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Applying Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Intersectionality to Address the Needs of African American Crossover Girls

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Abstract
Youth who are victims of maltreatment and engage in delinquency are at a greater risk of adverse emotional and behavioral outcomes compared to those in the general population (Herz and Dierkhising in 2018; Herz et al. in 2019; Stouthamer-Loeber et al. in 2001). "Crossover youth" is a common, collective term for youth who experience maltreatment and engage in delinquency. Current studies suggest girls and African American youth are more likely to experience crossover between the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Yet, there is little existing scholarship, especially conceptual articles, specific to consideration of both race and gender regarding crossover youth. Critical Race Theory (CRT) and intersectionality are utilized to analyze and better understand the overrepresentation of African American girls who cross over from the child welfare to the juvenile justice system. This article concludes with implications for social work action strategies, for micro and macro social work, including policy and research, to better address the unique needs of this population. Race and racism, and how these overlap with experiences as girls and young women, are central and cannot be disentangled and need to be included as social work pays more attention to addressing the needs of this especially vulnerable sub-population of crossover youth.

Keywords African Americans · Girls · Child welfare · Crossover youth · Juvenile justice

Youth who are victims of maltreatment (e.g., abuse, neglect) and later engage in subsequent delinquency are at a greater risk of adverse emotional and behavioral outcomes compared to those in the general population (Herz & Dierkhising, 2018; Herz et al., 2019; Stouthamer-Loeber, Loeber, Homish, & Wei, 2001). "Crossover youth" is a common, collective term for young people who experience maltreatment and exhibit delinquency (Herz, Ryan, & Bilchik, 2010), thus they shift between the child welfare and juvenile justice systems with estimates as high as 67% of juvenile justice-involved youth having maltreatment and child welfare system histories (Herz, 2012). Current studies suggest girls and African American youth are more likely to experience crossover (Herz, Abbott, & Stewart, n.d.; Scrivner, 2012). Yet, there is little existing conceptual scholarship specific to consideration of both race and gender for this population. Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a theoretical framework that examines race, racism, and power structures (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) and is utilized to inform critical analysis of issues as well as to inform action strategies. One of the tenets of CRT is intersectionality (Cole, 2009; Crenshaw, 1991), which acknowledges the intersecting roles of race and gender in understanding social issues. The goal of this manuscript is to analyze and better understand the overrepresentation of African American girls who cross over from the child welfare to the juvenile justice system by providing an application of CRT, including the concept of intersectionality, and to offer implications for social work practice and policy, as well as set a research agenda that is guided by these perspectives.

This paper is structured as follows. First, the article provides an overview of the population of crossover youth, highlighting the experiences of African American and female youth. Then the analytical approach of CRT as well as intersectionality is introduced and described. This is followed by a brief review of empirical studies specific to African American crossover girls and an application of CRT and intersectionality to African American crossover girls. Last, discussion includes relevance to social work practice, policy, and especially research at micro to macro levels and describe action to be taken by social workers and other professionals.

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CRT and intersectionality inform a research agenda. The intent is to draw attention to the unique needs of African American crossover girls as well as to acknowledge how the issue is in many ways structural, thus applying these conceptual lenses to inform micro and macro changes.

Crossover Youth

Research consistently demonstrates that children and youth who are victims of abuse and/or neglect are at a heightened risk of adverse outcomes compared to non-maltreated children and youth, including delinquency (Herz & Dierkhising, 2018; Herz et al., 2019; Stouthamer-Loeber et al., 2001). Such experiences may have lasting deleterious effects across a range of life domains, including family relationships, academic failure, employment, crime victimization, and public assistance receipt (Courtney, Dworsky, Lee, & Raap, 2009). Terminology varies between jurisdictions, with "crossover youth" referring broadly to a youth who has been a victim of abuse and/or neglect who engages in delinquency (Herz, Ryan, & Bilchik, 2010) and additional terms that are more specific depending on formal involvement in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems (e.g., "dually involved"/"dual adjudication") or geography (e.g., "dual ward," "dual jacket"). Current estimates on the number of crossover youth who shift between the child welfare and juvenile justice systems are difficult to ascertain due to lack of national statistics. In samples of juvenile justice-involved youth, though, Herz found about 67% of young people had a maltreatment history (2012). Other estimates, among samples of child welfare-involved youth who cross over into the juvenile justice system, are between 9 and 29% (Kelley, Thornberry, & Smith, 1997; Smith & Thornberry, 1995; Widom, 1989; Zingraff, Leiter, Myers, & Johnsen, 1993). The pathway from maltreatment to delinquency is not deterministic, yet a substantial number of abused or neglected youth exhibit delinquent behaviors. One study showed that there is a 47% increased likelihood of delinquency among maltreated youth (Ryan & Testa, 2005). Crossover youth are also younger in age at the time of their first arrest when compared to youth without child welfare system histories (Herz, 2012).

The child welfare and juvenile justice systems themselves also play a role in the lives of youth who experience maltreatment and exhibit delinquency. When youths are involved in the child welfare system, the likelihood of juvenile justice system contact also arises through a "child welfare bias" in that assumptions are made about youth with child welfare system histories, such as having a lack of social support from adults (Ryan, Herz, Hernandez, & Marshall, 2007); thus, they are more likely to be detained for formal case processing (Conger & Ross, 2006) and receive harsh sanctions (Ryan et al., 2007) than youth without child welfare system histories. Although many jurisdictions have taken measures to address this vulnerable group of young people, such as having a "one judge, one family" model where the same judge oversees maltreatment and delinquency cases, in other places crossover youth are a "hidden population" in that there is a lack of formal data and information sharing which results in professionals in one system being unaware that a youth is involved in the other (Herz et al., 2010). Research suggests that crossover youth are also susceptible to deeper penetration into the juvenile justice system (i.e., more likely to become further entrenched in the system at decision-making points). A study in Arizona found that dual-system youth comprised increasingly higher proportions in juvenile justice: 1% of diversion youth had prior child welfare system contact, 7% of probation supervision youth, 11% of detained youth, 12% of youth in Arizona's Department of Juvenile Corrections, and 42% concurrently on probation and in a private group home or residential treatment (Halemba, Siegel, Lord, & Zawacki, 2004).

Race and Crossover Youth

Children and youth who are African American are overrepresented in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems (Hill, 2006; Snyder & Sickmund, 2006); similarly, evidence supports that crossover youth are more likely to be African American (Goodkind, Shook, Kim, Pohlig, & Herring; 2013; Herz, 2012; Huang, Ryan, & Hertz, 2012; Ryan & Testa, 2005). In a study in Los Angeles, youth who were African American were 10% of the general population, 37% of child protective services referrals, 28% of probation referrals, and 63% of crossover youth cases (Herz & Ryan, 2008). African American youth, when compared to white youth, penetrate deeper into both systems (e.g., having a case dismissed versus receiving probation as an outcome in the juvenile justice system) when controlling for variables including age, gender, neighborhood poverty, and maltreatment type (Ards, Myers, Malkis, Sugrue, & Zhou, 2003; DeLone & DeLone, 2017; Needell, Brookhart, & Lee, 2003; Ryan et al., 2007). Evidence also supports that they are overrepresented among child welfare system youth who experience placement outside the home. Among a deep-end child welfare system youth sample, who had at least a full year in out-of-home placement, approximately two-thirds were African American (Kolivoski, Shook, Goodkind, & Kim, 2014a) despite the general population of African American children at around 18%.

Gender and Crossover Youth

Although delinquency and juvenile justice system contact are typically associated with boys, existing research suggests that girls are disproportionately represented among

child welfare-involved youth who cross over into the juvenile justice system (Herz, 2012; Herz, Abbott, & Stewart, n.d.). Among the general population of youth, the percent of arrests for girls has increased, with the proportion of females around 30% in 2015 (Puzzanchera & Ehrmann, 2018). Girls also may be more susceptible to negative effects of crossover when compared to boys. Herz and Ryan (2008), for example, found that girls involved in the juvenile justice system were more likely than boys to have multiple issues related to mental health. Girls who have experienced child abuse or witnessed violence between parents are over seven times as likely as girls without such histories to commit violence that is referred to the juvenile justice system (Herrera & McCloskey, 2001). Comparing delinquent girls with and without child welfare histories, Dannerbeck-Janku, Peters, and Perkins (2014) found that child maltreatment, as operationalized by official records, petitions, and self-reports, was "significantly, but weakly" associated with violent behavior (p. 780). The reasons for higher crossover among girls compared to boys are not fully known, but trauma experiences, family histories, and sexual abuse are likely substantial factors (Kerig & Ford, 2014; Saar, Epstein, Rosenthal, & Vafa, 2015; Smith, Chamberlain, & Deblinger, 2012).

Of concern is that girls may be more vulnerable to crossing over and have additional adverse life domain effects than boys upon crossing over, yet due to the higher numbers of delinquent boys, many services may not be tailored to the specific needs of crossover girls. Girls involved in the juvenile justice system may be less likely than boys to have their service needs met (Munson & Freundlich, 2005). Few, if any, studies specifically have tested whether girls have better outcomes than boys when they receive gender-specific services (Leve, Chamberlain, & Kim, 2015). Additionally, even when receiving gender-specific services, such services may not fully meet their needs, as they need to be more accepting of broader categories of gender and include recognition of girls' agency (Goodkind, 2005).

Given that youth who are African American and girls are more likely to experience cross over between the child welfare and juvenile justice system, scholarship needs to pay attention to this specific issue. There is little existing scholarship, especially conceptual work, that explicitly considers both race and gender regarding crossover youth to provide direction for future work.

Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a theoretical framework that examines race, racism, and power structures that is used to guide critical analysis of issues to inform action strategies (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). CRT aims to examine relationships between race, racism, and power, and specifically the status quo of white supremacy into the fabric of society, the lack of acknowledgement of experiences of people of color, and provides new perspectives into how race and power maintain racial inequality. CRT asserts that race is socially constructed; racial differences are created, spread, and supported by society; racism is "complex, subtle, and flexible" in that it reveals itself depending on the context and changing stereotypes of people who are minorities (Gillborn, 2015, p. 278). CRT emphasizes that structural racism needs to be understood within the broader social, economic, and historical context (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993). Through an analysis from a CRT lens, the possibility of social change may occur. The academic origins of CRT are rooted in legal studies and education; more recently, scholars in social work have published articles describing and/or applying CRT (e.g., Kolivoski, Weaver, & Constance-Huggins, 2014b). Broadly, anti-racism frameworks and critical theories that incorporate CRT tenets in social work research and scholarship have consistently addressed issues of mass incarceration, the prison industrial complex, and practices in the child welfare system.

CRT is multi-faceted and broad, and some of its main theoretical elements include: racism as ordinary (Bell, 1992, 1995), whiteness as the ultimate property (Harris, 1995), counter-storytelling the unique voice of color (Matsuda, 1991), and intersectionality (Combahee River Collective, 1977; Crenshaw, 1991). The first, racism as ordinary, means that racism is so engrained in U.S. society that it is difficult for many to recognize, thus making it harder to effectively address (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). CRT posits that whiteness has the ultimate value, meaning that being a member of the racial majority affords leverage to maintain advantages and privileges among whites (Harris, 1995). Given the historical emphasis on the white experience, the unique voice of people of color is included as a part of CRT to provide the opportunity for people to share their lived experiences via counter-storytelling, and to change the narrative regarding people historically considered the "other" relative to whites. The last, intersectionality, is described in further detail in the next section.

Intersectionality

Given CRT's emphasis on the centrality of racism in U.S. society, it is of interest to examine the role of how racial inequities are influenced by other aspects of identities and social structures while including race (Gillborn, 2015). Intersectionality refers to an analytic framework that recognizes the interrelated and complex nature of gender, sexuality, class, and race, including broader power relations (Davis, 2008). Instead of examining these as separate, intersectionality recognizes

that they cannot be understood in isolation and they mutually impact one another (Collins, 1998). The Combahee River Collective (1977), comprised of Black feminists, first formally described the concurrent overlap of race and sex on oppression. The concept has more historical origins, with some early Black scholars advocating for activism that acknowledged both race and sex, which was less common than focusing on one construct (Cole, 2009). CRT includes considerations of intersectionality, and the term is credited to CRT leading scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw. Specific to CRT, intersectionality involves examining overlapping and intersecting social identities as they are associated with structural and systemic oppression and discrimination (Crenshaw, 1991). The African American Policy Forum (AAPF), of which Crenshaw is a cofounder, describes the term as follows: "Intersectionality is a concept that enables us to recognize the fact that perceived group membership can make people vulnerable to various forms of bias, yet because we are simultaneously members of many groups, our complex identities can shape the specific way we each experience that bias" (AAPF; Intersectionality, 2013). Thus, intersectionality considers the multidimensional nature and within-group heterogeneity of subgroups of people. For instance, how one experiences racism may differ based on one's gender or the different experiences of sexism between white women and women of color. One benefit of analyzing issues through an intersectional lens is the ability to capture complex social issues more comprehensively to impact more all-encompassing solutions (Old Boys Network, n.d.).

Utilizing critical reflection with intersectionality is an analytic approach that emphasizes the role of social structures such as gender, sexuality, class, and race, as well as marginalization and oppression of some groups in society (Mattsson, 2013). The term "matrix of domination," first described by Patricia Hill Collins (1990), and then expanded upon by Crenshaw (1991), describes the broader social organization within which intersecting oppression related to privilege, oppression, race, and sex are formulated and contained, and add to the understanding of how systems of domination operate. Another strength is that it is not only to be used as a tool for analysis, but also one for social action. Gillborn (2015) describes this "core *activist* component" that "aims to generate coalitions between different groups with the aim of resisting and changing the status quo" (p. 279).

Existing Studies on African American Crossover Girls

This section will specifically review literature on female African American crossover youth and apply relevant concepts from CRT and intersectionality. To locate this scholarship, Academic Search Premier/EBSCOhost, Google Scholar, and JSTOR were the main databases searched for peer-reviewed journal publication. Search terms included "crossover," "crossover youth," "African American," "Black," "female," "girls," "dually-involved," "child welfare," "juvenile justice," "Critical Race Theory," "intersectionality," and combinations of these. Of note, studies that included "crossover" but were referring to other types of cross-system or cross-over issues were filtered out.

Despite existing research that indicates that youth who are girls and African American are more likely to experience cross over between the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, few empirical studies specifically address this population, and, to the best of this author's knowledge, there is currently no peer-reviewed, published empirical work, solely focused on a sample female African American crossover youth. Typically, they are a sub-population of demographics among a larger, diverse sample (e.g., Kolivoski et al., 2017a; Goodkind et al., 2013; Scrivner, 2012; Vidal et al., 2017). Appropriate quantitative methods specific to the inquiry of this group could provide more in-depth information (Jayaratne & Stewart, 1991) that is beneficial to African American girls. There is also a paucity of research that integrates empirical research with a CRT and/or intersectional lens with crossover youth. However, given the existing, relevant scholarship on topics such as the school-to-prison pipeline, the prison industrial complex, and the child welfare/foster care industrial complex, additional works of scholars are drawn from as needed to focus specifically on African American crossover girls; they are just not covered in detail here. This next section will highlight studies that include African American female crossover youth as specific studies on African American crossover girls as important subsamples, including the theoretical frameworks that informed them.

Some existing research does include this specific subpopulation as part of broader, empirical studies. One of the first studies to explicitly connect crossover youth, overrepresentation of African American youth, and CRT is a mixed-methods study by Marshall (2012) and subsequent publication in a peer-reviewed journal (Marshall & Haight, 2014). Although not a study that sampled crossover youth directly, professionals working in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems were asked about racial disproportionality, racial sensitivity, and the relationship between the two. The goals of the study were to examine why youth who are African American are overrepresented among the crossover youth population and to examine the relationship between professionals' explanations and their own racial perceptions. More than a quarter of the sample of professionals independently mentioned race as a factor related to cross over between the child welfare and juvenile justice systems (Marshall, 2012). Professionals also described factors they identified as specific to African American youth crossover:

(1) distrust of authorities due in part to racial socialization from the youth's home experiences, (2) lack of communication between legal authorities and African American people, and (3) structural racism within the two systems (Marshall, 2012). Differences emerged on racial self-identity in that Black professionals and professionals who worked in the child welfare system had less colorblind views of race in the United States when compared to white professionals and professionals who worked in law enforcement, with the former placing greater emphasis on macro and systems-level factors as contributors to racial disproportionality among crossover youth versus child, parent, and family-level factors (Marshall, 2012). Although the study did not explicitly address the interactions of gender and race for African American youth who experience cross over, the interpretation of the results through, in part, a CRT lens, contributed as a strength of the study to inform improved professional practices that can reduce racial disproportionalities. This includes consideration of how intentional and unintentional practices and policies reinforce white supremacy and racial oppression.

Baglivio et al. (2016) researched maltreatment cases of deep-end (i.e., youth who completed out-of-home placements in the juvenile justice system) crossover youth in Florida and compared subgroups by race/ethnicity and gender to assess likelihood of recidivism in the juvenile justice system. Exposure to adverse childhood experiences (e.g., physical abuse, family violence, household mental illness) was significantly related to likelihood of placement within the child welfare system, but child welfare placement only had a significant impact on recidivism for white and Hispanic youth, not Black youth (Baglivio et al., 2016). For youth completing juvenile justice residential programs, the status of one's crossover youth case (e.g., whether a case had prior involvement in a system or there was a current, open case) was unrelated to Black boys' and girls' delinquent re-offending (Baglivio et al., 2016). Neither a CRT or intersectionality framework were utilized in this study; the primary theory that informed this work was Moffitt's (1993) developmental taxonomy, which examines different pathways of juvenile offending as influenced by neuropsychological deficits, parenting practices, and youth behaviors as interacting with the environment. More recent work has criticized Moffitt's work, finding that a child's environment is a key moderator in understanding anti-social behavior (Fairchild et al., 2013).

More recently, Williams-Butler (2018) examined individual, contextual, and systems level promotive factors that reduced the likelihood of delinquency among 534 adolescents in foster care in Illinois. Results suggest some important factors to consider regarding gender among African American crossover youth. For both boys and girls, younger age and less time spent in the child welfare system were associated with less likelihood of delinquent behavior (Williams-Butler, 2018). Yet, school achievement, caregiver resources, and time spent in the child welfare system had a greater influence on delinquency reduction among African American boys, and age had a greater impact on African American girls. Williams-Butler (2018) asserts the need for an intersectional approach that considers both race and gender in the adolescent development of African American girls. The primary theoretical framework that informed this study, though, was on resilience (e.g., Masten, 2001, 2007), which has received criticism for the focus of change being on the individual, and not the broader environment (Bottrell, 2009).

Application of CRT and Intersectionality to African American Crossover Girls

Building on the existing empirical work on African American crossover girls, this next section applies how the CRT concepts of race and structure, history, counter-storytelling, and intersectionality can be applied to this issue.

Race and Structure

Race and racism are socially constructed, and applying CRT helps to uncover underlying oppression of African American girls, particularly as oppression is complex and can be in a latent form. With race and racism built into the structure of society, crossover youth issues need to be analyzed from a macro or structural perspective. However, the dominant narrative is that when youth of color exhibit delinquency, it is more likely interpreted as a negative individual-level trait that accompanies a perception of future dangerousness among juvenile justice system professionals, which includes recommendations for harsher punishment (Bridges & Steen, 1998; Graham & Lowery, 2004). Compared to white girls of the same age, African American girls are viewed as more mature and independent, needing less nurture and protection, and more knowledgeable about sex and adult topics (Epstein, Blake, & González, 2016). Marshall and Haight (2014) found that when youth and families used language and demonstrated behaviors that were not preferred by child welfare and juvenile justice professionals, negative assumptions, particularly around race, may be made and they receive heavier sanctions.

Because racism is engrained in U. S. society, a race-conscious, critical lens needs to be applied when analyzing this topic, as previous scholarship has laid the foundation on awareness of racial disproportionality (e.g., Derezotes, Poertner, & Testa, 2004). One has to ask oneself if how the overrepresentation of African American children and youth in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems is

approached as well as the lack of attention to it would be the same if other groups were affected in the same way. Consider that in addition to race and sex, that people from lower socioeconomic statuses are disproportionately represented in the child welfare system, as previous, seminal work has acknowledged (e.g., Gil, 1970). Societal-level factors such as poverty play a role in child welfare involvement in that neglect is more common than abuse as the reason for child welfare system involvement (Houshyar, 2014). Thus, it is worth questioning whether and how our system responses would be the same if middle-class white boys were affected in the same way as other youth. Roberts (1999) notes that if someone unfamiliar with the U.S. child welfare system learned about it, the probable conclusion would be that its purpose is not for children's welfare, but instead to control and penalize poor families, especially those who are Black. For African American girls specifically, they are 14 times as likely, when compared to white girls, to receive juvenile court referrals for nonpayment of fines, which may be related to an increased likelihood of being in poverty (Goodkind, 2016).

We need to focus on the structural aspects of the issue to focus away from "blaming the victim" or, holding a youth responsible for situations beyond his or her control. Since the system is problematic, then change needs to occur at the systems level. Thus, structural problems need structural solutions. There is an individual component in that youth need to be held accountable for delinquent behavior and afforded opportunities for rehabilitation, but we cannot overlook the broader aspects of this issue as well. For example, the Strong Black Woman (SBW) is an enduring image in the U.S. describing pressure on Black women to exude a superhuman strength despite adversity, resisting showing vulnerability, and a demonstrating a self-reliance and resourcefulness not asked of other demographic groups. Media images play a role in the enduring nature of this stereotype (Jerald, Ward, Moss, Thomas, & Fletcher, 2017). Although admirable in self-strength and perseverance, it has received criticism for the undue burden placed on Black women to not show self-vulnerability, as well as asking them to be superheroes for everyone (e.g., Watson-Singleton, 2017). Similarly, scholarship has described "armoring" where Black girls and women are taught survival skills and strategies for dealing with a racist society that devalues them (Bell & Nkomo, 1998). African American girls in child welfare and juvenile justice have likely experienced trauma, including sexual abuse, that needs to be appropriately addressed by systems. Despite not engaging in delinquent behavior at higher rates than others, the rate of growth of girls in the juvenile justice system, and particularly for girls of color, is growing at disproportionate rates; girls in the juvenile justice system also have disproportionately high experiences as victims of sexual violence (Saar et al., 2015). The reaction that girls may have to sexual abuse and trauma, such as running away, substance abuse, and truancy, are often criminalized, meaning that they are addressed by the justice systems, which then reinforces the sexual abuse to prison trajectory (Saar et al., 2015). One study found that rates of alcohol and drug use were similar among African American and white girls, but African American girls were three times more likely to be brought into the juvenile justice system for drug offenses (Goodkind, 2016). Therefore, it is unfair to overlook this sub-population of crossover youth and ignore their experiences and ask for them to exhibit super-human strength in showing resilience and achieving positive outcomes. For African American girls, the intersection of race and gender may contribute to greater social disadvantages (Seaton & Tyson, 2018).

It is also worth considering the unique experiences that female African American adolescents face in their own lives as well as within the child welfare and juvenile justice system themselves, and the role that systems play in perpetuating inequality. African American girls who come into contact with the child welfare system as teenagers may do so specifically as a result of a "parent–child conflict" (Goodkind, 2016). In entering the child welfare system as teens, they may be placed in congregate care facilities, which are out-of-home settings that are highly structured and monitored by staff 24/7, as opposed to more family-like settings such as kinship or foster care. Being placed in congregate care is related to worse outcomes for girls, such as contact with the juvenile justice system (Goodkind, 2016). Studies show that girls are more likely to run away from placement compared to boys, partially due to factors such as feeling unsafe, abuse, trauma, and experiencing abuse/sexual harassment (Crosland & Dunlap, 2015; Jeanis, Fox, & Muniz, 2019).

Structures and systems are maintained, in part, by behaviors at the individual level that negatively impact African American girls who encounter the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. As Kelly and Varghese note: "Institutions are upheld by both individual practices and institutional policies." (2018, p. 882). Although not easily recognizable, white supremacy influences institutions, such as in setting the standards for what is considered "appropriate" behavior of clients and setting the standard against which people of color are judged; professionals having decision-making capacity that can result in unfair treatment based on race; and defining what the "problem" is when working with clients, thus setting the boundaries and tone for the "solution" (Albrecht & Keen, 2009). There are implicit ways in which authority figures in systems may have racialized gender norms, or ways in which they expect African American girls to act based on a reference point that is typically white and male. Social workers and other professionals working in these systems may have benevolent intentions, but without doing the work of confronting unconscious bias, fears, and

ignorance, can do more harm than intended. For example, in the child welfare system, it is typical that young, female, white caseworkers are tasked with investigating abuse and neglect in neighborhoods they may not be familiar with and ones in which they themselves feel not safe, which in turn impacts their judgement about what is a safe place for a child (Weinberg, 2006). Then involved in the system, it can be difficult for African American parents (and their children) to exit it, as a substantial amount of authority is provided to the caseworker's assessment about the parents meeting the goals of the treatment plan sufficiently to have their children returned home (Chaney & Spell, 2015). More broadly, Roberts (2002) asserts that the child welfare system represents a failure of social policies to appropriately help socioeconomically disadvantaged, particularly Black, parents address the needs of their children. Through benevolent oppression, children are put in out-of-home placements with the justification of protecting them, but the removal from one's home of origin is disruptive itself, and moreover, issues that may have been at the root cause, such as economic disparities, are not adequately rectified (Kelly & Varghese, 2018). Child welfare caseworkers need to walk the fine line between perceptions of risk, and race may play a role (Dettlaff et al., 2011). This then reinforces a negative narrative about African American families as neglectful.

Additionally, research suggests the lasting impact of having a history of child welfare system contact upon involvement with the juvenile justice system in the form of a child welfare bias (in addition to the compounding factors of race, sex, etc.). Youth whose delinquency cases that originate in the child welfare system are less likely to receive probation than non-child welfare youth, which impact both short-term and long-term youth outcomes (Ryan et al., 2007). Specific to African American youth, the child welfare system is a key source to overrepresentation in juvenile justice (Ryan et al., 2007).

History

CRT recognizes the importance of analyzing issues using a race-based lens of examining history as well as present-day realities for people who are members of racial minorities. For African American crossover youth, despite present day overrepresentation in both systems, historically, these systems either excluded them or treated them differently than their white counterparts (Kolivoski et al., 2017b). Since their founding, child-serving systems, especially the juvenile justice system, have always had two main objectives that, at times, are in competition with one another: social care and social control. The state is involved in young girls' lives with the paternalistic intention of providing protection and support for youth to become capable adults. At the same time, the goal of helping is contradicted by these systems that often place limits on their behaviors, may involve further penetration into the system, thus influencing additional negative outcomes (Sherman & Balck, 2015). One area in that this was historically pronounced, and continues to be an issue in juvenile justice today, involves the policing of girls' sexuality from a moral standpoint (Pasko, 2010). Additionally, some early professionals in systems held differential beliefs that Black children were less innocent than white children and therefore were at a greater risk for delinquency (Agyepong, 2018). The early juvenile court also reinforced racial stereotypes of Black youth and delinquency, which to their credit, the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) advocated for reforms and confronting stereotypes (Butler, 2013). Yet, among Black children, Black girls were sometimes not given the same services as boys. For example, in 1920 in Chicago, Black girls were reported as comprising 12% of the population and Black boys 10%, yet there were four youth agencies for boys and only one for girls ("Y.W.C.A.: Indiana Avenue Branch Takes Active Part in Great Drive," 1920).

Counter-Storytelling

Counter-storytelling is an important component in providing a voice to people who have been marginalized, and the ability for them to express their experiences and inform and educate others who may only be familiar with the dominant narrative. For crossover youth, there is a paucity of research that specifically asks them directly about their experiences. Further, the focus of the work is not on African American girls specifically, despite their known overrepresentation. When the population directly affected by an issue has little voice weighing in on it, this leaves others to fill in this narrative gap, which may or may not accurately reflect their experiences, or may focus only on negative aspects of experiences or characteristics of the youth themselves. Through applying a CRT perspective, and subsequent methodology to research, one is provided with "a tool to 'counter' deficit storytelling" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 23). Historically, African American women were not in positions of power, thus they were not able to control their own narrative. Negative stereotypes of African American women were used to strip away their humanity, divert attention away from structural inequalities, and maintain the dominant ideology as an unworthy group (Collins, 2000). Counter-storytelling, however, can shift power back to who controls the narrative. It can empower African American girls who shift between the child welfare and juvenile justice systems to focus on strengths not deficits.

Counter-storytelling can also draw attention to the role of race and culture on ways in which people communicate. In Marshall and Haight's (2014) study, thirty nine percent of the sample of middle-class child welfare and juvenile justice

professionals mentioned cultural variations in communication patterns of low-income African American people. If the way a client communicates is different from the expectations of the professional, this may exacerbate the issue and could result in increased client sanctions. For example, angry expressions from a Black client, such as being vocal or loud, may be culturally acceptable to the client but also misinterpreted from the child welfare or juvenile justice professional (Marshall & Haight, 2014). Counter-storytelling provides a way for clients to offer their perspective of the issue.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality acknowledges the multifaceted nature of oppressions and that race and gender cannot be disaggregated. For empirical studies, categories are used to describe specific groups (e.g., boys/girls, white/Black), and while this is logical, scholars also need to be knowledgeable and critical of the history and socially constructed meanings behind these categories, as well as the broader issues and interplay between variables such as race and gender. Given that girls have specific needs that should be addressed by the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, as well as African American children and youth and crossover youth, these considerations need to be taken with an intersectional lens. Thus, intersectionality means more holistically than placing people into discrete categories: African American adolescent girls are a specific group in and of themselves. Because of the existing reliance on lenses that only address race and sex separately, there has not been as much scholarship on exploring how multiple intersections of oppression interact to marginalize African American girls.

Newer perspectives and applications that consider how race and gender are intertwined, and includes space to consider the experiences and emotions of African American girls and women, are necessary. An intersectional perspective "can disrupt limiting discourses and point the way toward openings and possibilities" regarding working with African American girls during adolescence (Harrison, 2017, p. 1036). Transcending the Strong Black Woman frame, contemporary examples include #BlackGirlMagic, which originated as a Twitter hashtag created by CaShawn Thompson in 2013 as a positive, strengths-based celebration of community and self-love of Black womanhood (Walton & Oyewuwo-Gassikia, 2017). This approach and could prove worthwhile in being applicable to African American crossover girls.

Implications for Social Work

Micro Level

Utilizing CRT and intersectional perspectives applied to African American girls who cross between the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, several implications emerge for micro social work practice. Social workers and other professionals in the child welfare and juvenile justice system work with diverse populations, and need to recognize the importance of centering race and racism in their work. There is the need to possess knowledge, including knowledge of race, racial history and treatment of youth by the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, and acknowledge the unique experiences of African American youth, girls, and African American girls, respectively. This includes awareness that there are not many practice frameworks that are culturally relevant specific to Black women (Copeland & Butler, 2007), as well as the need for frameworks that include race, gender, as well as age and adolescent development (Seaton & Tyson, 2018). When individuals working in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems learn more about the unique vulnerability of African American crossover girls, an intersectional approach allows for awareness of the need to encourage advocacy and other efforts that are more inclusive. To help with this, trainings, practice models [e.g., Crossover Youth Practice Model (CYPM), (Center for Juvenile Justice Reform, 2020)], cross-system initiatives and other programming can held so that a professional does is not alone on this journey, but also part of changing agency/institutional perspectives.

Still, micro changes at the individual level include awareness of one's own racial and ethnic identity to best serve clients. Practitioners need to have self-awareness about how racial experiences, and interpretations of those, shape our racial identity and how that carries over into our professional lives and work with clients (Marshall & Haight, 2014). Professionals' own life experiences also may contribute to their understanding of racial disproportionalities in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems (Marshall, 2012). Specific to African American girls with child welfare system contact, this is especially important given that most of the child welfare workforce is white (Fallon, MacLaurin, Trocmé, & Felstiner, 2003). Also, professionals need knowledge of how one's own individual self may help ameliorate or perpetuate racial disparities.

Macro Level: Policy and Research

Macro social work change requires macro theories and perspectives. CRT's focus on structure and systems aligns with social work's focus on broader forces that are at play in social problems, the person-in-environment perspective, and in shifting blame away from an individual without consideration of the larger circumstances. This next section will address how CRT and intersectionality could be more strategically applied to inform social work policy and research regarding African American crossover girls.

First, future work needs to include conceptual scholarship to develop these foundations further than what is feasible in

one article. For example, intersectionality was conceptualized as a component of CRT here, yet there is much more to be described and applied related to African American crossover girls, intersectionality, and centering such work in a feminist perspective.

CRT and intersectional perspectives have application in quantitative and qualitative social work research as well. For quantitative research, studies can focus on African American crossover girls specifically. There is value in analyzing a sub-population alone, and not only when used in comparison to other groups. With a narrowed sample such as this, then CRT, intersectionality, and more broadly, feminist perspectives and theories can be applied and examined in-depth. Administrative data, including historical data pulls of records, can be a way of obtaining a large enough sample of this sub-population to do this kind of research. Even then, any quantitative research completed needs to make meaning of the data, and not simply add "race X gender" as a variable and call it intersectional. If researchers use quantitative data methods and want to be informed by a CRT and intersectional lens, this involves applying one's critical thinking skills and substantive knowledge. Just as qualitative approaches aim to give voice to people who are typically voiceless, quantitative methods can tell stories and counter-stories at the aggregate level through data (Carter & Hurtado, 2007).

Qualitative research and mixed-methods studies can also provide great benefit to filling in current gaps in knowledge. In qualitative research, the need exists to further amplify the voices of African American girls in crossover youth research, as aligned with the CRT tenet of counter-story-telling. This idea of "narrative as inquiry" involves the interviewer asking questions, but with minimal prompting for answers and being allowed to speak without interruption and for the length of time that the interviewee prefers (Graham et al., 2011). Listening to stories and lived experiences, and appropriately utilizing them for advocacy provides a richer understanding of issues, and to challenge dominant narratives among professionals and others who view them in a more negative light than their white or male counterparts. CRT/intersectional researchers recognize context for any data as well: "Data should not be perspectiveless, but should be considered in particular social contexts" (Graham, Brown-Jeffy, Aronson, & Stephens, 2011). Keeping this in mind aides in interpreting findings, particularly with mixed-methods studies where qualitative data provides context for quantitative.

The lack of studies on this topic—despite research that supports the heightened needs of African American girls who cross over—is indicative of the need for additional research, both in terms of breadth and depth. Applying CRT to a research agenda for this population would mean that investigators place race and racism at the forefront in all their research stages, and to be mindful and critical of traditional research resources and dominant worldviews (Creswell, 2007). It is admirable that there are existing studies specific to African American crossover youth girls, and future research can build on this foundation. For example, additional research on racial disparities from a systems perspective on African American crossover girls could focus on the decision-making points and pathways between the child welfare and juvenile justice system that are contributing to their overrepresentation. Examining how professionals make decisions regarding how to proceed with cases involving African American girls, including stereotyping, biases, assumptions, could potentially uncover how racism is embedded in, and outwardly demonstrated, by the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Findings from these studies can then inform policy, especially regarding prevention and early intervention efforts to keep African American girls who have had child welfare system contact out of lengthy involvement in juvenile justice, as well as curtailing unnecessary child welfare system involvement.

A researcher interested in incorporating CRT and intersectionality in building future research on African American crossover girls would incorporate these theoretical perspectives at all points in the research process (e.g., conceptualization, recruitment, dissemination) to add both to the amount of research as well as the broader, critical perspective it can take beyond simply reporting empirical findings. Recognizing that CRT acknowledges that being a member of the racial majority accompanies certain privileges and worldviews, a great example of this applied in existing research on this topic is Marshall's work (2012; Marshall & Haight, 2014) in which professionals in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems were interviewed about their perspectives on racial disproportionalities in the systems, and used a diverse sample (e.g., white/African American, male/female, child welfare and juvenile justice system professionals). This was done to examine how different groups view a situation to help provide solutions that can better benefit all youth served in systems. More studies can extend on how implicit bias manifests itself in professionals working in child-serving systems. Inquiring about racial disproportionalities and implicit bias also can be incorporated into other samples who work with African American crossover girls, such as foster parents and congregate care staff.

Additionally, an intersectional approach to understanding this issue further would involve diverse samples of crossover youth themselves, to compare how dual system experiences are different for African American girls. At the same time, more in depth research specific to them is necessary. Future research can examine a better understanding of African American girls with contact in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems and assess their experiences of institutional racism and sexism, and could compare

to how this changed before and after system contact. For example, is their perception of treatment the same or different in other settings, such as schools, in which recent news stories suggest African American girls are being unfairly disciplined for violating school dress codes (Dvorak, 2018). Future research can also address the additional intersecting identities of African American girls in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems: LGBTQ+, biracial/Latinx, pregnant or a parent, etc. There is also the need to pay attention to societal-level risk factors linked to race and gender that would be associated with child welfare, juvenile justice system, and cross-systems involvement as guided by CRT. For example, economic inequalities such as African American women making substantially less money compared to white men, and especially given that people who are from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to experience systems contact. Regardless of the type of research, it is critical to remember that youth are more than their outcome in the system, or a data point; they are whole people with dignity, worth, and value, and it is important to hear their voices and lived experiences, good and bad, and learn how was as professionals can use our knowledge and privilege to improve the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

Limitations Using CRT and Intersectionality

Both CRT and intersectionality give direction for social justice action that needs to be taken; given that social work is an applied/action-oriented profession, these frameworks offer a rich perspective in analyzing this issue and providing future directions for practice, policy, and research. Yet, this scholarship is not without some limitation considerations. For example, the intersectional approach as it is applied here considers race and sex, yet there are numerous additional facets that this analysis has not included, as there are a range of other important identities and groups that intersect with this population. These include, but are not limited to, socioeconomic status and poverty (especially related to child welfare system contact) and youth who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, questioning, gender nonconforming, and transgender (LGBQ/GNCT; for more on the latter, see: Irvine & Canfield, 2016). Related to this, one could argue that there are so many intersecting identities to be considered that these differences can be broken down to fine units of analysis to the point of being stalled in analysis due to the focus only on differences (Delgado, 2011). No one perspective is monolithic or homogenous from any group, but that should not detract from undertaking an intersectional analysis, focusing on similarities, and not dwelling on differences. This point is similarly recognized by Gillborn (2015), who asserts that to fully analyze how racism operates, examination of the ways in which race and other forms of oppression interconnect depending on the time and context, a balance needs to be struck between applying intersectionality while also not being paralyzed into lack of moving scholarship forward. This paper aims to find such a balance, utilizing current scholarship related to African American adolescent female crossover youth, specifically focusing on race and gender. Of note, there is heterogeneity among any of the above categories and identities (e.g., African Americans, girls).

Conclusion

The main objective of this article was to analyze and better understand the overrepresentation of African American girls who cross over from the child welfare to the juvenile justice system to inform social work through applying CRT and intersectional perspectives to the issue. Through application of these frameworks, specifically, structure, history, counter-storytelling, and intersectionality, professionals can gain a deeper understanding of this typically overlooked sub-population of crossover youth. This conceptual analysis lends itself to social work practice and micro and macro implications, including social work practice, policy, and research guided by CRT and intersectionality. In the tradition of these critical lenses, these can in turn impact individual and systemic changes for improved outcomes for African American girls who experience crossover between the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

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