The author(s) shown below used Federal funds provided by the U.S. Department of Justice and prepared the following final report:

Document Title:	**Experiences of Youth in the Sex Trade in Chicago: Issues in Youth Poverty and Homelessness**
Author(s):	**Laurie Schaffner, Grant Buhr, Deana Lewis, Marco Roc, Haley Volpintesta**
Document No.:	**249954**
Date Received:	**June 2016**
Award Number:	**2009-MC-CX-0001**

This report has not been published by the U.S. Department of Justice. To provide better customer service, NCJRS has made this federally funded grant report available electronically.

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Experiences of Youth in the Sex Trade in Chicago

Issues in Youth Poverty and Homelessness

By Laurie Schaffner, Grant Buhr, deana lewis, Marco Roc, and Haley Volpintesta

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Acknowledgements

This study was supported by Award No. 2009-MC-CX-0001 from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention of the U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of the Department of Justice.

This research was expertly managed through the Center for Court Innovation: Michael Rempel, Jennifer Bryan, Rachel Swaner, and Allyson Walker were our competent directors to whom we are very grateful.

The brilliant lead team of Chicago administrative research associates included Grant Buhr, Alana Gunn, deana lewis, Marco Roc, and Haley Volpintesta. Lisa Benson, Anna Cobb, Angela Ellis, Jessica Estrada, Marsha Flowers, Julie Hilvers, Yvonne Isom, Llysa Librea, Laurel Mazar, Nicole Randle, Amanda Vasquez, Isa Villaflor, and Aimee Wodda also conducted field research.

Expertise and training was offered from Claudine O'Leary of Rethink Resources in Milwaukee, WI, Haley Volpintesta, and Isa Villaflor. Their insights enriched the data obtained in interviews exponentially.

We are also grateful to our community and law enforcement contacts: Captain Mark Busick, Broadway Youth Center, CAASE, the Salvation Army's Stop It! Initiative, and Lawndale Christian Legal Center.

Most of all, our gratitude goes out to the brave young folks who agreed to be interviewed and participate in this important research documenting the needs and struggles of youth involved in the street sex economy.

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements i
Executive Summary v

Chapter 1.
Introduction 1

Chapter 2.
The Chicago Setting 4

Chapter 3.
Methodology 12

Chapter 4.
Research Findings 17
Respondent Information 17
Making and Spending Money 20
Market Involvement 22
Customers 26
Pimps and other Market Facilitators 29
Health and Needs 33
Experience with the Police 36
Perceptions and Expectations 39

Chapter 5.
Conclusion 42

References 45

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Exhibit 1. PEOPLE MAGAZINE, AUGUST 12, 2013, PAGE 119. Note the victim being led away in hand-ties.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: FAIRCHILD PHOTO NEWS SERVICE/NYSCOM; FBI

BABIES

It's a boy for actress **Evan Rachel Wood** and *Billy Elliot* star **Jamie Bell**. The newlyweds welcomed a "beautiful" son, her rep confirmed to PEOPLE on July 29. "Parents and baby are all doing well." The *True Blood* alum, 25, and Bell, 27, announced the pregnancy monologue a day after the birth. "She's 5 lbs., 9 oz. Me and my wife are so happy."

BACK HOME

Teresa Heinz Kerry, 74, ketchup heiress and the wife of Secretary of State **John Kerry,** was released from a Boston hospital on July 27, nearly three

her belly. The tot will join big brother **Sebastian**, 6.

ENGAGED

Designer and *Project Runway* champ **Christian Siriano** is engaged to musician **Brad Walsh.** "Yesterday @BradWalsh and I exchanged engagement bracelets," Siriano, 27, wrote on Twitter July 28, along with a photo of the jewelry. Walsh also tweeted, "We've told our moms so now we can tell you." The pair have been together since 2007.

HUNDREDS OF TEENS RESCUED IN SEX RAID

On July 29, the FBI announced that 150 people had been arrested during a three-day sweep of 76 cities across the U.S. for allegedly holding teenagers for prostitution—the largest crackdown against child sex-trafficking. FBI agents and police rescued 105 children during the operation at truck stops and motels. Child sex-trafficking remains "one of the most prevalent crimes in our country," said **Ronald Hosko**, assistant director of the FBI's criminal division. "This serves as a reminder that these crimes can happen anywhere."

DEATH

Popular national radio talk show host **David "Kidd" Kraddick** died July 27 after falling ill at a charity event he was hosting outside New Orleans. He was 53. A preliminary autopsy found that he had an enlarged heart and blocked arteries. "[He was] one of a kind," **Ryan Seacrest** tweeted. "One of the best at what he did every morning."

By Paul Chi

PEOPLE August 12, 2013 119

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Chapter 1
Introduction

The United States Congress adopted the *Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000* in response to the widespread notion circulating that tens of thousands of women and children were sold within or across the U.S. and forced into commercial sexual activity (Chapkis 2005). Despite the lack of confirmable data regarding the quantity of "sexual slaves," as they were often termed, serious concern for the welfare of sexually exploited persons—especially children—has grown exponentially (Doezema 2010). This interest has resulted in an international cottage industry of non-governmental agencies, non-profit organizations, law enforcement teams, web-based coalitions, foundations, United Nations Conventions, research, and other networks of individuals attending to the commercial sexual exploitation of children. Debates rage among feminist and religious "rescuers," and feminist and activist sex-worker defenders over what is to be done (Bernstein 2010).

According to the FBI homepage, "[o]n January 1, 2013, the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program began collecting data regarding human trafficking as mandated by the *William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008*. According to David Cuthbertson, assistant director of the FBI's Criminal Justice Information Services (CJIS) Division, 'As law enforcement begins to capture and submit data on human trafficking, our UCR statistics will start to show the extent of what is essentially modern-day slavery in our country'" (www.fbi.gov/ Accessed July 6, 2013).

The purpose of this research project is to render an accurate statistical accounting and to foreground the voices of urban young people who are involved in a street sex trade economy. While pundits and politicians, activists and academics, and victims/survivor leaders and law enforcement weigh in on the topic, the ideas and experiences of adolescents involved in the endeavor are rarely heard.

This report features the opinions and experiences of young people aged 13 to 24 who self-defined as having traded sex for money or other needs in Chicago, IL, gathered over a period from 2011 to 2013. We feature qualitative interview and observational data and focus on young people's experiences with needs and services from three areas of the city: the Southside, Westside, and Northside. We present their answers to questions about their experiences with the details of the market transactions and their experiences with the police.

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After listening to dozens of hours of conversations with young people involved in trading sex for money or other resources, several key findings became apparent. First, the accounts of youth trading sex for money do not follow the mainstream narrative of the commercial sexual exploitation of youth being trafficked by adults and pimps. In fact, young people recounted great variety across interviews in ideas about, and actual transactions of trading sex for survival. Second, a considerable number of boys and trans girls came forward to be interviewed for this project. This gendered account also defies the general dominant presentation of the population. Third, it became overwhelmingly clear that the first and foremost defining feature that youth in the street sex trade economy share is the effect of a damaging combination of poverty, racism, homophobia, sexism, and physical and sexual assault. Addressing the needs of youth and their families by attending to building safe communities for poor and working class households would seem to solve most of the problems the study participants shared. Listening to young people involved in trading sex for survival needs reveals trading sex as mainly a social—not criminal—problem.

Chicago, Illinois was chosen as a site as part of a larger study, funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and overseen by the Center for Court Innovation, to fill the current gap in scientific knowledge regarding the size, needs, and characteristics of youth in the sex trade. Based on original research in six sites, including Atlantic City (NJ), the Bay Area (CA), Dallas (TX), Miami (FL), Las Vegas (NV), and Chicago, the larger study aims to estimate the size of the population of youth in the sex trade; to describe their characteristics, experiences, and health and service needs; to explore what services are available; and to analyze arrest patterns and prosecution and recidivism outcomes when these youth encounter the juvenile or criminal justice systems.

The current report represents one of six site-specific reports that provide systematic, detailed findings drawn from the youth interviews in each site (see, also, Jones and Gamson 2016; Martin et al. 2016; Marcus, Riggs, Rivera, and Curtis 2016; Maurrasse and Jones 2016; Wagner, Whitmer, and Spivak 2016). A multisite report describes the overall study methodology; differences in how that methodology was applied by site; findings from a national and multisite analysis of arrest, prosecution, and recidivism data; themes emerging from social service provider interviews; and multi-site quantitative findings from the youth interviews in all six sites (Swaner et al. 2016).[1] Because the multisite report has a quantitative focus, this report and the other five site-specific reports endeavor to provide a rich qualitative

[1] For all reports produced by this project, see www.courtinnovation.org/youthstudy.

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account that reveals and gives voice to the experiences, perceptions, and needs of the relevant population of youth.

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Chapter 2
The Chicago Setting

> *Q. What was it like when you first started exchanging sex for money or other things?*
>
> *"Stress and drama happening at home - my mother drinking. I left to escape it and an older male demanded sex in exchange for living there. He wanted it everyday, and if I didn't he would get abusive and angry. It was a hard decision, every time. I was exhausted from going back-and-forth between my mom's place and his. I would rather stay home with mom, but when she drinks she's crazy. I have conflicts with the male I stay with because he wants sex too often in exchange for me living there. He gets aggressive and violent. If I don't do it, he tells me to get out. I do what he wants or leave. It's scary."* (African American, bisexual, 18-year-old young woman from Chicago Southside)

In 2003, the FBI identified Chicago as one of 13 hub cities with high amounts of trafficking activity (Heinzmann 2005). This designation became the driving force behind the formation of Cook County law enforcement's post-9/11 priorities, the establishment of multi-agency task forces to end juvenile sex trafficking.

For example, the bold headlines of the Chicago Sun-Times for Tuesday, August 9, 2005, read "**TEENS SOLD ON CHICAGO STREETS,"** announcing the third in a series of articles on "Sex and Sorrow: The Modern Slave Trade" (Sweeney 2005). As one Chicago FBI department head framed the response:

> *In the post-9/11 period in the criminal division, we've had to really do some searching as to what's at the core of our criminal mission. If we have a choice of working a violation—being a major theft, bank robbery, or working a child-abduction case—we're going to go after this type of egregious exploitation of children. (Heinzmann 2005)*

Law enforcement agencies in the City of Chicago and Cook County scrambled to organize a variety of task forces and units both state and local, not coincidentally as millions of federal dollars to focus on CSEC became available. Hundreds of local faith and community-run organizations signed on to Illinois' "Restore and Rescue Coalition" (http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/resource/about-rescue-restore).

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Contrary to popular myth, prostitution is an unusual arrest charge for young women. In a 2000 Chicago study, only 35 of the 5,651 prostitution-related arrests in metropolitan Chicago were of girls less than 17 years old (O'Leary and Howard 2001). Nationally, arrests for underage prostitution/commercialized vice comprised only 1.7% of all juvenile arrests (Puzzanchera 2013). In 2010 nationwide, only about 1,000 arrests for prostitution were estimated for youth under the age of 18 (Puzzanchera 2013).

Chicago has served as a rich site for the study of commercial sex. According to Cynthia Blair's study of the history of African American women's prostitution in Chicago from 1870 to 1920, then, like now, the idea of the prostitute provided a contested symbol where the public could debate ideas about middle-class sexual norms versus definitions of a new leisure industry (speak-easies, bootlegging during Prohibition, burlesque, and such). Her historical research demonstrates that (as some might argue today): "black women's sex work was a constant negotiation of working class notions of respectability, individual self-respect, and economic self-reliance" (Blair 2010:11).

Chicago has long been highly segregated (Drake and Clayton 1945; Hirsch 1998). In the early years of the 21st century, Chicago continues to be a racially divided city (Krysan and Farley 2002). One of the more obvious ways to sector Chicago is geographical. Because Chicago hugs Lake Michigan to the east, its urban arrangement tends to sprawl over South, West, and Northsides.

We conducted fieldwork and interviews in over nine different Chicago Police Districts. Our research focused on urban areas in three general neighborhoods. In Northside Chicago, we conducted interviews and observations in the neighborhoods of Lakeview (which encompasses Boystown), Uptown, Rogers Park, Lincoln Square, Albany Park and Logan Square. Our Westside research sites included the neighborhoods of South Lawndale, North Lawndale, East Garfield Park, West Garfield Park, Humboldt Park, and Austin. Southside sites included Gresham, Chatum, Englewood, West Englewood, Kenwood, New City, Grand Boulevard, Washington Park, and Woodlawn. We included smaller sections of the Near Westside and Lower Westside in the neighborhoods of Little Village and Pilsen (see Exhibits 2, 3, and 4).

During the course of our fieldwork, participants made many references to suburban area hotspots, including preferences for going out to the suburbs with customers. One girl said she enjoyed the drive, it was pretty, lots of trees. During the drive she felt she got a chance to get to feel safe with her customer (youth often called them "friends.")

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In addition to seeking respondents in well-known active areas, by arrest data, and in locations indicated to us by youth, we also used the presence of the sex industry infrastructure such as night clubs, strip clubs, XXX stores, and massage parlors to inform our outreach methods. In addition, we researched the locations of high schools, alternative schools, social service agencies such as clinics, hospitals, and adolescent drug treatment facilities, including domestic violence shelters and Department of Children and Family Services group homes within the areas mentioned. Due to time and resource restrictions, we limited our focus to these three general areas of urban Chicago.

Northside. We conducted fieldwork interviews in an area of Northside Chicago called Boystown, a largely white, gay, middle-class, gentrified neighborhood (Keating 2008). Boystown is peppered with cafes, bars, upscale restaurants, boutiques, and real estate offices. The main stroll we concentrated on there was framed by Belmont Avenue, Halsted St, Sheffield Ave, and School St, generally speaking.

Exhibit 2. Northside area of fieldwork

Source: Google Maps.

Recent racial incidents, often related to black youth presence (see Sosin 2011), barely interrupted the lively, crowded, drunken partying in the streets of this hotspot on the weekends. Boystown, located in Lakeview, is host to several community centers focused on

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the LGBTQ community, including Howard Brown Health Center, The Center on Halsted, and Broadway Youth Center, to name a few. Boystown is known for a relatively "safe" neighborhood for young, African American transgirls and gay boys to work the streets, bars, and passing cars to sell sex. As one young gay black young man told us,

> *I like to be in areas like Belmont and Halsted because they are more gay-friendly. You wouldn't expect to find a male looking for another male in Englewood* [neighborhood in Southside Chicago].

Another young man recounted that *"I don't go to the Southside—way "too much drama" there and I just don't feel safe on the Southside. I only go if my client will pick me up or send a cab."* In general, but not always, Chicago's Northside neighborhoods where we flyered and interviewed were more populated, more racially and sexually mixed (gay/straight), and less frightening in terms of street crime.

Exhibit 3. Northside, Boystown

Source: Google Maps.

On the Northside, we also collected interviews in Rogers Park, Albany Park, and along Howard Street, notorious for drug activity. These neighborhoods are predominantly people of

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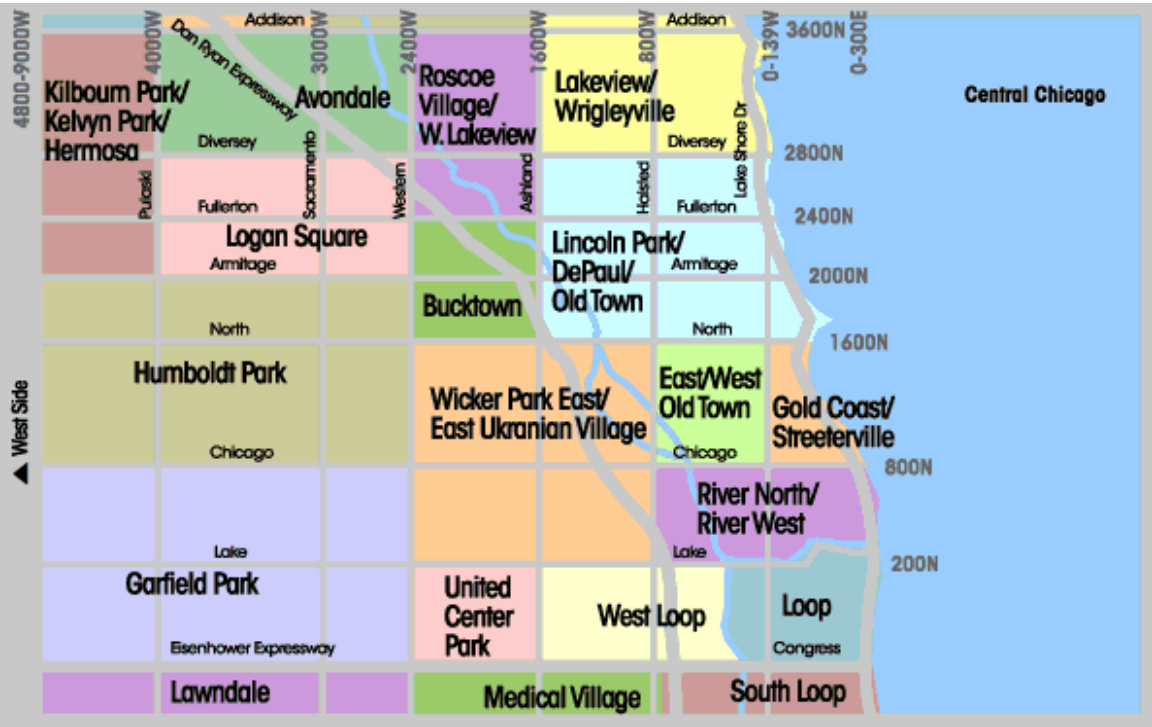
color, black low-income families, although white professionals are moving in and changing the neighborhoods—bringing gentrification and increased surveillance and control over black and brown people. The neighborhoods of Rogers Park and Albany Park, for example, are much more heterosexual than Boystown in Lakeview.

Westside. Our fieldwork in Westside Chicago bordered Cicero, 47th Street, and Kedzie (police districts 009, 011, 013). Roughly, these neighborhoods were known as Garfield Park, Lawndale, Archer Heights, and Brighton Park. The Westside of Chicago is renowned for being home to low-income folks, comprised of both large Latino populations as well as large African American sections. We identified a few well-known tracks and then youth told us about other areas.

Exhibit 4. Map of Westside, Chicago



Source: Google Maps.

Chicago's Westside has a long history of growth, expansion, development, as well as a story of gentrification and destruction of beloved local neighborhoods such as Maxwell Street, Greektown, and Little Italy. With the construction of the Circle Interchange, now a freeway network nightmare, coupled with the development of the University of Illinois at Chicago, the near Westside struggles to survive waves of migration and gentrification. Jane Addams and others opened the first juvenile court in the nation, as well as the settlement house, Hull

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House, in the near Westside in order to address the struggles of youth, the poor and immigrants there. Addams and colleagues also conducted a study of prostitution on the Westside of Chicago as part of a larger project to document the social struggles of the immigrant poor (Addams 1925).

We thought that we would be interviewing more Latina and Latino youth on the Westside, Spanish-speaking youth, but that population did not form a significant proportion of our sample.

Exhibit 5. Additional Images from Westside, Chicago

Source: deana lewis

Southside. The Chicago Southside has long been of interest to academics and law enforcement (Hirsch 1998; Drake and Clayton 1945; Park et al 1925). Some could say that the ethnographic fieldwork conducted on the Southside of Chicago by sociologists at the University of Chicago formed the basis for urban studies. Our fieldwork fell in areas such as Auburn Gresham, Lawndale, and Englewood. At present, city services, housing and infrastructure resources, and business development are woefully deficient in much of Chicago's Southside.

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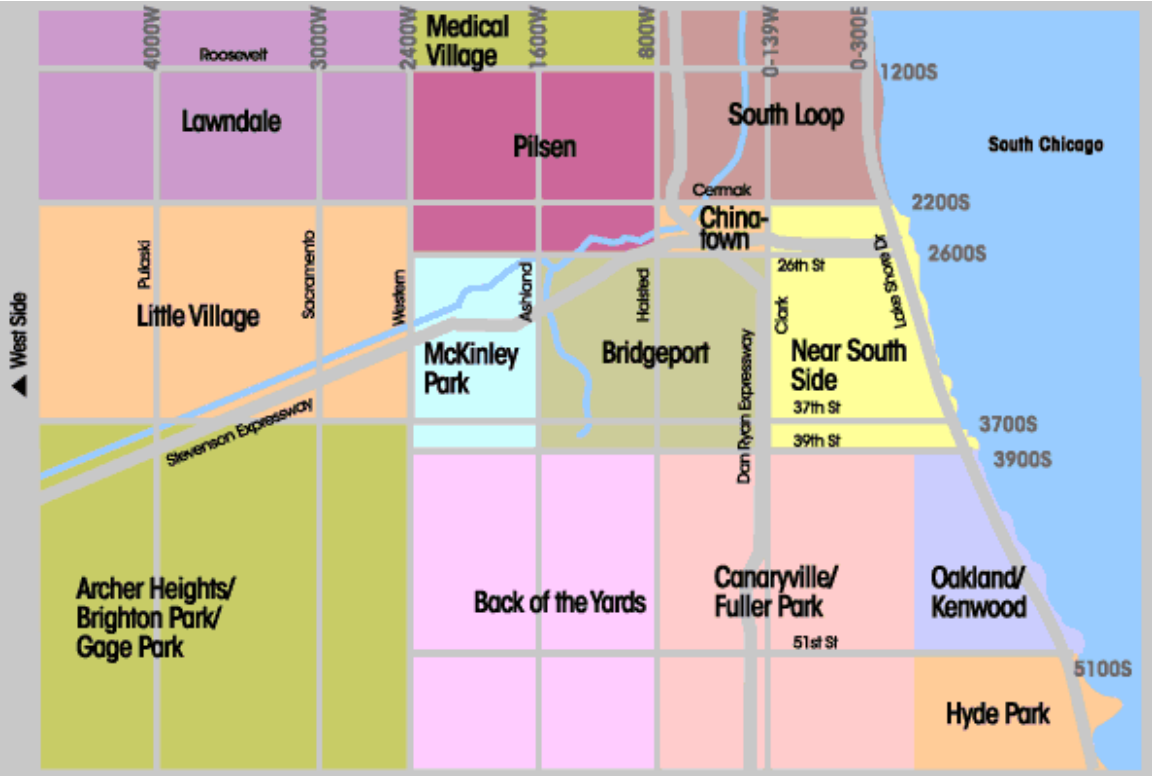
Exhibit 6. Southside area of fieldwork



Source: Google Maps.

During the course of the fieldwork, several police raids on strolls and sexual-activity hotspots took place on the South and West sides of Chicago (for example, in July 2012 and February 2013). The City of Chicago Police Department maintains a website, ClearPath, http://www.chicagopolice.org/ps, where it publishes the photographs of persons (men and trans women) arrested for soliciting prostitution and related statutes. It is a little confusing because they seem to arrest those soliciting as well as those offering sex under the same statutes. Below the photographs of each suspect/arrestee, they list the name, address, sex, age, arrest location and statute violated. After one such raid in the neighborhood where we conducted fieldwork, we went online to see if they had arrested (rescued?) any of our study participants, and we did see one person, a transwoman, who had told us they were 23, but their age on the website was 27.

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Exhibit 7. Southside area of fieldwork

Source: Google Maps.

We spent time in the 70s (71st Avenue to 79th Avenue) and Halsted, which can be a desolate, deserted area with long stretches of undeveloped, abandoned, and decrepit buildings, small churches, and corner bars. The great majority of Southside Chicago is populated by working class families, law-abiding folks whose historical neighborhoods boast of a rich history and culture of art, music, fashion, cuisine, and more. Yet, as of this writing, the whole of "the Chicagoland area" is treated to a nightly replay of mug-shot photographs of young black men suspected of committing horrible violent gang-related crimes, providing a racist, biased, skewed vision of Chicago's Southside.

In fact, one similarity that study participants on the streets of Chicago's North, West, and Southside neighborhoods shared was their struggle against the combination of racism, heterosexism, poverty, inadequate education, and unstable housing. Portions of the Westside and the Southside were far more depleted in general than the gentrified Lakeview and other Northside communities, due to a failure by city and state government to supply the necessary resources to sustain healthy communities. Youth participants evidenced much more in common around issues of survival, trauma, violence, and poverty than any single way, practice, or manner that was "sexual" about them.

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Chapter 3
Methodology

> *Q. About how many teens do you know under the age of 18 that [sic] have sex for money in this city?*
>
> *A. Four.*
>
> *Q. How many are girls?*
>
> *A. Four*
>
> *Q. How many are black?*
>
> *A. Four. One is a family member of mine.*

19-year-old young black woman who started exchanging sex for money when she was 17 years old.

The design, methods, and sampling structure were predetermined by the funding agency (OJJDP) and lead agency for the national study (the Center for Court Innovation). We were to interview 300 youth between the ages of 13 and 18 who had ever been involved in providing sexual services in exchange for money or other needs. We also included interviews with people aged 19 to 24 who had begun or traded sex for money before they were 18 years of age. The funder (OJJDP) called the process CSEC—the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

We separated the city into the three loose geographical areas described above delimited by Lake Michigan. We chose those neighborhoods based on several sources: our own street knowledge, former research, arrest reports, locations that young people told us in early interviews, as well as research described above.

Our plan was to use flyering in order to access young people in these neighborhoods. Our flyers included a note in Spanish with a number to call because one member of our team

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spoke Spanish, and we added what we thought was a kind of youthful look to the flyer so that it might attract attention from young people.

Exhibit 8 Image of Sample Flyer

Possible eligible participants called the cell number on the flyer and set up an appointment to be interviewed. Our team administrator who covered the phone would conduct a preliminary informal conversation to see if the caller was within the study's eligible age group, where and when they saw the flyer, and where and when they would like to be interviewed.

We used a sampling strategy called respondent-driven sampling (RDS) (Abdul-Quader et al 2006; Heckathorn 1997, 2002; Heckathorn et al 2002). While critiqued (see Schapiro Group 2011), RDS has evidenced success in reaching research subjects who are traditionally difficult to access. The model is based on the notion of a deliberate snowballing—each study participant recruits more participants, thus producing a detailed and broad accounting of social networks across the city. This targeted and theoretical methodology asks participants, "Who do you know? Can we talk to them?"

Each initial participant (called a "seed") was paid $40 for an interview and given three coupons. If the "seed" knew someone who was eligible, that friend would arrive with a

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coupon. The coupon-bearer was paid $40 for their interview, and the original "seed" was paid $10. In turn, the coupon-bearer would be given three coupons, and so on…in order to encourage broad networks of youth to come forward and participate. RDS produces network trees that map the interactions among youth.

Exhibit 9. Image of Study Coupon

Coupon #: A001 DO NOT THROW AWAY

CHICAGO YOUTH STUDY

For more information: 1-877-394-XXXX
You can earn between $40 -$70 if you're eligible to be interviewed!

Our final sample consisted of approximately 202 youth between ages of 13 and 24. About 11 percent self-defined as trans girls: male-born youth living as young women. Approximately 47 percent of the sample were cisgender boys/men, and approximately 41 percent self-identified as cis girls and women; there was one trans male participant. Participants reported that they identified their sexual orientation as straight, gay, and bisexual. A great majority of the youth self-identified as African American, Latina or Latino, or mixed (see Table 3.1). Only five youth identified as White. All of the young people interviewed had participated in exchanging sex for money before the age of 18 years old.

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Table 3.1. Chicago Participant Demographics

Number of Cases	202
Demographics	
Age	
Mean Age	0%
13	0%
14	0%
15	1%
16	1%
17	5%
18	14%
19	18%
20	16%
21	16%
22	9%
23	15%
24	5%
Age Categories	
13 to 17 years	7%
18 to 24 years	93%
US Born	
Yes	98%
Gender	
Cis Male	47%
Cis Female	41%
Trans Female	11%
Trans Male	1%
Sexual Orientation	
Heterosexual	46%
Bisexual	33%
Homosexual	1700%
Other	4%
Ethnicity	
White	3%
Black/African America	80%
Hispanic/Latino	7%
Other	3%
Multi-racial	7%

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This report reflects the response to research in the Chicago area in three neighborhoods from 2011 to 2013. A larger proportion were interviewed in the West and Southsides of Chicago, less on the Northside. We do not claim that these proportions are representative of the actual proportions of youth or CSEC in Chicago by geographical location. The neighborhoods varied greatly in terms of congestion, levels of street safety, and how visible youth were willing to be.

The Westside of Chicago was by far the most "dangerous"—there were shooting incidents in the neighborhoods at the times we were present and interviewing. Interview participants talked about two separate incidents where trans women were killed. We could not verify or confirm these reports, but field researchers reported a definite heightened sense of insecurity by themselves and participants there. Visibility on the streets on the Westside where we flyered seemed to limit youths' willingness to be interviewed—we sensed that there were more pimps and adults controlling and monitoring the streets than in the Northside, in Lakeview, where we could be out until 2:00 AM with little concern for physical safety. There, the streets were often full of folks coming and going, and youth seem to remain relatively comfortable about being "out and about." The neighborhoods and "strolls" (hotspots of commercial sexual activity) where we flyered in the Southside were relatively remote and felt less controlled and surveyed by pimps and other street-level adults (i.e., "gangbangers," drug dealers, homeless folks, neighborhood unemployed, and pimps, for examples). In 2011, we flyered less on the Southside because Northside respondents brought us south through RDS. We focused on the Halsted/75th Street stroll in Chatum because of arrest data in 2013.

The following section presents results from the interview data, approximate proportions of responses, as well as archetypical and outlier responses from interviewees.

* * *

> *If children trade sex because they will starve if they do not, or use prostitution as part of a strategy to escape a life in which they are hungry and barefoot and/or experiencing physical or sexual violence, for example, then to identify their commercial sexual exploitation as* the *factor threatening their 'physical, psychological, spiritual, moral, and social development' (ECPAT, 1999, p. 8) seems rather to put the cart before the horse. Julia O'Connell Davidson, 2005, Children in the Global Sex Trade, UK: Polity Press, p. 142 (emphasis in the original).*

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Chapter 4

Research Findings

Respondent Information

In addition to asking study participants to self-identify how old they were, their race, gender, sexual orientation, and where they were born and raised, the interview protocol included questions about how long they stayed in school, when they first left home, where they were staying at the time of the interview, at what age they had had first consensual sex, and at what age they would say they "entered the sex trade." While there was wide variation in the details of each answer, almost all of the young people had been born and raised in the Chicago area, had already dropped out of school at the time of the interview, had left home before turning 18 years of age, and had first sex before turning 18. Table 4.1 displays the approximate percentages of respondent information that participants shared with us.

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Table 4.1. Chicago Participant Demographics Life Experiences

Number of Cases	202
Education Level	
Less than 6th Grade	0%
6th to 8th Grade	2%
9th to 11th Grade	37%
12th Grade and above	61%
Time in "the life"	
Less than 1 year	9%
1 year	18%
3 year	32%
4 years	14%
5 to 9 years	24%
10 or more years	3%
Has Children?	
Yes	32%
How old when first left home?	
Mean	15
<13	9%
13 to 15	28%
16 to 18	46%
19+	8%
Still lives at home	10%
Age at first sex experience	
Mean	13
0 to 12	25%
13 to 17	64%
18 to 24	7%

Table 4.1 tells a quantitative story, but the narratives go much deeper.

Jae[2] was a 19-year-old African American girl, self-identified as bisexual, looking strong and wearing her hair up in a clip. The Cook County Department of Children and Family Services removed her from her mother's home when she was six years old. Her story is horrific and, unfortunately, common among youth in the street sex economy. Shy and smart, Jae had a pleasant way of speaking with a resonant voice. She recounted how her Mom was "a hype" and using drugs and worse. Jae lived with her grandmother, until her grandmother couldn't

[2] All names and identifying details have been altered in order to protect interviewees.

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take care of her anymore. She moved in with her "Auntie," ran away from there to go stay with her sister, and, after the police caught her, stayed in the "Audy Home" for over a month (the former nickname for the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center (JTDC), the site of the very first children's court in the world, founded in 1899 by Jane Addams and others). Jae had been out of the home, on her own, staying wherever she could find a place to be—since she was 13 years old, always frightened and desperate.

> *Well, when I was eight years old, my Uncle forced me to give him oral [sex] ... By the time I was 13, I pretty much didn't have anywhere to really live, so I just quit going to school. ... So, I asked some girls around me who always had their hair done and stuff, "How you get money for that?" And they put me on it. Before, I used to yell, "JAILBAIT!" whenever a guy tried to talk to me, but then I started to jump in their cars.*

When asked what she spends her money on, Jae replied:

> *Cigarettes, weed, food, clothes. I'm saving up for a coat. I've been wearing this [points to her hooded cotton sweatshirt] all winter, and it's getting cold out here!*

Jae seemed strong and had big plans. But as this report will show, life was difficult and complex for youth engaged in the sex trade for survival needs.

A 19-year-old from the Westside told us that the first time she exchanged sex for anything was when she was 17 years old.

> *I ran away with another girl. I didn't have bus fare or food. We were walking around. We called a partyline and made a message. Someone called back and they asked, "Are you mobile?" We went to his house. Afterwards, we bought food and bus cards.*

She identified herself as African American and bisexual, and said that she mostly stays in an apartment with other folks paid for by Department of Family and Children's Services.

> *We need more stuff now that we are on our own. I met someone else who does it. We have each other's backs. We mostly stay on the party line Chicago Alibi because it's more convenient. My friend showed me. She also has a website. She has a daddy who took pics and put it up on the website.*

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It was common to hear the terms “daddy” and “mommy” when referring to adults who “help” the young people, but the participants did not consider themselves controlled by pimps. The grim stories of life and sex in the streets continue throughout the interviews.

Making and Spending Money

Participants were queried about their entry into the activity of trading sex for money (at times referred to as “the life,” “the game,”), the prices they charged and for what, where they worked, how much money they make, keep for themselves, spend, and on what they spend their money. The accounts of debut in the sex economy and the amounts of money charged and earned varied widely. Answers to questions about who was in control of their money and what they spent it on did not vary much—they kept their money and they spent it on food and household items for themselves, their families, and their children, and they spent it on marijuana and cigarettes. Although the prices charged varied to the extreme, some sounded more reasonable than others:

> *I charge $40 to $50 for sex, always use a condom, no kissing. (Straight female)*
>
> *I start at $70 for a blowjob, and go up to $350 for oral, roleplay, fetish, and intercourse. I charge $350-$750 for overnights. (Gay male)*
>
> *Depends on who I’m with, but at least $50. Might get more but I’ll settle for between $50 and $75. Last time I was with someone, I got $60. (Straight male)*
>
> *$30 for sex, $60 for both (oral sex and intercourse). (Straight female)*
>
> *Oral $50 to $75. Anal $150. For me to penetrate is $100. $250 for an overnight. (Bisexual male)*
>
> *$40 for oral, $80 for sex, $200 for the night, and $250 for a threesome. (Bisexual male)*

Tyra was a 20-year-old mixed-race transwoman who had been exchanging sex for money for about two and a half years. She said she started because “someone asked me…I was propositioned. I didn’t have any responsibilities and it was an easy way to make a living.” Tyra said she charged $60 per hour “for whatever” from a “Regular Joe” and $150 per hour from a “business man.” She held all her own money and the first things she usually bought

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when she got money were "cigarettes, food, hygiene, and products." Overwhelmingly, most youth spent reported spending their money on these type of survival items.

Many youth, like Michael, said they started because "I had to do what I had to do." At 16, gay, and African American, Michael "got $500 for dressing up for drag queen things." He said that he usually works dancing ("ballerinas") and being with "regulars" (referring to known clients whom one sees regularly, sometimes called "steadies"). What are the first things Michael buys when he gets money? "Food, clothes, weed, and liquor."

Another common narrative among the young people interviewed came from Maria, a white/mixed race Westside 18-year-old young cis-gendered woman. Maria self-identified as heterosexual, and said she had been trading sex for money since she was 13 years old because "I had no food, no nothing, and I needed it…I was around the 'hood. My eye just caught a person who was 15-16 [years old]. I looked older." Maria names her prices and keeps all her money, "I'm the boss!" She buys "clothes, shoes, pads, basic things," goes to the grocery store and restaurants—and pays for her phone.

Other accounts surfaced as well, like this one from L'anae, a young black straight woman who started trading sex for drugs when she was 17 years old. She finished school up to the 8th grade and never went back. Her two daughters live with her mother.

> *When I started using drugs is when I had to do it* [participate in sex exchange]. *Up 'till then I sold drugs, but wasn't doing them. A lot of these young folks out here don't realize that if you sell it, you'll end up doing it.*
>
> *Smoking weed led to smoking primos* [cocaine sprinkled in a joint—a cigarette of marijuana], *then crack. After that I figured out I needed to find a way to get money to get my stuff. I used to say that I'd never prostitute myself – you have to realize – never say what you'll never do. I looked up; here I am doing it.*
>
> *First time: It was a drug dealer. He made me an offer. Okay, fine. I didn't like it, I thought to myself, here I am trying to get a ten-dollar bag and I'm here letting this man handle on me. It was uncomfortable.*
>
> *For everything I charge $200; a blow job $60-$80; to pee on the men it's $80-$90, talk freaky is $60. I have more male customers than women. Some men are just lonely, they want to drive around in their cars and talk to someone.*

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L'anae now meets clients "on the streets, between Jackson and Madison on Kenton – that's when I want a quick fix. I also have personal clients that call me up – we keep in contact. I met 'em on the stroll originally." She has had offers to work in strip clubs, parties, and porn but said she would "die" if her brothers or mother every saw her doing sex work. "They know about my drug life, but they don't know about this." So, we did meet some young folks who were in the sex economy in order to get money for drugs, but this was much more of an anomaly than a common narrative.

Very few young people reported being forced into sex work and having to give up all their money to someone who controlled their lives. The great majority did not like having sex for money, but spoke plainly about starting to do it because they needed to buy food and clothes and other things young people like and need—gear, drugs, diapers for their babies, McDonald's, bus fares.

According to many large-scale studies of CSEC in the last decade, the sex business is a multi-million dollar industry. Most articles about CSEC begin with recounting that the industry is a "billion dollar industry" (i.e., Dank et al. 2014; Butler 2011). We did not meet any billionaires among the youth in this sample. Nor did we see evidence of a multi-million dollar market in their relationships with adults—even those who disclosed working for pimps or for legal sex industry establishments.

Market Involvement

We asked participants about where they worked, how they transported themselves to those places, what influenced their decisions to go to one place and not another, and when they worked—what days, hours, and how often. Young people revealed great variation in the places they conducted commercial sexual activity. Whether in the South, West, or Northsides of the Chicago area, participants were active in a range of places: houses, cars, hotel rooms, behind buildings, in parking lots, in abandoned buildings. Many youth mentioned having exchanging sex for survival needs in nearby states (Wisconsin, Indiana) and different towns in the suburbs of Chicago. Many youth went out at night to look for sexual exchange for money; others reported working the streets in the mornings and afternoons. And many used the Internet from wherever they were staying to find "customers." One new theme that came out of the interviews regarding market involvement was the notion of safety: racial safety, sexual orientation safety, and sex work safety.

Young people mostly used public transportation to get around. Taxis, buses, the El (the elevated train system in Chicago), in cars with friends, and riding with customers were all

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mentioned as transportation methods. Young people from the South and West sides often went North; young folks went to South Chicago for certain kinds of "dates," and West and North for others. In addition, we learned that some young black gay and trans* youth did not feel safe close to home on the West and South sides of Chicago due to homophobia (Carson Williams 2014; Sege and Huppke 2013). As Chicago Tribune reporters stated in their coverage of a violent hate crime against two lesbians on the Westside of Chicago,

> *For years, black and Latino LGBT youth from the city's west and Southsides have come to the Center on Halsted, seeking a safe place where they can be open about their sexual orientation. Many say it's too dangerous to be openly gay in their neighborhoods (Sege and Huppke 2013).*

Queer youth travel across the city to come up to the Northside to the gay neighborhood known as Boystown to work the sex trade, hang out with each other, have fun, and receive social services at the Northside non-profits such as Center on Halsted and Broadway Youth Center (Sosin 2011a; Sosin 2011b).

One African American bisexual young man told us he worked "Belmont (more for girls) and Waveland and Broadway (for the male side)"—both these areas are on the Northside of Chicago. He said his brother or his cousin drove him around town. He avoided the Dunkin' Donuts on the intersection of Belmont, Clark, and Sheffield Avenues generally because that is where the police hang out—and, he says, the police tend to racially profile him.

Juan's friends introduced him to his boyfriend, a medical doctor quite a bit older than him ("I don't want to say his age"). Being a gay Latino, Juan says he has lived in Boystown on the Northside of Chicago where he feels safe since he moved out of his home at age 19. Juan describes his living situation as having a "paying lover." He stays with him, lives with him, and doesn't have to worry about paying the rent. Juan describes the relationship as having been "mutually beneficial, so far, for 17 months."

Many young folks had their favorite places they felt safe as well as streets and strolls they knew not to go to. Youth explained the difference between the streets where pimp-controlled women worked and streets where drug-addicted women worked. In general, tracks were gender-segregated, i.e., mostly boys worked Boystown, but one young bisexual man explained how he would get into fights with "the girls out on Madison and Cicero" [Westside] because the girls would tell him that it was their spot. He said that one time he got in a physical fight over "work territory." He also told us that in the drug spots "guys would say mean and derogatory things like, 'Get off our block with that gay shit.'"

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Eric, African American 19-year-old, had first sex with his girlfriend, but self-identified as bisexual. He'd been in the trade for two years and had some regulars. He also said he sometimes worked at Steamworks, a men's club for "men looking for other men" (see www.SteamworksBaths.com for a full menu of services offered). Once in a while Eric worked letting folks "take pictures," as well as mainly meeting dates on the Internet. Eric said he stayed away from the streets and mostly worked Craigslist.

On the other hand, one 17-year-old young woman told us that she "only works referrals" from a friend. She finds it embarrassing to walk around on streets trying to get dates. Actually, she didn't really want to do it that much, so she just would take the opportunity if her "friend" called. She has four teenaged sisters and discovered, after the two of them both "came clean" to each other, the one of her sisters does it too. "Now we can talk about our secrets from time to time," something she said makes her feel safe and maybe, not so alone.

The young people who worked the strolls and tracks on the South and West sides of Chicago recounted more lonely and more dangerous engagement with exchange. The South and Westside tracks are less populated, in decaying neighborhoods, with long stretches of avenues of abandoned houses and closed businesses, small local churches, and liquor stores with windows barred.

Exhibit 10. Born Losers Private Club on Chicago Westside

Source: deana lewis

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Youth moved around from track to stroll, neighborhood to neighborhood, depending on where law enforcement patrols were active, whether they felt safe due to being racially profiled by police, being profiled as being gay or trans (see "Walking While Being Transgender is Not a Crime," www.youthbreakout.org, a New Orleans organization "fighting the criminalization of LGBTQ youth"), or participants moved around to avoid being suspected of prostitution. Youth also reported moving around if there were too many other people working that area—"too much competition."

Tyrone is a 17-year-old African American straight guy who only has sex for money with women. He said he first got into to it because,

> *I was outside on the block. A woman came up to me*. [He described her as being "ready."] *She was drunk and offered me money for sex. At first I wasn't going to because she was a stranger, but then she offered me money, and I thought, "Hell yea!" So that's how it's been since then.*

He explained that he was 16 and needed money to take care of himself –and the women liked it and they were paying. Sometimes Tyrone goes outside in his neighborhood to find women to pay him. If it's "too cold," he just sits at home, sometimes on the Internet, and "calls girls." "They love having sex—they pay!" He sometimes refers customers to his friends because he has more women than he can handle. Tyrone tells his friends that they just have to approach the women and tell her what's up, that if they want "woo-woo" they need to pay.

Tiffany just had one customer. He was "talkin' to her" for a long time, giving her stuff. He was a big-time drug dealer on her block. "He was known all over Little Village," she said. Finally, one day, he told her, "Hey now, I been talking to you for a while now, when you gonna do somethin' for me?" She said she knew he meant "have sex with him." She was 17 years old, he was 27 with a girlfriend and kids in another neighborhood. He took her to his apartment and that's how it started.

> "I seen him like two to three times a week. Every Monday, he give me $250."

Tiffany said that it felt "OK" to get paid for having sex, but that she wanted to go to school and become a nurse. She said that she knew the girls up on Madison (a main stroll in Westside Chicago) worked exchanging sex for money, and she did not want to do that. "They all have pimps up there. I don't want that." Tiffany's situation could be likened to the instrumental dating that women practice around the world. According to Decoteau's 2013 study of HIV/AIDs politics, some of the most poor South African women in her sample had

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several boyfriends that they got money from each one for certain things—market involvement as directed and organized around survival needs.

Customers

Considering demand speaks to the heart of the issue: who is driving the market? Study participants were asked where they meet their "customers" (the study's choice of language), how old are they, their marital status, sexual orientation, racial background and their customer's professions. Again, we heard a wide range of responses: customers are middle-aged women, lonely older straight men, married middle-aged middle-class professionals, working class men of color, police officers, lawyers, construction workers, and more.

Responses to questions asking for descriptions of customers of cis-gendered girls and young women (folks born with the body that conforms to mainstream ideas of what their gender should be) revealed answers such as:

> *Most of my customers are straight men in their 20s to their 50s.*
>
> *Most of them are old white men, I think some of them are married but we don't talk about that. I mostly go downtown Chicago, that is where I feel safe because the men are wealthy. They tell me: the idea of being with a black woman arouses them.*
>
> *My regulars are like a teacher, a businessman, bartender, a sales guy—like that. They are between 25 and 35 years old, I'd say. I don't like old men.*

An 18-year-old African American young woman told us:

> *Four of my regulars are men—two of them are bisexual, like me. Three are women aged 22, 28, and 19. I don't like fat boys—I would prefer to be with people who are in good shape: but my regulars aren't! Oh, I met all of the women on the Internet.*

Another straight black youth said that "80% of my customers are females—I meet them at clubs and parties."

At times, our team questioned the veracity of the narratives we were hearing. Young men reported that middle-aged women picked them up off the streets and paid a lot of money to have sex with them. At first we were skeptical, until we realized that sex tourism, sexual exchanges for cash occur in endless formations around the world—why would survival sex for youth in Chicago be any different? Why would "sexual desire" or whatever drives the

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market be only one way, one age, one gender, one configuration? If social science and the study of sexuality in the last century has taught us anything, it continually finds great variation and myriad attributes in the activity of human sexuality.

Youth garnered customers in many ways: the Internet, from what they called "referrals"—which meant that friends shared connections. Youth met customers in bars, strip clubs, and on strolls and tracks. Internet sites included Adam4Adam, Craigslist, BlackPlanet, Backpage, Tagged, Facebook, BGC.com, Mocospace, and others.

B'Linda had been working in the sex economy since she was 16. She was a black MTF young person with a light complexion. She was wearing leggings and knee-high boots with a long brown sweater—she was relaxed and funny. She had a lot to say about her "dates," as she called them.

> *Well, when I first started it was 'cause I got kicked out of my group home. Boys always be hittin' on me. I was hungry so I did it for like $10.00 until people volunteered to teach me. The first time I was on my own, he was cute. I thought he would want a relationship!*
>
> *This last year, the track is getting difficult. They been coming out, trying to rob the dates. So I mostly stay up where it's crowded—Belmont, Irving Park, like that. But it's rough—I have to change it around a lot. If tons of girls be out there with they tits out, then I have to dress slutty—I have to do something to stand out!*
>
> *Ok, so I don't work the Internet—I meet everybody just walking down the street. We usually go to their cars or they get a hotel room. I don't know what they do for a living, but I do see some wedding rings out here… They mostly in they 30s and older, I'd say half are White, half are Black. I think they are straight males with a fantasy to fulfill.*

Other trans youth reported similar perceptions of their customers, "They are straight guys, but they are confused," one participant told us. Another said, "They want to fill a void in their lives."

Study participants were pretty comfortable talking about what customers wanted. Most common was oral sex and intercourse. But we did hear about clients with fetish desires:

> *They ask to do weird things sometimes, like crap on them, hit them, pee on them, kick their balls, make them lick my shoes.*

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A comment shared many times when asked what they disliked the most about their financial situations was "remembering things I had to do" and "doing things I don't want to do for money."

One of the most intriguing findings from the fieldwork was how many of the youth who answered the flyer regarding young people in the sex trade were boys/young men/males. We interviewed young men from the West and Southsides of Chicago, not only in the Northside near Boystown, where one might expect to meet boys and young men exchanging sex for money with other men. Who are their customers?

Blair shared a narrative that could be titled "Benefits with Friends." Slim, good-looking with a pocked-mark complexion, he described himself as a straight black 18-year-old male. He said he only has sex with female friends from school

> *So, for a couple years now, I been having sex for money with about three of my girlfriends. I don't really ask for money—like a set price or anything—we just do it and then they give me something, usually like $50 or something. I asked this one girl if she would give me a ride to Naperville and she said yes, but I had to have sex with her.*

Blair's girlfriends are all around his age—straight black young women, as far as he knows. Another 18-year-old young man told us that for at least one year, he's been getting money from "this lady in my apartment building. She's Latina, and she pays me $25 every week to go have sex with her. I think she works at Metra or something."

Another straight black teenager we interviewed said that all his customers were females. Why? "Because they like sex." His sister "scouts" for him and he gives her some of the money (usually between $50 and $75 for a "date"). One 16-year-old African American young woman said her sister "knows people, she used to work in a strip club" and "she lets me know when she meet [sic] someone." She only goes with straight men and usually charges around $80.00. Her dates work in business, as engineers, and "work at the airport."

While these accounts may meet the definition of commercially sexually exploited children, they do not jibe with the dominant narrative of the federal panic over trafficked children.

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Pimps and other Market Facilitators

During our research, we met few young people who were traditionally positioned and controlled by pimps. Almost all participants claimed to be in charge of selecting customers, handling their own money, and working alone or with "friends." We heard about (and witnessed) adults called "boyfriend," "Street Mother," "Daddy," and "Mommy" but they were not featured as major influences in the economic sexual lives of the Chicago participants. Of course, notions of choice and agency blur when the participants are young, hungry, and homeless.

It is difficult to report back the findings from the section on "Pimps and Market Facilitators" because very few reported having a pimp. Clearly, we did not attract youth in the sex trade who are under the total control of pimps. Or, possibly, the dominant narrative among the youth is that, even if they do have "an adult friend who helps them get customers" they do not experience that or share that as having a pimp. Another possibility is that the "cool" thing to say is that, "I am completely in charge and on my own," even if that is doubtful after a more close listening to an interview. In that case, it would be that they don't want to be seen as *victims of traffickers*.

Common responses when asked about pimps and "market facilitators" (a phrase inherited from the study protocol) included:

> *It don't apply to me.*
>
> *I don't have a pimp.*
>
> *Me and my friends handle it.*
>
> *I don't have a pimp, my Uncle helps me* (see below)
>
> *I don't need any help getting customers!*
>
> *I'm a self-running business.*

However, one young woman detailed her horrific experiences with customers and with her pimp. Heavy-set, dark skinned African American young woman in a blonde wig, Ariana told us she left home five years ago when she was 13. She has a two-year-old son. When she was 15 years old, she found herself really desperate.

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My baby needed Pampers and everybody around me was high on drugs. Nobody would help. So, yeah, I got in a car with a guy and he made me go down on him. It got easier to do if I got high. The next couple times were bad—they were older—they wouldn't take me home and they smacked me and hit me. But I didn't tell anybody.

One time I went in a car with a guy and he kept driving. He kept me for like 3 or 4 days. I was trying to get away and he started hitting me and threw a glass at my face [showed scar above her eyebrow]. *He was constantly having sex with me. He had left, and left a window open so I jumped out and ran away.*

So OK so, I met D.M. on 47th and Ashland. I was walking down the street and I got into a car with him. He told me who he was and he asked did I want to do it. Once I got in, I couldn't get out. I am so scared of owing him money.

Q. How does your pimp help you?

A. He don't help me, he puts me down!

Ariana said that D.M. usually drops her off and picks her up when she's done. He looks for her and calls her and sets things up—any time of the night.

If he doesn't set something up, or there's not any [johns], *he gets mad. One time he followed me and was stalking me—and lying about it. I try not to let it go there, but it does get physical.*

One time, at the beginning, he wanted to do it without a condom and I told him he had to use one. He got mad and kicked me down some stairs. Then he started apologizing and said he'd use one.

Ariana lived with D.M. for 6 to 8 months, but he had all kinds of rules. He wanted her to be at home by 7:00pm, clean, and he made her get down on her knees and say his name. She said he was verbally and physically abusive. One time, when D.M. left for Michigan, she left the house. Ariana said she still goes back to him if he gets customers, he gets half the money but sometimes wants it all.

Yeah, he like has like 8 girls including me, I think. I only really know one, named Junie—I get along with her, but I'm closer to some than others. I heard of some other pimps like L.C, Killer, and Smooth—but I don't go near them.

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At the end of the interview, Ariana asked for help getting her own car, her own house, a job, domestic violence services, therapy, a mentor, and someone to talk to.[3] In ten years? She wants to get her baby back, drive a Mercedes Benz, and own a 3-bedroom condo.

Tall and thin, microbraids pulled into a side ponytail, 17 year-old Monica sported a tongue piercing and a beautiful smile. She recounted a disjointed and disturbing story about her life and experiences with exchanging sex for money.

> *OK, so like I'm 4 years old and they took me and put me with my grandma. Then I bounced around like to foster homes. It didn't go so good for me. My foster mom's husband raped me. He gave me drugs and then did stuff to me.*
>
> *It* [exchanging sex for money] *started when I was really young. My foster brother would give me $10* [for sexual activity] *and I would spend it on my little sister. I always have to take care of my little sister. We got bounced around a lot and I had to do what was necessary.*
>
> *Now it's always with my Uncle. He has his people. He call people to bring people over to party and then he keep $500 and give me $300 to spend on my sister. That's when I was about 14* [years old].
>
> *Now I'm tryin' to stop. I only do it through my Uncle. He takes me places, he makes all the arrangements. I'm tryin' to stop—it's starting to hurt. Yeah, but I just do everything through my Uncle—not the Internet, not the streets. He has his people that he calls on the cellphone and they come pick me up and drop me back off. He keeps some of the money.*
>
> *It's different. I never thought that if I got back with immediate family I would be used like this. I hate him with a passion. I'm tryin' to get out for so long. It's like a forcing thing. It's a hated relationship but I got to be there for my sister.*

One witnesses Monica's story with difficulty. Knowing that her account is rare, and hoping that she will eventually get away from her Uncle helps. It was not even clear if he was her actual uncle—she *thinks* she remembers meeting him through her grandma, but she's not sure.

---

[3] All participants in this study received referral information to local social service organizations that work with youth populations/sex work populations.

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Monica's and Ariana's stories were anomalies. One young man told us his story and he said the whole point of working where he works is to avoid the pimps. Bobby showed up with an eyebrow ring and dreadlocks. He said he'd been in the life since he was 15 years old. He "stays on a park bench with friends in Englewood" [Southside].

Exhibit 11. Image from Chicago's Southside

Source: Google Images

Bobby's grandmother died and he was left on his own on the Southside of Chicago:

> *My grandmother had died and my father lost the house. He left me so I was sleeping at a bus stop and I met this guy Rick who offered to let me sleep at his house in exchange for oral sex. We lasted 6 months.*
>
> *Now I work in a trap house at 64th, 67th, 69th, and Throop* [he changed the street locations throughout the interview]. *It's a place where drugs, alcohol, sex are sold. We sit and wait and people come and select which ones they want. I have to kickback ten percent of what I make to the house.*
>
> *On any day, there are about ten 15- to 30-year-olds working. Folks work like three days a week. I usually work the morning shift – 9am to 5pm. I've also worked in the*

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evenings, and in suburbs like Harvey and Bridgeville and Algonquin—not frequently though. I just go where there is a high volume of people.

I will move along if pimps are around. You have to pay a fine if you go on a pimp's block. My whole purpose of going to the trap house was to avoid the pimps.

The majority of young people we interviewed in Chicago did not have "market facilitators." This finding is key because the dominant narrative circulating about CSEC is that to break up a prostitution ring, there must be some central controlling adult figures who are constituted as traffickers running the show. In the main, that was not the account we heard from hundreds of young people in this study.

Even when youth talked about adults being involved, young people were in control of negotiating activities and prices, collecting money, and choosing what to do with the money earned. We did not hear about "breaking night"—a term used to describe the process of paying up to the pimp when they come to collect. When some of the youth talked about being pimps and "market facilitators," they described collecting upfront and paying the girls fifty percent. On the whole, a different sense of shared responsibility was evidenced in terms of how the young folks talked about adults, and when the young men and women talked about pimping.

Health and Needs

Youth were asked about their health care needs, how they met them, and what kinds of services they wished they could find. A surprising number of youth reported that they had never had a sexually transmitted infection. Another surprising proportion reported going to a health clinic for services recently and often. Very few believed that their health care providers knew they were situated in commercial sex on the streets. Almost everybody said they used condoms for protection.

One young woman was being treated for trichotillomania, or compulsively pulling hair out, another for asthma. Other medical complaints that participants listed included being treated for UTI (urinary tract infection), chlamydia, "I need glasses," "I had bronchitis," gonorrhea, eczema, syphilis, hearing problems, and more. A surprising proportion answered "yes" to having seen a dentist recently.

Mallory's obesity kind of took over any first impression of her. She had three kids whom her sister took care of; she started trading sex for money when she was 15 years old. Her clear

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brown skin made her white smile stand out. Mallory was wearing a wild-print beautiful colored blouse and jeans when she showed up for her interview.

> *I saw a doctor about a month ago because I had like bronchitis. But I go to doctors whenever I need to. OK so like after I had an incident* [Mallory did not go into any detail] *they asked me if I wanted to see someone. So I did talk to someone about selling sex, when I was 17 years old. So it was just that one time. I found it helpful…but the poverty was just too persistent.*
>
> *She told me what I needed to do to go somewhere. She encouraged me to go to school and that I should get a foster parent.*

Mallory said that when she is not "working," she is working on getting a GED. She said what she really needs is housing "with a lease," maybe help with "mental health," and—"a degree in phlebotomy—I want to work in a hospital." I have argued elsewhere that health needs and the work to get those needs met can be a pipeline to success for young people who basically need everything and don't know where to start (Schaffner 2014). Faced with homelessness, lack of high school degree, living in an underground economy, sometimes the first and only contact some youth have with loving, caring, healthy, understanding, non-judgmental, empathic adults is through public health systems.

In the main, young people accessed a variety of health care services. Many mentioned The Center on Halsted, Broadway Youth Center, and Howard Brown: three of the main sources for health, medical, psychological, and social services for LGBTQ and street youth on the Northside of Chicago. Both public and private resources were accessed.

> *I went to a doctor two months ago in November. I got blood tests and urine tests. Even though I use condoms and wash/douche, I had chlamydia twice. I got shots from a doctor to take care of it. The University of Chicago* [on Chicago's Southside] *has hotline services for a lot of things. I have an aunt that I am very close to, but I see myself as my own therapist.* (Tricia, African American bisexual, exchanging sex for "cash and stuff" since she was 15 years old)
>
> *Sometimes I go to Kaleidoscope at Damen and 12th Avenue* [a city-funded health clinic and social service project for youth, foster families, and childcare], *or the Boys and Girls Home at Mercy for counseling. I was referred through DCFS* [Department of Children and Family Services]. *I was going every Wednesday, but I don't go no more. I never told them I did what I do.* (A 16-year-old girl from Chicago's

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Southside, who "just moved back with my mother. Prior to that was living with a man I was getting money from.")

The Mercy Home for Boys and Girls is a private Catholic charity that serves "at-risk children" in Chicago. The Mercy Home has a long, popular, and checkered history in Chicago.

Youth in the sex trade in this sample accessed health and medical care across the city, but recounted that they rarely told their health care providers much details about their participation in a street sex economy.

Pearson was a young Black youth—18 years old—and was both a "market facilitator" and traded sex for money. He detailed his practices, both with preying at clubs and bars upon "older Black women with low self-esteem," and setting up young women with dates with men where he kept half the money. Pearson experienced a lot of violent physical fighting in his family when he was young. When asked about his health care and needs, he recounted a childhood injury and contact with a variety of social services both on the South and North side of Chicago.

> *I was in a real bad fire when I was a kid. We had to jump out a second story window. I landed, falling back on my head, and was bleeding from both ears. It was hurting and bleeding. I still have trouble with my hearing. I went to the hospital at the University on 55th and Cottage Grove* [The University of Chicago on the Southside] *and they just gave me drops.*
>
> *I went to this program up North, Circle and Ciphers* [an amazing, successful, and popular youth development project in Chicago that fuses hip hop with restorative justice practices] *with my friend. And I went to Salvation Army* [Red Shield on 69th and Morgan, Southside] *to use the computers and work out. I went to groups there--for help with jobs, to use the computers, and for a reference.*

Pearson said that nobody at any of these places had any idea that he exchanged sex for money, and helped three other young women get dates, too.

Adolescent health care is crucial to ensure positive outcomes for all children as they transition to adulthood. The city of Chicago struggles to meet all youths' health care and social service needs. While a number of programs exist that work with "prostituted persons" and conduct street outreach at night, the most successful project that worked with girls who

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exchange sex for money or other survival needs is the peer-led Young Women's Empowerment Project (YWEP).

YWEP is a nationally-known non-profit that is run by young women "who have been there." Utilizing harm reduction, self-care, and leadership development—all with a social justice perspective, YWEP has been a powerful force for support, empathy, source of strength, and peer-counseling among Chicago's straight, trans and queer young women of color street youth and an inspiration across the nation. YWEP provides crucial information to teach the public about the needs and experiences of young women in a street sex economy. In both a transformational and unfortunate move, YWEP was forced to go underground in 2013 because of police harassment regarding CSEC "rescuers" as well as lack of funding. YWEP continues to have a website at www.youarepriceless.com until 2015.

Experience with the Police

Youth were asked about their experiences with police. What was most interesting was the range of responses—from "the police are nice to me," to "the police are brutal" to "the police want to date me." Especially among the transgirls who spend time on the Northside of Chicago in Boystown, some did report that "walking while transgender" came to be seen as a crime by some of the local beat officers (see also BreakOUT! Research by youth in New Orleans at www.youthbreakout.org).

The streets of Chicago are not safe at night for children. The street sex economy is harsh, frightening, ugly. Youth cannot know with any certainty the outcome of contact with a "date" or "client." Commercially sexually exploited youth must climb into cars, go into alleys, and enter cheap motel rooms with adults in order to perform sexual activities and get some cash. The irony of earning money in a street sex economy is that there is nowhere to turn when things go bad and get dangerous and violent. For young people working in an illicit market, there is no police to call for protection. But, even worse, several trans youth described how the police officers themselves participate in the street sex exchange. The following examples betray a creepy sort of twist to the whole business.

> *I've never had any trouble with police. I just know one cop who's a date.*

> *Police took me to jail. They saw me standing by a car talking to some man. They are irritating. They discriminate by us for being transgender. But I do have a regular who is a Chicago police officer.*

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The police treat me nice, they want to date me.

So, in a paradoxical twist, trans girls recounted, on the one hand, that police were rude and disrespectful. In the next breath, young women reported that Chicago Police Department law enforcement officials were regular dates for some of them.

In an act of ultimate betrayal, the one place where a citizen might have any hope of redress, police officers transform themselves into clients implicit in the illicit activity of market sex exchange. Trans girls recount being triply violated: disrespected for being transgender, mistreated because they are in the sex trade, and betrayed by adults who are paid to provide protection and safety for city residents.

Many youth reported having multiple run-ins with police, often more than a dozen. They reported being arrested and hassled while walking down the street, and being arrested for a range of reasons. One youth said he got arrested for "stealing electricity"—he was charging his cell phone inside a hallway that had a door that opened onto the street. Another young man said he was arrested for "aggravated assault against a police officer" and spent a year in Juvenile Temporary Detention Center (JTDC).

One young woman told us she only works in the Roseland community on the far Southside of Chicago because it is the neighborhood she knows the best. She said the police always stop her and ask her if she has a pimp. She acts like she doesn't know what they are talking about.

> *One time I got hassled because I was on the street. This lady called the police because I was in public! They offered to take me to a shelter. Just for being out there!*

She also said she hates every single thing about this "work." "Every time, I feel like I'm selling my soul."

Narratives by other youth reveal how the police enforce the racial regime on the Northside. One African American boy told us that one time a police officer told him to "get out of Lakeview because you are not a resident." Another recounted his arrest for "sleeping on a train." Youth reported feeling that sometimes there was nowhere for them to just be, to just be safe, to hang out.

Young people in this sample reported run-ins and arrests for a variety of reasons: fighting, prostitution, curfew, possession and sales of drugs, residential burglary, loitering on the corner, playing dice, trespassing, battery, suspected of carrying a gun, not going to school,

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robbery, retail theft, and more. This level of involvement with law enforcement is ironic because the overarching goal of the CSEC project, as it were, is to decriminalize minors and reframe them as victims.

"The police treat everybody like they a criminal," explained 18-year-old Julia, an African American girl who self-identified as bisexual. "I've had like three or four run-ins with them and they are always rude." Her best friend got her into the game when she was 14 years old.

> *If I don't get any calls [from steadies], I just put on my clothes and go out to West Cermak—Cermak and Pulaski. But I don't have to deal with cops out there because I go out during the day. I don't make myself visible—they never even see me.*

Many young people like Julia go unnoticed by police on the beat when they are on the streets in the afternoons and wear what most young people wear—i.e., jeans, hoodies, and the like.

One youth just had his first experience with sex work the week prior. He was fairly new to Chicago and homeless. Bright and insightful, when asked about police treatment, he displayed acute awareness of his white privilege:

> *When we get messed with by the cops while we are all in a big group, I get the majority of my constitutional rights observed. It's not the same for my black friends. The cops in Chicago must have a lot of money and resources pumped into them, 'cause in [Washington D. C], cops are scared to go into most these neighborhoods.*

Other young people were savvy and strategic. An 18-year-old knew that he would no longer go to juvenile hall if apprehended by police—he would go straight to adult jail. He explained it this way, "I try to stay away from them. I'm county material now. I don't want to catch county cases, so I stay by myself."

Straight, queer, feminine, masculine, black and brown and white youth all reported varying experiences with the Chicago Police Department. Because few reported being arrested for prostitution outright, it is possible that many run-ins are due to the youth's homelessness. Another explanation might be the new Safe Harbor Laws in Illinois that define youth in the sex trade as victims of trafficking, unable to consent to sexual activity—not prostitutes. Either way, as discussed earlier, apprehension and arrests of minors in Chicago for prostitution have been low for at least a decade, regardless whether they are framed as juvenile prostitutes, CSEC, youth in the street sex economy, or sex trafficking victims.

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Perceptions and Expectations

Youth were first asked if there were things they liked about this work, and things they disliked. Except for "the money," almost everybody said "no" to the first question, although some said things like:

I like helping people out.

This work is easy—you don't need education, training, or a license.

What did they dislike?

I hate going down when I don't want to.

I dislike the things I have to do.

I dislike everything—it's demeaning. There's no stability.

If I wasn't feeling a female, I would have to feel her. I would have to pop a Viagra to get right. Sometimes it [gets] *tiring, especially when you had three ugly females lined up.*

Not surprisingly, most of the young people pictured themselves with their own homes and quite wealthy in the near future. When asked, "Where do you see yourself in ten years?" answers varied in the fantastic hopes and dreams:

Halfway through my rap career and already invested in my first hospital—I plan to own them.

Millionaire in about five years.

With a doctor's degree.

International business.

And, of course, most youth mentioned that getting a job, going back to school, finding housing, and finding supportive people was the most likely way to make their future happen. So many said things like: "I just want to be living alone, pursuing my life, and dancing," and other completely reasonable and attainable life situations.

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I would like a guaranteed job that won't lay me off, so I can stop trading sex for money.

In ten years, I want to be in Florida, doing childcare. I like doing that. I like taking care of my nieces and nephews.

I want a place to stay, a car, and a job. I want to be married and be successful.

I'd like just a regular apartment with a nice comfortable bed, hot shower, and a refrigerator.

I need low-income housing—somewhere I could get stable to live so I could go back to school. Food, too. Hopefully, I'll be finishing up my Bachelor's degree, starting my career, living with a wife or girlfriend—and having a car.

It is likely that many of the young people in this sample will make these reasonable transitions to adulthood and beyond. Criminology calls it "aging out" (Massoglia and Uggen 2010). For others, the structural constrictions will be considerable: racism, a poor economy, lack of entry-level low-skill jobs that eventually lead to a living wage.

Pearson had clear plans about what he wanted to do instead of trading sex for money: "Well, I had a basketball dream, but now I want to open my own business—a dread head shop. I also think I would like to work in a center for kids."

Reggie had plans too. Reggie was 17 years old when he met an "older lady" named Pat on a chat website. His family had kicked him out, so she let him stay with her in exchange for sex. He mostly got referrals from Pat and her friends, but he stacked up a few regulars and made a living trading sex with older women for money. "A lot of women looking for a younger guy; they had money because they lived up North [Northside of Chicago]." He learned the hard way to not talk about another woman to the person he was with.

The more low-key you is, the less you have to worry about. If you meet them at a hotel or something, there is less people in business. And you have to treat them like they the only one. I would surprise them with flowers to keep them happy.

But Reggie was already looking for another job at the time of the interview. Young, straight, African American, he said he felt more safe on the Northside—"there's a lot of diversity and different people." By that, I suspect he meant that people were more accepting of <u>him</u>. Many liberal whites live in Wrigleyville, Boystown, Lakeview and, increasingly, Edgewater—all

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neighborhoods on the Northside of Chicago. These neighborhoods are flush with resources and city services. Reggie also perceived the Northside as where rich people lived.

Exhibit 12. Northside Boystown Image

Reggie was thinking his job prospects were promising, “I’m a salesman—I could make anything sound good if you give me time!” Ultimately, he said he wished there were “more opportunities.” Reggie thought he would like to go back to school in computer engineering and get “a little studio—something to call my own.” In a better world, that should not be impossible.

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Chapter 5
Conclusion

Listening to the responses of 202 young people engaged in the sex trade (for money or shelter or food or other survival needs) in the streets of Chicago, we hear much more in-depth, varied, complex stories that challenge some of the basic claims in many reports on CSEC (i.e., Adams et al 2010; The Schapiro Group 2011; U.S. Department of State 2013). For example, much research on CSEC begins by making claims about the hundreds of thousands—even millions—of children trafficked nationally each year, yet after careful methodology and design, studies yield often fewer than several thousand youth engaged in the sex trade.

The cases of human trafficking and youth in the sex trade are not synonymous. The commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC), juvenile prostitution, and youth who exchange sex for money or other survival needs are all distinct aspects of a commercial sexual market. The sex industry is not the same as CSEC. Definitions of each are not shared by law enforcement, social service personnel or the youth themselves. There is great variation among the conditions of youth in the sex trade. Attempting a "one-size fits all" approach to determining the unique needs of myriad youth is failing.

Not all young people in the sex trade want or need to be rescued and recovered by law enforcement, faith-based efforts, or well-meaning neoliberals. Some youth need to choose who they want to associate with and when they want that association to happen in order to get relief from poverty, hunger, and homelessness. Some need job training, life skills development, leadership guidance, and critical education about social injustice. Others need healthcare and housing. Some need society to recognize their right to respect, dignity, and privacy. All need to be considered on an individual, case-by-case basis, as stated in the original mission of the juvenile legal system over one hundred years ago.

The low numbers of victims apprehended or arrests made—both in Chicago and nationally—do not reflect the depth of the problem of youth surviving in a street/sex trade economy. Yet, care must be taken before joining a national moral panic with a punitive response toward an epidemic of the commercial sexual exploitation of children without evidence clearly outlining that, first, there actually is an epidemic, and second, that any one particular approach (rescuing, protecting workers' and children's rights; arresting and detaining youth involved *for any reason*) is the most efficacious to deploy (see Cohen 1980; Hall et al; Herdt

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2009). As other researchers have found, the commercial sexual exploitation of children is often misunderstood and misrepresented, and the response is disorganized and ineffective (IOM and NRC 2013)

Limitations. It is clear that this research was not able to capture young people who are being held in sexual slavery. Children who are kept indoors under the control of adults or who are sold in secrecy did not come forward to participate in this research. If there is such a population in Chicago, our participants did not talk about such practices. A different methodology would be needed to apprehend this population, if indeed it does exist in Chicago. But the findings do beg the question: if the FBI and law enforcement can't find them, if feminists can't find them, if rescuers can't find them, if faith-based groups can't find them, where are the thousands of commercially sexually exploited children trafficked into sexual slavery every year? In addition, if all those people can't find them, how do the "customers" find them and make a billion dollar industry? More research is indicated.

Recommendations.

1. Reframe and differentiate the research problem: youth who exchange sex for survival sex is distinct from sex trafficking.

2. Research the suburbs, major airport areas, explore the variety and ramifications of myriad settings in which youth are engaged in the sex trade for money or to survive.

3. Focus on gender: on boys and young men, on the experiences of transyouth.

4. Disseminate this more realistic picture of poverty, homelessness, hunger, and homophobia out to the general public.

5. Open youth-led programs and projects that are culturally competent, gender specific, and trauma-informed.

6. Appoint youth to boards, task forces, and research units—anywhere that decisions are made about this topic.

7. Open youth-run safe houses in every neighborhood where youth can congregate, sleep, eat, bathe, and get assistance with community resources. Such open door shelters should be places where young people are not required to register as social, legal, or psychological "cases" with authorities unless that is their choice.

8. Support financially and work locally with non-profits and non-governmental organizations, for example, in Chicago: Young Women's Empowerment Program,

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Salvation Army—Stop It; Lawndale Amachi Mentoring Program; CAASE; Circles and Ciphers; Heartland Alliance; Howard Brown Health Center; After School Matters; Urban League; GIRL TALK; Project Nia; Mercy Home for Boys and Girls; Community Justice for Youth Institute; Center on Halsted; Broadway Youth Center; The Night Ministry; Southwest Youth Alliance; Affinity, and more. The personnel working at these locations most likely know the actual situation on the ground, be best informed of latest incidents and trends, as well as maintain institutional memory about social justice activism with the population of young people who struggle against poverty and racism, and/or are engaged in the sex trade for money or other necessities.

We know what to do to address this critical social tragedy among American youth. We do not need to reinvent the wheel. The real problem is the lack of will to invest the resources necessary for social justice to be served on behalf of young people. The trope of poverty, homelessness, and hunger does not inspire the moral outrage that the notion of children, sex, and money in the same breath does. Criminals or victims, they are the young people of this nation. The solution to their success and safety is not cheap, fast, easy—or necessarily popular. But it must be attempted—and it must be done.

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