic masculinity suggests that there are aspects of masculinity that are nontoxic such as being dedicated to one's children. However, toxic masculinity is constructed of those aspects of hegemonic masculinity that fosters domination over others (Kupers, 2005, p. 717). Male behaviour associated with toxic masculinity often may include:

incapacity to nurture, a dread of dependency, a readiness to resort to violence, and the stigmatization and subjugation of women, gays, and men who exhibit feminine characteristics (Kupers, 2005, p717).

Toxic masculinity plays an integral role in traffickers' success, how traffickers recruit and sell the people they exploit, and perhaps even their belief systems. In terms of sexual exploitation, traffickers capitalize on, and perpetuate toxic masculinity by enforcing, either overtly or covertly, that their manhood entitles them to ownership over, and access to, girls and women as sexual objects. Within trafficking networks, women are often placed in low ranking positions "in order to carry out duties more exposed to the risk of being caught and prosecuted" (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2009). Male traffickers secure more powerful roles in trafficking hierarchies as well as higher levels of immunity to being caught.

### **Implications of hegemonic and toxic masculinities**

Hegemonic masculinity perpetuates the dominance of a very specific group of individuals (typically, white males) over other less powerful groups, including women and other marginalized males. The ideas embedded within both hegemonic and toxic masculinities can give rise to other social contexts that perpetuate sexual exploitation within the human trafficking umbrella. Two significant ideas that are related and reinforced by hegemonic and toxic masculinities are rape culture and the fantasy-reality gap.

## Rape culture

The idea of rape culture is predicated on the notion that hegemonic and toxic masculinities reinforce the use of aggression and violence by men to maintain dominance over women. Rape culture is a culture in which rape and other sexualized violence are common, and the prevalent attitudes, norms, and practices of culture normalize, condone, excuse, encourage, or ignore rape and other forms of sexual violence (Nicoletti, 2010). It is also important to note that sexualized violence is not limited to the dynamic of men being violent toward women, it may also include men experiencing sexualized violence. However, women experience much higher rates of sexualized violence, and when men do experience this form of violence, it is also most often at the hands of other men.

Rape culture supports human trafficking because it allows for sexist and violent attitudes, which traffickers take advantage of, to spread and grow. There is a significant de-sensitization towards issues around sexual exploitation and human trafficking throughout Canadian society, based on the notion that it is not an issue that takes place within Canada and seems unrealistic. Rape culture exacerbates this desensitization by normalizing contributing factors to sexual exploitation, such as hyper-sexualized messages about women as well as assuming that men have an inherent right and control over women's bodies.

## The Fantasy-Reality Gap

One of the ways that sexual exploitation continues to be perpetrated is through the images and opportunities available through mainstream and online media to live within a fantasy world. Modern technology has made it easier to access materials that promote 'ideal' lifestyle or provide the ability to fulfill fantasies. Mainstream media reinforces and contributes to an ever increasing '*fantasy-reality gap*'. The 'fantasy-reality gap' is a phenomenon characterized by the failure to differentiate between fiction, particularly as portrayed in popular media, and reality. For example, there is a fantasy-reality gap when teenagers see the treatment of women in music videos or video games, and assume this is 'normal' behavior. This actively exacerbates the issue of human trafficking due, in large part, to the amplification of domination culture and unhealthy stereotypes.

One example from the mainstream media that demonstrates the fantasy-reality gap is the notion of 'pimping'. The glorification of the term 'pimp' has direct linkages with sex trafficking. The word 'pimp' has become so glorified and ingrained in our society that it is often used as a verb 'to pimp' an object or other

individual in a demonstrative and impressive manner. The relationship between extravagance and 'pimping' that led to this linguistic change is the idea that a pimp can afford to be extravagant by virtue of making large sums from exploiting and brutalizing others. The glorification of the pimp lifestyle promotes erroneously positive notions about pimps and pimping, desensitizing the public to the realities of sex trafficking and contributes to the fantasy-reality gap. It is important to note how communities of colour are impacted by stereotypes associated with 'pimp' culture. Poverty, lack of opportunities and socio-economic factors are some of the issues that need to be taken into account when unpacking the glorification and stereotypes of 'pimping'.

### **The Role of Women Traffickers**

One of the unique aspects associated with human trafficking and in particular, sexual exploitation is the involvement of women as recruiters or traffickers of young women and girls. In order to ensure that any conversation regarding sexual exploitation incorporates all aspects of this issue, it is necessary to develop an understanding of the reasons why some women may engage in the trafficking of other women and girls.

One helpful way of understanding this behaviour is through identifying and discussing the impact of sexism or misogyny on women and girls themselves. This is best described as the belief by some girls and women that the sexist stereotypes and myths about women in a sexist society are true (Cultural Bridges to Justice, 2014).

Women and girls may choose to embody traits often associated with hegemonic masculinity or toxic masculinity. The result is often the perpetuating of harmful sexist attitudes against other girls and women. When the beliefs of male superiority and entitlement, and female inferiority and submissiveness, are internalized, girls are more likely to accept emotional abuse, followed by the other forms of abuse traffickers perpetrate. They may do this in order to gain social acceptance from, or feel valued by, boys and men. In the case of female traffickers, internalized misogyny may allow for them to 'reject' their femininity in a bid to increase their value in their own, and their traffickers' eyes. This may make it easier for them to abuse other girls and women because they fail to identify as members of the same group.

## The Lives of Boys

In addition to understanding how masculinities influence male behaviours, developing a prevention-based strategy must consider the lives and experiences of male youth. Similar to the work done by Connell regarding masculinities, it is important to understand that the lived experiences of youth are socially constructed. Society has adopted and perpetuates messages that suggest that there are very specific ways that boys and girls should behave. Many of these behaviours are often considered 'traditional' ways but are more likely to be based within power structures or ways of maintaining power over others (Kivel, 1999). As part of the socialization process, youth receive very distinct messages from various aspects of society that influence and shape their behaviour. These messages are found throughout society and can come from the media, peers, parents, adults, teachers, sports icons, advertising, etc. As Kivel (1999) notes, the real challenge for individuals working with youth is to "acknowledge the tremendous influence of socially created gender divisions and traditional male roles without accepting them as natural" (p.10).

The lives of male youth are complex and influenced by many different sources that occur as part of their daily routines. However the implication of the socialization process for boys has a profound impact on their ability to deviate or behave in any way other than that which has been defined as socially acceptable. Several authors have discussed the implications associated with this socialization process. Kivel's (1999) work regarding the 'Act Like a Man Box' is an excellent example of how young boys are socialized to act in a certain way. Behaviours that fall in line within accepted norms of 'boyhood' are reinforced through positive feedback. Kivel suggests that the narrowness of the Box prepares boys (and subsequently men) to be emotionally absent and unable to express themselves in sincere and genuine ways. He further suggests that the pressure to act like a man results in false beliefs regarding women and places many youth on the path to occupying employment positions based on power and control (Kivel, 1999).

Similarly, Pollack (1998) suggests that an unwritten Boy Code largely guides the lives of boys. This Boy Code is "a set of behaviours, rules of conduct, cultural shibboleths and even a lexicon that is inculcated into boys by our society (Pollack, 1998, p. xxv). This code is also referred to as a mask that some boys utilize in order to fit into peer groups or to simply exist within a society that has targeted them with unrealistic expectations of manhood. The boy code is a

restrictive and debilitating social construction that limits boys' ability to be themselves.

### Healthy Masculinities

In contrast to the toxic and hegemonic masculinities that are central to understanding how men construct their identities and how these masculinities reinforce oppression of women and girls, it is equally important for prevention-based programming to emphasize the importance of healthy masculinities. In much the same manner that other masculinities can be socially constructed, so are healthy masculinities. Unfortunately, greater attention is often given to the more negative masculinities as they often offer the potential and allure of power and control. Healthy masculinities exist in contrast to the oppressive and power-related ideas of hegemonic masculinities. Healthy masculinities promote gender-equality, a healthy sense of the male self and the importance of healthy relationships. Prevention programs designed to address sexual exploitation serve as an excellent opportunity to create dialogue with youth regarding the healthy aspects of masculinity and create an atmosphere that reinforces healthy masculinity amongst peers.

## Strategies for Engagement

*“Educational work with boys must start with the boys’ own interests, experiences and opinions” (Connell, 2000, p. 169)*

### The Spectrum of Prevention

There are a significant variety of prevention programs in place to address the issue of violence against women (Flood, 2011; Minerson, Carolo, Dinner, Jones, 2011). There have been numerous emergent efforts developed to address this issue in an effort to prevent violence before it occurs. Engaging male youth regarding the issue of sexual exploitation must consider the layered nature of their lives. A prevention strategy must take into consideration an ecological approach to the lives of male youth. In considering the most effective areas of prevention for youth, Flood (2011) and Minerson et al, (2011) suggest beginning at both the individual level and at the community level. Both of these levels of prevention provide for an opportunity to engage in the change process with individuals in ways that are engaging and allow for dynamic interaction with the issue.

The most localized form of prevention is the transferring of information and skills directly to individuals that increases their capacity to prevent or avoid violence against women (Flood, 2011). This might include the involvement of teachers or educators working with boys and youth to increase their equitable attitudes. Prevention efforts among youth can easily address the links and associations between violence against women and poverty, school, employment and other social factors. Prevention strategies at the individual level may also target high risk behaviours such as delinquency or drug use.

The second level of prevention is the promotion of community education (Flood, 2011; Minerson et al, 2011). Prevention programs delivered as educational programs to youth and young adults are the predominant method for addressing the issue of violence against women. This type of intervention can have “positive effects on males’ attitudes toward violence against women” (Flood, 2011, p. 364). Prevention programs that are designed to educate within a community setting such as a secondary school have been found to be effective in changing attitudes of male youth and building empathy by males towards victims. Many of these programs vary in duration and often utilize differing pedagogical

approaches. Regardless, prevention at this level is often associated with positive and lasting change in attitudes and behaviours (Flood, 2011).

### **Key features of effective prevention programs**

In order to engage male youth regarding sexual exploitation, it is necessary to utilize an effective prevention program. The biggest challenges of prevention programming with male youth is to produce change in attitudes, values and behaviours associated with sexual exploitation. In order to truly be effective, these programs must have sufficient intensity and sufficient personal relevance to produce change (Flood, 2004). In order to be effective, Berkowitz (2002, 2004) and others (Minerson et al, 2011) suggest that there are four key features that must be present. They are;

1. **Comprehensive:** They address and involve are relevant community members and systems.
2. **Intensive:** Effective prevention programs offer learning opportunities that are interactive involve participation, are sustained over time and have multiple points of contact with reinforcing messages
3. **Relevant to the audience:** Effective programs are tailored to the participants and take into consideration their needs and concerns.
4. **Based on positive messages:** Effective programs offer positive messages that build on values held by youth that may contradict toxic masculinity. These programs must also offer examples of healthy behaviours and norms and engage individuals regarding their ability to participate in change.

### **Creating male-identified space using male facilitators and peer educators**

Engaging male youth regarding sexual exploitation and human trafficking requires careful consideration regarding the kind of environment the prevention program is delivered in and the gender of the facilitators. In order to effectively

engage boys and male youth regarding sexual exploitation, it is generally considered a good practice to hold male identified sessions that are gender-specific; i.e.; men only. Within male identified environments, youth can build alliances with their peers and begin to collectively challenge their behaviours and values regarding masculinity. The attitudes and behaviours of males are often shaped by their peers. Within male identified sessions, it is possible to encourage the positive aspects of masculinity and create change with other male youth (Flood, 2004). Utilizing male identified sessions has been found to be successful in providing men with a space in which to consider the issue, critically consider violence and sexism and provide the opportunity to shift their attitudes (Berkowitz, 2001).

In addition, it is also generally accepted that in order to create a space where males can unpack and challenge sexist norms, the use of male facilitators is effective. There are several reasons for considering the use of male facilitators. Provided that the male educators have critically reflected on their own masculinity, these individuals can serve as powerful experts regarding the workings of masculinities and the ways in which the lives of male youth are shaped (Flood, 2004). Male facilitators can often act as a representative of those males who do not tolerate violence towards women and therefore role-model equitable, anti-sexist behaviours (Burque, 2009). In addition, these male role models can also demonstrate that it is possible to gain acceptance from other males through holding anti-sexist behaviours and attitudes. Finally, having male youth work together to understand the issue of sexual exploitation is a strong signal of the importance of males working on the issue of ending violence against women.

The literature also suggests that female facilitators and mixed-gender groups may be of some benefit in creating conversations with male youth. It is generally accepted that one of the concerns related to male only groups is the risk of collusion between the men that might reinforce sexist and violent supportive discourses and behaviours (Flood, 2004). Utilizing mixed-sex facilitators provides an opportunity for male youth to see an equitable working partnership and demonstrates that both men and women can be interested in achieving an end to violence against women. Utilizing a mixed-sex group as part of the prevention programming may also be effective in creating dialogue between male and female youth and to build understanding of the experiences of each gender in relation to the expectations from society.

## Educational strategies

Working with youth in either a workshop, training setting or classroom requires consideration of the ways that youth hear, process and interact with the material that is being presented. The relative effectiveness of any prevention program is predicated on the approach utilized. There are many different approaches identified within the literature and supported by the work of male anti-sexist researchers and facilitators. While each theory presents a unique perspective on how to work with male youth, the most often configuration is a synthesis of theory that meets the needs of the particular prevention program. The two most often cited educational strategies are social norms theory and the use of popular education theory. Social norms theory posits that one's behaviour is influenced by the incorrect perceptions of how other members of our social groups think and act (Berkowitz, 2004). Popular education theory is utilized primarily to ground discussions between facilitators and participants in an effort to understand and build critical consciousness regarding the issue (Burque, 2009). The use of both of these theories as educational strategies are, in some ways, an extension of the orientation toward the issue as noted above i.e.; that gender and masculinities are socially constructed and in order to promote prevention, any educational strategy must take into consideration the socialization process.

## Address Social Diversity

Anti-violence prevention strategies with male youth that are designed to address sexual exploitation must take into consideration the complex intersections of class, race and ethnicity (Flood, 2002-2003). The individual experiences of each youth will influence the setting in which the prevention program is delivered. These experiences are influenced by the day-to-day lives of male youth. This might include cultural or religious beliefs, their race or ethnicity, their socio-economic status, physical ability and their family background. They might also include messages received through their consumption of media, their interaction with social agents (police, child welfare or the criminal justice system), and their peers. It is important to validate and consider the context of the lived-experiences of the male youth entering a prevention program. As Flood (2004) notes, "violence prevention efforts must engage with local cultures among men [youth], and sub-cultures among groups or gangs of young men, which endorse violence against women" (p. 7).

Effectively engaging male youth regarding the issue of sexual exploitation requires acknowledgement of the diversity of experiences and the ways in which

they have benefitted from these experiences and the ways that they may have been victimized. This would offer an opportunity to explore the ways in which they have power and the ways that they may have felt disempowered that can subsequently be utilized to build empathy within the prevention work.

### Importance of the School setting

The school setting acts as a double-edged sword when considering the issues of gender, masculinity, sexual exploitation and human trafficking. It is within the school setting that much of the gender socialization of boys occurs. It is where their peer group is often formed and their identity further develops and is tested or challenged. Peer culture has some of its greatest influence during a relatively short period of time. Schools are essentially 'gender regimes' that act as a masculinity-making device (Connell, 2000). It is also possible to consider that school environments are gendered in their approach to some subjects. They are often used to control behaviours to ensure that, mostly boys, are appropriately behaved. School environments are the vortex through which power, symbolism and emotion are developed through participation in sport.

Despite the challenges associated with the school setting, it represents an excellent opportunity to challenge many of the gendered norms that are found within hegemonic/toxic masculinities and provide a venue for students to seek alternatives to many of the dominant ideologies. Kindler (as cited in Connell, 2000) identified three main goals related to educational strategies in work with boys. These include knowledge, developing boys' capacity for relationships and learning anti-sexist behaviour. These can be broadly applied to the issue of sexual exploitation.

### Knowledge

The goal of building knowledge with boys can be considered in two ways. The first goal is to challenge the current ideas and patterns that boys are subjected to as a result of their masculinity formulations – how they are socialized influences the kinds of knowledge they are exposed to and are prepared to accept. The second kind of knowledge is related to gender, their own and others. Simply learning about the experiences of others and having an opportunity to critically examine existing culture can significantly influence interaction patterns.

## Human Relationships

School education is preparation for later life and involves developing the capacity to establish healthy relationships. There are concerns that the current school system is gender-specialized and does not provide an integrative component that would assist in developing healthy relationships. School programs that emphasize communication skills, conflict resolution, gender awareness; valuing girls and 'feminine' qualities and life relationship goals promote both gender equity and emotional support for boys (Connell, 2000, p. 165).

## Justice

The issue of justice in working with boys begins with acknowledging that, generally, they are not a disadvantaged group. It is important to consider that while boys might do poorly in some aspects of the educational system, for example reading scores, these are not indicators of disadvantage, rather they are evidence of a short-term cost of maintaining long term privilege as they are streamed towards hegemonic masculinity reinforcing activities such as sports (Connell, 2000). However for some boys residing in communities where poverty is an issue, the issue of social justice within education is likely going to require examining their masculinity as well. This extends to consider the layers of oppression that exist within the school settings that restrict self-expression and participation. Boys are part of both sides of these challenges, some perpetuate oppressive practices and some are victims. Pursing justice in schools "requires addressing the gender patterns that support these practices" (Connell, 2000, p. 167).

## Promising practices

Central to any work being done regarding sexual exploitation and human trafficking is the need to promote gender equality. Due to the gender disparity in trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation, engaging men and boys around the promotion of gender equality should be the central figure of any program. The following have been identified as practices that support the engagement of boys and male youth in discussions regarding human trafficking and sexual exploitation.

### Deconstructing human trafficking through exploring supporting concepts

The best alternative to using confusing legal definitions is to deconstruct human trafficking with students by exploring key concepts and ideas that arise when looking at the issue. Once they understand the elements of human trafficking, students will be able to demonstrate their knowledge by re-incorporating the key concepts into the legal definition.

A promising practice, developed by Persons Against the Crime of Trafficking Humans (PACT) located in Ottawa, Ontario, is the facilitation of sessions that involve students understanding and critiquing issues such as how gender and relationships are portrayed in popular media. This usually involves showing clips of videos or other media followed by facilitating an interactive, student-led, conversation that touches on key concepts such as sexism, abusive relationships and stereotypes. These conversations prepare students to naturally identify the links between these topics and human trafficking themselves (see <http://www.pact-ottawa.org/> for greater detail).

### Distinguish between an abusive relationship and a healthy relationship

Many exploited girls and young women perceive their exploiter to be a good friend or dating partner. Ensuring students understand the qualities of an abusive relationship or toxic friendship may assist them in identifying and rejecting the grooming stage of a trafficking scenario. Understanding abusive relationships can also encourage students to set and uphold their boundaries in their friendships and relationships, and seek support when needed. Refer to Appendix

A for examples of activities that can be utilized to identify healthy and unhealthy relationships.

### Examine masculine culture and develop/promote non-violence cultures

Prevention programs designed to address male violence and to challenge male actions and beliefs have benefitted from addressing the masculine culture that exists in our society and from the development of a culture of non-violence, particularly within a school setting. Central to prevention programs is the need to provide opportunity and space for young men to safely and openly discuss how masculine culture is shaping their values and beliefs. Several examples of activities that can engage male youth in these kinds of discussions can be found in the work of Paul Kivel, in particular, his book entitled, *Boys Will Be Men: Raising our sons for courage, caring and community* (Kivel, 1999). Beyond the engagement of male youth, is also the development of a non-violent culture within which male youth can take a leadership role. School settings are excellent venues to foster discussions regarding human trafficking and sexual exploitation.

### Addressing Toxic Masculinity as a contributing factor

Educators can help youth identify toxic masculinity and consider what students can do to bring about healthy masculinity and internalized gender equality in their capacity as bystanders.

They can challenge students to recognize examples of toxic masculinity in the media, in their societies, communities, schools and homes. Educators can provide them with opportunities to creatively re-write scripts of popular shows and advertisements, or the lyrics of songs so that they have healthy messaging. Perhaps teachers can get students to then act out their new scripts or sing the song with their newly created lyrics.

Boys and men can play a particularly large role in reaching gender equality by promoting healthy masculinities amongst other healthy identities. Whereas toxic masculinity is a construction of manhood that resides in notions of dominance and men as being superior, *healthy masculinity* promotes men as allies with other human beings, rather than ownership over them.

Healthy masculinity also includes encouraging self-respect as the first step in respecting others; celebrating strength, and equally identifying the misuse of strength to cause harm as weakness; respecting and encouraging everyone's freedom to emotional expression; demanding equality for all people; and

removing labels that force men and boys into stereotyped straight-jackets that limit their ability to act as whole, authentic beings.

Similarly, it is equally important that girls discuss the role of toxic masculinity in their lives and what improvements they think might arise if they were in environments where healthy masculinity is present in their environments. These discussions can help them consider what effects they think redefining masculinity would have on their own expectations of what is considered healthy male behaviours and attitudes.

### **Provoke critical thought when discussing topics such as human trafficking**

Fostering critical thinking can be done in a variety of ways within the curriculum, or by watching clips of popular media and facilitating exercises whereby students deconstruct gender, violence, hyper-sexualization and domination culture after watching the clips. Encouraging students to engage in critical thinking can shape their ability to accurately assess fantasy-reality gaps and allows them to take leadership over their own emotional and intellectual development. It also equips them with the skills required to be discerning in their life choices. The use of educational strategies that provide opportunity to critically assess the issue, information and that enhances the development of a critical consciousness is strongly encouraged.

### **Youth-led conversations, activities and initiatives**

Youth-led work is one of the most effective ways of building knowledge within primary prevention programs (Minerson et al., 2011). Youth who are afforded an opportunity to 'own' the material and information are more likely to adopt an anti-trafficking stance and champion the cause. Youth champions of anti-human trafficking messages can be the most impactful because their messages are relevant to their peers, they can serve as effective role-models, and have a full life of activism ahead of them. Similarly, the most effective, impactful champions of changing toxic masculinity into healthy masculinity are boys and young men. (See Appendix A for examples)

### **Offer additional support**

Interventions among boys and young men should be complimented by other "strategies aimed at addressing particularly intensive forms of support for violence in peer cultures and group norms, such as peer education and

mentoring” (Flood, 2011, p. 365). There is evidence that suggests that peer support is an important predictor of men’s perpetration of sexual and physical abuse (Flood & Pease, 2006 as cited in Flood, 2011). Those men or male youth who have ‘rape-supporting social relationships’ are more likely to be abusive towards women. As such, the development of peer leadership and the involvement of non-violent men as role models and peer educators can be effective tools in the engagement of male youth in the prevention of sexual exploitation.

## Conclusion

The lives of young boys and men are filled with hope and promise. Adolescence is a particularly exciting time when young males begin to develop their own identities, discover the world around them and actively construct their self. However, it is also a time marked by vulnerability, peer pressure and other external pressures that fill their lives with toxic ideas of masculinities and pressure to ‘act like a real man’. Nowhere is this more obvious than when considering how ideas like hegemonic and toxic masculinities perpetuate male involvement in human trafficking and sexual exploitation. These very concepts are also responsible for narrowing the healthy masculine options available to young men.

Now more than ever, it is imperative that educators engage young boys and men on the issue of human trafficking and, in particular, sexual exploitation. The issue of human trafficking is no longer an abstract idea that involves only the movement of individuals across borders. Rather it is a very real issue facing many urban centres across Canada. It is also likely that many young men and women are aware of situations of sexual exploitation within their own communities. However, they have no outlet with which to discuss this issue. In addition, many young men are beginning to reject the ideas of unhealthy masculinities and are becoming active in working on building gender equality in their communities.

The school setting represents an excellent opportunity to promote primary prevention programs related to human trafficking and sexual exploitation. Schools not only function as an educational conduit, but they represent a major sphere of influence for young men. They also offer the opportunity for young men to experience a safer space within which to discuss both human trafficking and

sexual exploitation and begin to counter the influence of hegemonic masculinities. Educators are key players in this process of engagement. Often, the relationships with educators are one of the most important in the lives of young men as they are often treated as part of the extended family. As such, both the school setting and the importance of educators cannot be overlooked when engaging young men on this issue. While the focus of this report is on engaging boys and young men, it is also important to highlight the need to build girls and young women's resilience and capacity to reject the "grooming phase" of sexual exploitation.

There are no simple solutions to the issues surrounding gender inequality. The nature of human trafficking and sexual exploitation requires engagement of young men within the safe confines of the school setting in order to effectively begin these important conversations. Engagement by educators within the school setting about this issue represents a unique opportunity to transcend many of the current constructions of gender and build increased capacity in many spheres to improve the safety and lives of young women and men.

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## Appendix A

Examples of youth led conversations, activities and initiatives include:

a) Facilitating youth groups.

The FCJ Refugee center uses a promising practice that involves a youth group working on human trafficking issues. They carry out awareness initiatives, make visual aids and discuss important topics surrounding human trafficking.

Ensuring that discussions on the topics that arise are youth-led but facilitated by an adult who is knowledgeable about human trafficking and can create a safe space in which students can both discuss the topics as well as carry out role plays in which they can experiment with how they might respond in a variety of situations.

b) Hosting arts and performance competitions that surround the theme of human trafficking.

Futures Without Violence highlights 'Theme Elements Dance Crew', a youth-based group who "use dance, spoken word, theatre and video to reflect on the causes and effects of violence." Inspiring youth groups to come up with their own solutions in a similar manner not only incentivizes them to do their own research but also dramatically increases the likelihood that they will use language and media that will attract their peers' attention

c) Use activity books like the [Respect Yourself Activity Book](#) which allows students to identify sexually disrespectful songs and then offers them the opportunity to re-write them.

Here are some excellent online resources on how to identify abusive relationships and friendships:

d) [Dating violence warning signs](#) (The Centre for Children and Families in the Justice System)

e) [Unhealthy relationships checklist](#) (The Centre for Children and Families in the Justice System)

- f) [Toxic friendships: relational aggression and covert bullying](#) (Relational Aggression: How to Spot Friendship Bullying)
- g) [Relational Aggression](#) (National Association of School Psychologists)
- h) [Cyber-bullying: spotting the signs](#) (National Crime Prevention Council)
- i) [Healthy friendships and internet safety](#) (Canadian Centre for Child Protection)
- j) [Unhealthy friendships and internet safety](#) (Canadian Centre for Child Protection)

### Draw the Line Campaign

Draw The Line / Tracons les limites is an interactive campaign that aims to engage Ontarians in a dialogue about sexual violence. The campaign challenges common myths about sexual violence and equips bystanders with information on how to intervene safely and effectively. Draw the Line is managed by the Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres (OCRCC) & Action Ontarienne Contre la Violence Faite aux Femmes (AOcVF) in collaboration with a group of partner organizations including White Ribbon.

Posters, postcards, lesson plans, educational videos, and other resources, including scenarios related to sexual exploitation and human trafficking targeting secondary and post-secondary school demographics can be accessed through the campaign website at [www.draw-the-line.ca](http://www.draw-the-line.ca) and [www.whiteribbon.ca/draw-the-line](http://www.whiteribbon.ca/draw-the-line).

### White Ribbon Resources

White Ribbon Canada has considerable resources that are available to educators and community development projects to assist in the development of gender-based programming. These resources can be found at:

[www.whiteribbon.ca](http://www.whiteribbon.ca)

[www.itstartswithyou.ca/index.cfm?pagepath=EDUCATORS/OSSTF\\_e\\_Learning\\_Modules&id=45531](http://www.itstartswithyou.ca/index.cfm?pagepath=EDUCATORS/OSSTF_e_Learning_Modules&id=45531)

[www.whiteribbon.ca/front-page/engaging-men-and-boys-to-reduce-and-prevent-gbv/](http://www.whiteribbon.ca/front-page/engaging-men-and-boys-to-reduce-and-prevent-gbv/)