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Is Child to Adult as Victim is to Criminal?

Social Policy and Street-Based Sex Work in the USA

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Abstract Longstanding policy debates over how prostitution/sex work should be thought about and responded to have been upended in the USA by a growing tendency to conflate the practice with sex trafficking. US law and social policy have converged most fully on this issue in a movement to eradicate what has come to be known as the commercial sexual exploitation of children. One outcome of this movement has been an expanded focus on prosecuting and imprisoning pimps and other legal adults who support or abet juridical minors involved in the sex trade. This paper will show that the simplistic, one-size-fits-all narrative of the child victim and the adult exploiter inherent in this policy does not reflect the realities of street-based sex work in the USA. After 2 years of ethnographic and social network research in two cities, we find that sex market-involved young people participate in a great diversity of market–facilitation relationships, many of which provide the only or the most crucial foundation for their support networks. A social policy based on a one-dimensional construction of the child victim and the adult exploiter not only endangers these crucial relationships but also disappears the real needs of young people involved in the exchange of sex for money.

Keywords Pimps · Commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) · Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) · Prostitution · Child · Adolescent · Sex trafficking · Victim

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The Trafficking Victims Protection Act and the Disappearance of the Teen Prostitute

Longstanding policy debates over how prostitution/sex work should be thought about and responded to have been upended in the USA amid a national moral panic over human trafficking. While prostitution has been and remains illegal in all US jurisdictions except the state of Nevada, where it is legal and highly regulated, the practice is increasingly being conflated with sex trafficking. Passage of the federal Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) in 2000 represented a watershed in this process, defining sex trafficking as "the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act" (US Department of State 2000). In particular, despite a national minimum age for legal work that is set at 14 and an age of sexual consent that ranges from 16 to 18, depending on the state, the sex act, and who is involved in it, the TVPA's novel legal framework has constructed sex workers under 18 years old as child victims of trafficking who, a priori, have no agency with which to decide to engage in the exchange of sex for money. Under a

special definition, the TVPA provides that "severe trafficking in persons" means "sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, *or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age*" (US Department of State 2000, emphasis added; see also US Department of State 2005).

Since passage of the TVPA, the conflation of prostitution and trafficking inherent in the legislation has found its fullest expression in an increasingly muscular international movement to eradicate what has come to be known as the commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) since the First World Conference against the Sexual Exploitation of Children in Stockholm in August 1996. However, with little evidence of trafficking in humans—"children" or "adults"—in the USA, the US CSEC movement has focused its attention and its growing resources on "children" involved in the exchange of sex for money.

The rise of the CSEC paradigm in the USA has paralleled and benefited from dramatically increased funding for anti-human trafficking initiatives and led to the growth of national and local organizations with a vested stake in defining adolescents under 19 years old as children and therefore non-sexual beings incapable of choice where sex is concerned (see US Department of State 2000, 2005; see also Cizmar et al. 2011, p. 4). Federally funded initiatives like the Polaris Project, the Georgia Care Connection, and Innocence Lost have joined not-for-profits like Girls Educational and Mentoring Service, The Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking, and Standing Against Global Exploitation, law enforcement officials, and faith-based organizations to form federally supported task forces across the USA that advocate for CSEC victims and seek to change the way law enforcement and social service providers think about and respond to people involved in the sex industry before their eighteenth year.

The outcome of these efforts has been uneven, with some jurisdictions continuing to arrest and imprison pre-18 year olds who trade sex for money, others accepting the CSEC model and referring them to family services, and still others only making service referrals if they identify a pimp for prosecution. However, a general consensus has emerged in at least one area: an expanded focus on prosecuting and imprisoning pimps, as traffickers.

Whereas pimps were once merely a single criminal element among several involved in the sex trade, they have become the primary legal bearers of responsibility for sexual solicitation involving pre-18 year olds under the CSEC paradigm. In addition to vastly expanded law enforcement efforts aimed at finding and prosecuting pimps, work by not-for-profits has sought to create an awareness of the dangers pimps pose to adolescents, particularly girls, and to promote public education campaigns designed to warn and protect those who may be vulnerable to the combination of coercion and seduction that is believed to be the pimp's stock in trade.

Despite this new policy focus on market-involved adolescents—a term we use in order to remain agnostic on the age at which an individual can effectively consent to trading sex for money—as a priori victims and their pimps as inherently criminal traffickers, there remains very little independent scientific evidence to substantiate the claims made by CSEC advocates about the nature of adolescent commercial sexual activity in the USA and the role of pimps in driving it. Instead, both the government and activists in the CSEC movement present horror stories by and about girls who were violently victimized by pimps as the rule rather than the exception and circulate well-worn, but generally unsubstantiated statistics about the scope and nature of the problem.

Kristi House, for instance, warns on its website (www.kristihouse.org) that "among children who are living on the streets, a third are lured into prostitution within 48 hours of leaving home. Most of these cases occur in major cities such as Miami, where at least 75% of the minors engaged in prostitution have a pimp" (Kristi House 2011). Yet the site provides no source for its data and offers no explanation for how its statistics were derived. Finally, several media controversies have erupted recently around celebrities and politicians using a discredited statistic, propagated by CSEC activists, that claims "300,000 children in the United States are at risk for commercial sexual exploitation, including trafficking, at any given time" (US Department of State 2000; see Pinto 2011 and Cizmar et al. 2011 for a discussion of the unreliable nature of this claim).

What is missing from these accounts is rigorous, independent scholarly knowledge about contemporary sex markets in the USA and the actual relationships between sex workers and their market facilitators—a term we use instead of pimp to suggest the diversity of the relationships that occur in street-based sex work. Based on 2 years of ethnographic and social network research on sex markets in two cities, this article seeks to address the lacuna by giving an in situ view of street-based adolescent sex work in the USA.

Our data suggest that the arbitrary division between child and adult built into the TVPA and the CSEC paradigm does not reflect the realities of contemporary urban sex markets in the USA in which sex workers under and over the age of 18 share the same space, social conditions, relationships, and in most cases, degrees of agency. We will argue that by flattening the complexities and nuances of the lives of real individuals and their relationships into mass media-generated stereotypes, and defining young adults as children without the power to choose their associations, CSEC-driven laws, narratives, and social service interventions effectively exclude the

majority of market-involved adolescents from the protection and support that advocates claim their paradigm uniquely provides. Further, these laws, narratives, and interventions vanish the very real problems and needs of highly vulnerable young people attempting to survive in difficult situations behind the powerful, obscurantist trope of the child victim and the adult sexual trafficker/abuser. At the policy level, we believe that the TVPA and the CSEC model potentially have the effect of isolating many market-involved adolescents from both formal institutional and informal social sources of support.

Literature Review

Since Eileen Mcleod's (1982) groundbreaking study of British prostitution, the dominant scholarly debate over prostitution has focused on whether exchanging sex for money is a potentially normalizable form of work for both men and women that is not inherently different from other skilled work, particularly the type that involves creative use of self, such as acting, teaching, counseling, and so on (Chapkis 1997; Jenness 1990; Overall 1992; Pheterson 1989; St. James 1999; Weitzer 2007) or a practice that is inherently degrading and oppressive to women (Barry 1995; Dworkin 1997; Farley and Kelly 2000; Jeffries 1997; MacKinnon 1990, 1993; Pateman 1988; Raymond 1995, 1998).

Within these wide-ranging discussions, there has been very little work in the USA of the type that has appeared in the UK that focuses, in situ, on juridical minors involved in prostitution (see for example Cusick 2002; Heilemann and Santhiveeran 2011). Prohibitionists have typically assumed that if prostitution cannot be reconciled with the human rights of women, anything involving "children" is by definition worse (Barry 1995). Conversely, normalizers have rarely engaged the question of the age at which a prostitute may effectively choose to "work" or the conditions under which that work occurs. The scant scholarship on adolescents involved in the exchange of sex for money has been largely restricted to theorizers of the historical construction of childhood and adolescence (Foucault 1980; James and Prout 1997; Jenks 1996), psychologists and social workers studying trauma (Silbert and Pines 1981; Heilemann and Santhiveeran 2011), epidemiologists concerned with the spread of sexually transmitted diseases (Marshall 2008), and anthropologists studying child prostitution in the third world (Montgomery 2001). With the exception of Dank (2011) and Curtis et al. (2008), there has been little interest in an empirical engagement with the actuality of adolescent street prostitution in the USA.

While most academic treatments of prostitution have discussed pimps at some point, scholarly work has rarely problematized pimps as a subject in their own right. Since Milner and Milner (1972) produced their groundbreaking ethnographic study of "black pimps" in San Francisco, pimps have been largely ignored by "normalizers" who view them, a priori, as one among many "third parties" who benefit from criminalization (Jeffrey and Sullivan 2009) and by prohibitionists who see them as part of the undifferentiated brutality and woman hatred that drives prostitution (Farley 2004).

The few extant studies of pimps typically draw their data from interviews with police, sex workers, and ex-sex workers, often in situations of incarceration (Norton-Hawk 2004), who offer portraits very similar to popular stereotypes of coercive, abusive, violent, and even psychopathic individuals with little concern for social context or day-to-day social activity (see Benoit and Millar 2001; Greaves et al. 2004; Kennedy et al. 2007; Sanders 2001; Williamson and Cluse-Tolar 2010).

Other academic accounts draw on secondary sources, autobiographical self-reporting, and popular narratives to interpret the pimp as a counter-hegemonic hero of the ghetto (Kelley 1998, 2001), an expert in "doing masculinity" when legitimate avenues of success are blocked (Katz 1988; Messerschmidt 1993), or the creator of exotic, hierarchic ghetto typologies of financial success and social performativity (Hodgson 1997; Partridge et al. 2007; Williamson and Cluse-Tolar 2010; Yang 2006). The only recent study that has attempted a rigorous empirical engagement with pimps, as a subject in their own right, was May et al. (2000), which looked at pimps in the UK through triangulated interviewing.

Our paper makes no claim to engage seriously the historical debate over prostitution in general or to provide a definitive account of either self-described pimps or other market facilitators. Rather, we include here a straightforward presentation of our data on market-involved adolescents and focus particularly on their relationships to the various individuals who facilitate their sex market activity. In contrast to CSEC advocates who proffer a simplistic, one-size-fits-all narrative of victim and victimizer, we demonstrate the wide range of these relationships and aim to capture their complexities and nuances in order to problematize the current direction of the social policy of sex work in the USA, with its growing tendency to collapse prostitution into sex trafficking, particularly where market-involved adolescents are concerned.

Methods, Fieldsites, and Limitations

In 2007, the National Institute of Justice funded our research team, comprised of researchers at the Center for Court Innovation (CCI) and John Jay College of

Criminal Justice, to estimate the scope of the CSEC problem in New York City and to determine the needs of the so-called victims. Over the course of 4 months, we interviewed 300 market-involved adolescents, all of whom were under 18 years of age. They were recruited using Respondent Driven Sampling (RDS), a methodology used to recruit statistically representative samples of hard-to-reach groups, like criminal offenders, by taking advantage of intra-group social connections to build a sample pool that mirrors the specified target population (for more information on RDS representative sampling see Salganik and Heckathorn 2004).

Following the New York project, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention funded our research team, again a collaboration between CCI and John Jay College, to conduct a national, six-city survey that would use RDS to recruit 1,800 young adults between the ages of 13 and 24 in order to estimate for the scope of CSEC in the USA. In each city, a research team comprised of a principal investigator and research associates from a local university would do the research. Atlantic City, New Jersey was chosen to pilot the study.

A city of only 35,000 people on a tiny 15-km long and several hundred-meter wide island, roughly 200 km from New York City, Atlantic City has 11 fully operative and licensed casinos, making it the USA's second largest gaming market, and has been memorialized in literature and cinema as a hub for deviance and prostitution. Despite the billions of dollars and millions of tourists who enter the city annually for the beaches and casinos, the city's median income stands at less than half that of the state as a whole, and urban blight surrounds and is visible from the edges of the tourist strip. The expensive new glass and steel skyscrapers housing casinos along the boardwalk stand in direct contrast to the vast number of sandlots, the substandard housing, and the ubiquitous empty buildings, locally known to the majority African American population as "abandominiums". It is often noted by residents that there is not a single supermarket currently open in the city.

During nearly a year of fieldwork in Atlantic City in 2010, we necessarily oscillated between these two contrasting milieus in search of respondents for our study, but we spent most of our time in the desolate, fringe areas of the city usually invisible to the tourists and high-rollers who frequent the casinos. The data we present here derives almost exclusively from the Atlantic City study, with the exception of a few, clearly labeled examples from our experience in New York City. Additionally, our presentation of the Atlantic City findings below is informed by the 300 interviews and hours of ethnographic observation we conducted in New York City, where much of the data we collected and many of the conclusions we reached were mirrored in our Atlantic City experience.

Unlike in New York, however, the group of juridical minors trading sex for money in Atlantic City was not large enough to grow the RDS recruitment chains necessary for making a population estimate. Moreover, rather than existing in a tightly networked and isolated market, the small number of market-involved adolescents we initially recruited using RDS were scattered throughout the larger sex market and networked with other adolescents, adult sex workers, and a wide variety of individuals playing ancillary roles in the local sex market. For this reason, much of the data we present in this paper derives from work with juridical adults, all of whom were under 20 at the time of the interview, and all but one of whom had traded sex for money before their eighteenth birthday (see below for a discussion of the woman who did not trade sex for money until the week after she became a juridical adult). Thus, unlike the New York Study (Curtis et al. 2008), which focused solely on minors, we focus more broadly on adolescents, who encompass a set of shared socio-economic, psycho-emotional, and cultural experiences connected to the liminal period between social childhood and adulthood that now typically stretches from the early teen years to the early 20s in the USA. We believe our focus is not only justified by an extensive body of sociological and psychological literature on childhood and adolescence but also a significant finding that reflects the empirical realities of a field site in which there was no separate market or market practices attached to the juridical age of majority.

The important discovery that there was not a separate and sufficiently dense network of market-involved minors in Atlantic City led to the decision to augment the RDS recruitment strategy with one more suited to the resources available in the field, i.e., classic ethnographic recruitment using key informants. In developing ethnographic collaborations with those who knew the local scene well enough to find the market-involved adolescents sought for the study, what we did not anticipate was that many of these people were themselves direct or indirect sex market functionaries, including self-described pimps, the very people the FBI agents, local police, and service providers we met at federal task force meetings consistently told us would impede recruitment and harm the "kids" or us.

Most of these market facilitators were African American drug sellers who occasionally referred customers to individuals selling sex on the main strip along Pacific Avenue in exchange for $10–20 tips. Our most prolific recruiter called these market facilitators "spot pimps," a designation which highlights the transient nature of their "pimping" and signifies that they had no exclusive control over any individuals who traded sex for money. For each successful interview introduction, we paid our informants $10, and many were eager to assist.

In the course of recruiting interviews for us, our informants occasionally introduced us to self-described pimps who managed individuals or small groups of adult sex workers and market-involved adolescents, very few of whom turned out to be under 18 years of age. In such cases, we needed to convince both the sex worker and the pimp that a confidential interview in a separate location was safe. The self-described, full-time pimps had little interest in either the $20 being paid for an interview or the $10 being paid for a referral. In such cases, it was more important to convince them of the value of telling their story for the "book" that we told people we were hoping to write. We often failed to convince sex workers that we were more than an annoyance, but the pimps, once they had been convinced we were not a danger to their business, showed a surprising desire to tell their own stories and allow us to observe their lives.

In addition to such interviews, we spent long hours on the streets and in motel parking lots around a wide variety of market facilitators of the local sex industry; gathering data on their everyday lives; the lives of the individuals whose sex market activity they facilitated; and the stories and views about them from neighbors, associates, friends, and customers. Indeed, we continued our dialogs with some of these individuals long after the data collection phase of the project ended, primarily through letters and phone calls from jail, where several of them ended up shortly following the close of data collection.

While we gained important information about the varied relationships between sex workers and market facilitators and became intimately familiar with the contours of the street-based youth sex market in Atlantic City during the winter, spring, and summer of 2010, we concede that our research does not allow us to make authoritative claims concerning the precise dimensions of the entire sex industry in Atlantic City. In particular, our data can claim no authority concerning escort services or individual sex workers and market facilitators who work solely via the internet. Additionally, during the course of our research, we encountered no evidence of organized sex trafficking operations involving the use of force and seclusion to exploit several women or young girls at once.

Finally, it is worth observing that given the failure of RDS to grow large recruitment chains of juridical minors exchanging sex for money, we cannot claim a statistically representative sample of the market-involved adolescents in Atlantic City, making demographic conclusions or comparisons weak. In particular, our respondents were, for the most part, those market-involved adolescents who needed the money paid for interviews, or whose friends needed the referral money. However, this paper attempts no such comparisons. Instead, our conclusions derive from extensive ethnographic connections within a city that is geographically compact, with a small resident population and an even smaller street-based sex market. We believe that these particular features of our field site made our survey closer to a complete census than merely a sample of Atlantic City's street-based sex market (for overall demographics of study participants, see Table 1).

Findings

Overall, the findings of our research suggest that the relationships between market-involved adolescents and those who benefit from their sexual labor are far more diverse and complex than the current policy enacted under the TVPA's logic indicates. In particular, among the many needs of our respondents (N=125), protection from a violent or manipulative pimp trafficker was rarely one of them. In fact, in a nearly perfect mirror image of our New York City findings, in which 90% of juridical minors who responded (N=249) reported having no pimp (Curtis et al. 2008), in Atlantic City, 86% (N=108) of our adolescent respondents reported not having a pimp (for statistics on the age breakdown of those with and without pimps, see Fig. 1). Whether or not respondents had a pimp, many clearly participated in a great diversity of personal and financial relationships. When asked if they had someone who helped them find customers, 40% (N=50) of respondents answered "Yes." Below, we describe these various forms of market facilitation relationships. We divide them into the following general categories: affective kinship-based domestic units, those generally explained by respondents

Table 1 Basic demographic characteristics

	All respondents (N=125; %)	Female respondents (N=86; %)	Male respondents (N=38; %)
Under 18 years old	10	12	5
18–21 Years old	43	39	50
22–25 Years old	31	31	30
26 Years old and over	11	13	10
White	56	57	55
Black/African American	21	21	21
Hispanic/Latina	11	11	13
Multi-racial/other	10	10	8
Heterosexual	44	43	47
Homosexual	3	3	3
Bisexual	48	49	47
Less than HS diploma	53	52	56
GED or HS diploma	34	33	36
Some college or college degree	9	13	0
Have children	51	59	32
Homeless	31	28	39

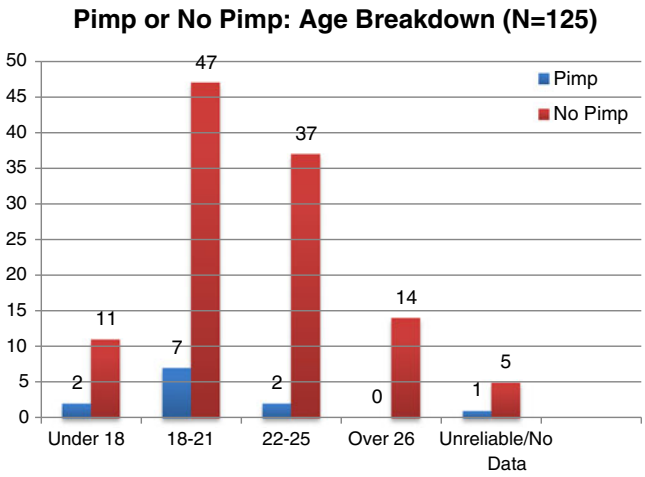

Fig. 1 The age breakdown of those with and without pimps

using terms such as "roommate," male or female "partner," "husband," "best friend," and so on; relationships of opportunity, which involved the "spot pimps" mentioned above; transient households, in which several market-involved adolescents banded together for safety and support; and exclusive management relationships, those involving individuals who could legitimately be described as "pimps." Finally, we conclude this "Findings" section by describing the rare instances of the commercial sexual exploitation of children we encountered in Atlantic City.

Affective Kinship-Based Domestic Units

Many of the market facilitation relationships we encountered were closer to what anthropologists refer to as affective kinship-based domestic units than arrangements based upon direct and immediate economic exchange. Most of these relationships did not appear to be primarily financial and were explained by respondents using terms such as "roommate," male or female "partner," "husband," "best-friend," and so on.

The typological literature on pimping might refer to the individuals we encountered who provided affective kinship in addition to customers, physical protection, shelter, food preparation, childcare, etc. as "boyfriend pimps," or men who are being supported by sex-worker girlfriends. However, what seems most important in characterizing these relationships is that neither of the individuals involved typically used the word pimp during interviews and that we detected no evidence of force or coercion in our observations of these relationships.

In one paradigmatic case, a white heterosexual couple who were both 18 years old had come to Atlantic City from Florida for the summer. They had no money and were sleeping in public during the weekends when hotel prices were often over $100 a night, and staying in cheap motels on the Blackhorse pike (the southern road out of the city) on weeknights when a room could be had for under $30. They both took their meals at the soup kitchen where researchers often recruited interviewees. During the young woman's interview, the young man talked informally with one of the principal investigators about their relationship.

> "Yeah, she is supporting us until we go back south, where I can get work."
> "Does this make you a pimp?" asked the investigator, hoping to elicit a bit of gangsta masculinity.
> The young man became angry:
> "That's my wife. We are married. Someday she'll give me a son. Besides, she never has sex with them. I would never allow that. Did you ever hear of CBT? That's Cock and Ball Torture. She beats on guys when they are naked, kicks them in the balls, all kinds of stuff. But I'd never let my wife do it with another guy. I'm not a pimp. I'm her husband."

After the interview was over, the principal investigator checked with the interviewer and discovered that this man's wife had said that she had no pimp but that she was having sexual intercourse for money and supporting herself and her boyfriend until they returned to Florida. While the young woman's admission to the interviewer is likely more honest than what her partner reported, it would be difficult to argue that the force, coercion, or manipulation associated with pimping, or indeed, sex trafficking applies to this young couple on the road.

For those who accept the TVPA logic and the CSEC narrative, age differentials are clearly important in determining coercion and agency, but race, ethnicity, and country of birth also seem to matter in constructing the trope of pimp. For example, we interviewed a 19-year-old white woman who had been exchanging sex for money for nearly 3 years and who was involved in a relationship with an older African American man. She was about 6′2″ with poor skin and 7 months pregnant, and the man she described as her boyfriend was a largish man in his 40s. Dressed far too slovenly to fit the pimp stereotype, the man was dragging along a backpack and keeping an eye on the woman in a way that suggested he was her "protection." He asked how long the interview would last and was told 45 min to an hour. "Ok, I might as well put my shit out," he said. He proceeded to pull bags full of incense out of his backpack and set up a display on Pacific Avenue. While she was being interviewed, the man engaged in an informal discussion with one of the principal investigators.

It turned out that they were sharing a room in one of the boarding houses on the strip and that he was the father of the baby she was carrying. He sold incense sticks on the street, which he made himself, while

providing market facilitation and protection for his girlfriend. He claimed that he was bringing in about $55 a day (he sold three 5–10-dollar bundles while talking) and that his girlfriend's income was far larger, but less steady and could not be relied upon much longer. As he put it, "She's the one paying the rent, but that can't go on forever. She's about to give birth. We gotta find another hustle soon." When asked directly if his market facilitation made him the woman's pimp, he started laughing: "Do you think I'd be sitting here in the sun selling incense if I was a pimp? I'm just trying to get by like everybody else." He turned the subject towards the research project and talked about his former days as a low-level social service worker.

Their difference in age and race, combined with the fact that he was probably already living off her sexual labor before her eighteenth birthday, mean that he could easily be imprisoned for sex trafficking if she was, for instance, caught with a customer or with drugs and offered a deal in exchange for turning on him. However, we noticed little to suggest violence, intimidation, manipulation, or any significant profit. The sense that emerged from our observations and from both the formal and informal interviews was that the two of them were sharing some fleeting sexually based kinship that included protection, companionship, income, and market facilitation. The woman suggested to her interviewer that while she was fond of him, she was not likely to stay with him for very long after the baby was born. She envisioned a more conventional life for her child than could be provided by a black 40-something ex-social service worker selling incense in Atlantic City. From the informal discussion with him, it seemed that he was aware of her doubts about the relationship and not unhappy that he might escape financial responsibility for the child.

These types of affective kinship-based relationships did not always depend on the heterosexual dyad. In one case, a young white lesbian who was 17 and had just finished high school in the suburbs was living with her early 20s girlfriend, who she was supporting through her exchange of sex for money. She was articulate, attractive, clean cut, and stylish in an understated way. She said that her girlfriend was mostly unemployed and contributed to the relationship by keeping house, paying bills, and offering her the emotional support she needed to perform her job, which she described as neither fun nor easy. She mostly obtained customers from spot pimps and often depended on them for protection. Despite the similarities between her girlfriend's role and that of a classic pimp, the young woman clearly did not view her girlfriend as a pimp. Within the TVPA's legal framework, however, the older girlfriend living off of the sexual labor of this juridical minor might be arrested as a sex trafficker.

Finally, this type of affective kinship-based domestic unit often involved close but nonsexual relationships. For example, a 19-year-old white male who identified as bisexual and claimed to have been 14 years old the first time he had exchanged sex for money answered "Yes" to the question, "Do you have someone who helps you find customers?" and characterized this person as a pimp, but he described a close but nonsexual relationship with a woman who "feels the same about life, so she's easy to talk to." Similarly, a 20-year-old white female also said that she had a pimp, but she described the "pimp" as "an old friend" who was female and whom she had met at a social service program a number of years earlier. She noted that this old friend "helps me make a lot of money."

In each of these cases, and in most of the other similarly structured affective kinship relationships we encountered, market-involved adolescents displayed far more agency than is suggested by the TVPA's logic, and the seduction, manipulation, kidnapping, torture, brainwashing, and sexual slavery described in the CSEC literature was utterly absent.

Relationships of Opportunity

We encountered many relationships that did involve immediate economic exchange without affective kinship, involving individuals who fit the stripped-down definition of a pimp as "someone who profits from the sexual labor of another," but these were nearly always relationships of opportunity, involving payment for services rendered in a specific time and place rather than long-term management. The most common of these relationships involved sex workers and market facilitators who we came to identify as the "spot pimps" mentioned above. None of them had management rights or any other type of exclusive arrangement with the young women and men they claimed to be pimping, and none of the young respondents interviewed referred to them as either pimps or spot pimps. Instead, these respondents insisted that the person who helped them find customers was "not a pimp" and tended to describe them as "guys who help me get customers," "friends who look out for me," or simply "drug dealers who watch out for me."

The ubiquity of these mostly young African American men, and occasionally young women, on the streets was evident on our first night of extended fieldwork. Walking down one of the main drug-selling blocks in Atlantic City, which has a strip joint in the middle, we were offered all manner of substances. When it became clear that we were not interested in buying drugs, they indicated that they could get us "girls." We came to know the lives of many of these market facilitators who

engaged in a wide range of "hustles" from their perches on street corners, stoops, and other public spaces. "Spot pimping" provided only a small part of their income, and only some of the younger men identified what they were doing as pimping.

In our observations of and conversations with these young men, we noticed little of the sexual or financial power and virtually none of the violence and coercion typically associated with pimping or sex trafficking. One discussion between several young men who self-identified as pimps is instructive. It focused on what types of "girls" should be avoided. The consensus was that drug-addicted white girls could not be trusted to deliver the $10–20 referral fee. They described experiences where "junkie-girls" had climbed out windows, gone out back entrances, claimed they had already paid, and generally scammed them out of their money. "There ain't nothing you can do to get your money from those hos," said one man. "What are ya gonna do, beat on somebody for $20?" Several agreed and suggested that it was tough to get away with exacting revenge, since the girls sometimes had friends who would protect them and the police were always looking for an excuse to make life difficult for young black men. One of the market-involved adolescents we interviewed succinctly captured the spot pimps' lack of power when she responded to the question, "How do you avoid pimps who want to take your money?" by noting, matter-of-factly, "I cross the street."

Regardless of how tough, successful, knowledgeable about the street, or capable of collecting payment these "spot pimps" may or may not be, they are clearly not the sexual predators or sex traffickers described in the CSEC model. We believe they are more accurately characterized as casualized laborers in the drug and sex industry. If they have any control over market-involved adolescents, it is occasional and limited. Summing up the view shared by many of the young and not-so-young women and men who paid them, one young woman said, "Spot pimps? Are you kidding? They're just failed drug dealers and thieves."

While the spot pimp was by far the most common type of market facilitator we encountered, we also observed a wide diversity of ancillary services of opportunity in the sex industry that involved various forms of immediate exchange. From casino bartenders who allowed young and not-very-professional women to "work the bar" in exchange for money or sex, to merchants who allowed sex workers to use the rooms above their stores in similar exchanges, to peep show attendants who expected tips from gay male hustlers working their territory, the street market for sex involves a plethora of relationships of opportunity, few of which involve the force or coercion associated with pimping or sex trafficking.

Transient Households

We encountered several complex arrangements in which a number of market-involved adolescents banded together into transient household units for protection and informal social support. For instance, a 17-year-old self-identified gay male discussed being part of a group of young men who all lived together and who all traded sex for money. He called these household members his "pimps," but in such cases, the role of pimp and prostitute tended to be interchangeable. In other cases, these transient household relationships involved a legal adult who did systematically benefit from the sexual labor of market-involved adolescents, but none of them appeared to fit the CSEC/TVPA's construction of the dangerous sex trafficker abusing innocent child victims.

In one case, a woman whose nickname was "Mamma" was running a boarding house for market-involved adolescents of both sexes. Some joked that Mamma was their pimp, but then indicated in the interview that they had no pimp. Mamma owned a large house a few blocks off the beach, towards the bay. She rented rooms, provided board, and used her local networks to help market-involved adolescents find customers, as well as providing advice about "the life" and childcare and parenting tips. She was clearly feared and had been known to physically threaten boarders who gave her trouble. However, her house was also known as a place where young people could live in safety and be assured that they would have food, diapers, childcare, and other necessities on credit, if they did not make enough money or spent what they made on drugs. Her credit rates were high, but nobody actually had any stories about her getting violent with young women or men who could not pay.

We also managed to gain the trust of an adult who was benefiting from the sexual labor of others through his ownership of a space in which he managed a far more informal and less safe version of Mamma's house. Shane was a white man in his early 30s whose apartment in Atlantic City was adjacent to a major casino and the center for a variety of illegal sex and drug activities for teenagers and many others. During a videotaped interview, the apartment showed evidence of crack vials, syringes, and other drug paraphernalia. Shane openly discussed his relationships with three market-involved adolescent women, each of which contained elements of market facilitation and economic exchange.

One of the young women was, according to Shane, a white girl in her 20s who had left, but would "come back here at some point" because "she's got her clothes here." He discussed another young woman who was 18 years old and who also stayed in his apartment on occasion. Her

name was Janine, and everybody described her as "the one with the baby fat." Of her, he noted, "She prostitutes; she helps me out." His relationship with the third girl, a very skinny 17-year-old named Kat, was more complicated. He told us that she had been his girlfriend previously and that she had been 16 years old at the time of their first meeting when she approached him in a casino to ask for heroin, to which her previous boyfriend had introduced her.

At the time of the interview, Shane observed that Kat's current boyfriend, Curtis, a half-Haitian and half-Irish 19-year-old from Staten Island, was downstairs in the basement with Janine "with the baby fat." Shane bemoaned the fact that Kat and Janine had not been staying in his apartment for the last few days. As he put it, "They used to pull in some money that they didn't wanna share with me, so they'd rather sleep in the basement…because they don't wanna offer me any. They'd rather sleep with water bugs [in the basement]…than help me out." Shane was convinced that Kat had relocated to the basement with Curtis because Curtis had better access to drugs than Shane had. Later, when we interviewed Curtis, he admitted that one of the ways he made money was by "pimping" both girls, but he added, "It's not like they don't pimp for me when the only money coming in is from men who like men." His friend Karel—a fourth member of this transient household sleeping in the basement—was in his late teens. Echoing Curtis' sentiment, Karel noted, "It is much more fun to be a pimp than a prostitute, but we all stick together and do for each other."

For everybody involved in this transient household, prostitution was only secondary to the use of drugs, and the story ended in tragedy. Early in the summer, Karel helped Janine find a customer who wanted her in his hotel room at the northern end of the strip. He seemed harmless, and both teenagers figured it would be a simple transaction like the ones they participated in every day. As she often did in such circumstances, Janine did heroin upon arriving in the man's hotel room. When Karel had not heard from her after her arrival, he called her phone and got the customer, who reported that she had started overdosing and he had been paralyzed by fear about what to do. Karel immediately called 911 and used the "upfront money" he had gotten from the customer to take a taxi to the casino's hotel room. He arrived just before the police and found it was too late to revive her. The police arrested him for an existing drug warrant.

Many of the respondents and researchers who knew Janine felt that her death was partially Shane's fault, since he had been the only real adult in the teenagers' lives. Although Shane was a legal adult, he was frequently in and out of prison and could not possibly be described as a pimp or sex trafficker, given his lack of control over where the young women slept or to whom they gave their money. Many felt that if he had acted more like an in-control pimp and less like one of the lost, drug-addicted adolescents who stayed with him, the tragedy might have been avoided. On paper, such as a police report, this tragedy might seem like an example of how child victims get used up by sex traffickers and then left for dead. The ethnographic portrait presented here hopefully demonstrates how such accounts can oversimplify and hinder rather than help efforts to make a difference in the lives of market-involved-adolescents attempting to survive on the street.

We encountered many such situations in which market-involved adolescents banded together into transient households. Often, within these groups, "prostitute" and "pimp" were roles played at various times by each member of a group of young people, rather than discrete identities or permanent, full-time "jobs." Financial gain was rarely a consideration for these young people, whose engagement with the sex industry was based on the struggle to survive and often to support drug habits. They typically formed these transient households in efforts to gain a measure of safety and support.

Exclusive Management Relationships: Real and Almost-Real Pimps

In addition to the relationships described above, some respondents did describe relationships that could conceivable fit into the prostitute–pimp dyad. In these cases, respondents either directly identified an exclusive market facilitator as "my pimp" or gave answers that strongly indicated they had one. However, not all of these relationships were clear cut examples. In particular, differentials of power, agency, and control turn out to be crucial in understanding how to judge these relationships. For the 20% of market-involved adolescents under 21 years old who said that someone helped them find customers, it was rare that this person seemed to hold most or all of the power, and we encountered only a few cases where there was evidence of force or coercion.

One respondent who admitted to having a pimp discussed a relationship in which she seemed to hold more power than the person she identified as her pimp did. This relationship was actually a triad, where one man was the pimp for two young women, one under and one over 18 years old. The two young women had hooked up with each other and were perhaps lovers, but they had apparently chosen a slightly older African American man to be their pimp. He appeared to be providing some protection and directing customers to them, but it seemed that his primary role was running errands, buying groceries, and maintaining their housing with its attendant payments. In exchange, they supported him in the house and the older one provided him with sex. While all three

referred to him as the pimp and showed him the respect typically due pimps from their "girls," the conditions under which they brought him into their relationship and his role in the situation suggested he was as much of a boy Friday as the type of gangster one normally thinks of when the term pimp is invoked. It seemed clear that the continuation of his role and the maintenance of his housing depended on his keeping the women pleased rather than vice versa, and that being the "pimp" did not entitle him to sexual access to the younger woman.

Researchers encountered several such inversions of the power relations expected in the prostitute–pimp dynamic. In several instances, researchers were approached by pimps with exclusive management of one girl who had failed to share the $20–50 that accrued from the combination of interviews and referrals. As one of these men, who had sole "management" of a 19-year-old sex worker, said before heading off to Dunkin Donuts, where the interviewers told him they thought his girl had gone, "She doesn't understand what it means that I am her pimp. She just does what she wants."

Another respondent who said she had a pimp described a relationship that was possibly more exploitative than the triad described above but seemed to involve two young people very inexperienced with the sex industry. This interviewee was a young woman who had turned 18 years old a mere week before the interview. She identified as white and as bisexual. She was short, somewhat heavy, and seemed to have a slight intellectual disability. She said she had been living in Atlantic City and exchanging sex for money for only 1 week. Apparently, she had fought with her parents on the day before her eighteenth birthday, and the fight had led to her parents driving her to Atlantic City and telling her "not to come back to their house."

She went to Covenant House, a local provider of housing services for youth, where she had met the young man she identified as her pimp and whom she called her "boyfriend" throughout the interview. She thought that he was around 20 years old. She reported that she and the young man had left the Covenant House and had sex under the boardwalk. When the staff at Covenant House discovered that they were having sex, they were both evicted. She said they were both homeless and living under the boardwalk and that their only source of income was the money she made through prostitution. She said that he had been negotiating prices and collecting the proceeds from her labor, which he was spending on cigarettes and "pot," which she said she did not mind. As she told the interviewer, "I follow him wherever he goes…. I love him to death… He proposed to me."

Another respondent answered "No" when asked if she had a pimp but described a situation that belied this answer. She was a young African American woman who claimed to be 18 years old, but answers to age-related questions suggested she may have been 19. She discussed having been homeless for the 6 or 7 months preceding the interview and noted that she lived at The Mission, a local service provider. She said she had been exchanging sex for money and/or other necessities for about a year and a half and sharing her income with a male friend whom she described as "pretty cool; he's like a big brother…a big brother that really loves you… because he has my back, you know, when I have problems and I'm in…need of things." She reported that he had six other girls for whom he did this—always on a part-time basis.

Although these last two examples contain some elements that suggest the type of coercion, manipulation, and power dynamics associated with popular views of pimping, they are missing crucial components. The "boyfriend" of the 18-year-old with the disability seemed clearly to be taking advantage of a vulnerable young woman, but pimps, as they are commonly typified, are rarely 20-year-old men living under boardwalks. The example involving the young woman and the "big brother" seems to indicate some degree of control and manipulation, but the fact that the young woman was living at a local service provider and that the man she discussed was only involved on a part-time basis suggests the potential for far more agency than is accorded in common understandings of pimping.

In addition to these somewhat ambiguous cases, researchers did encounter relationships involving "real pimps" who held a higher degree of control over "their girls." They typically worked in the higher echelons of Atlantic City's sex market, and their social performativity might qualify them to be interviewed on television as so-called "macks." On Friday and Saturday nights, we observed well-dressed women in their mid-20s with huge amounts of sexual capital "working a bar" in upscale casinos, such as Borgata and Caesar's Palace. Typically a sharply dressed African American man sat and drank nearby and negotiated deals with customers. These women usually laughed at us when we suggested that they could make $50 for an interview and two referrals. Their pimps, however, despite not needing the money either, agreed to tell us their stories after they had been pointed out to us by our spot pimp recruiters.

In one of these cases, we came to know a "real pimp" who called himself Nomad and had a thriving business in the lower-end casinos at the northern end of town. We did several interviews with him and his friends, who were also perched between the high-end casino trade and the street sex market. They were all managing girls who were clearly in their 20s and strongly believed that pimping underage girls was dangerous and unprofitable due to young girls' immaturity, inexperience at manipulating men's fantasies,

and inability to master the finer points of dressing and carrying themselves properly in public and in bed. This business model based on managing women in their early 20s is corroborated by our data (see Fig. 1) from interviews with sex market providers, who are less likely to report having a pimp before the age of 18 and after the age of 24.

Nomad and the other self-described pimps were initially quite perplexed and alarmed when we told them that we wanted to interview "underage" youth involved in prostitution, which they seemed to equate with pedophilia. Nomad was arrested in late 2010 on drug charges, but we continued to communicate with him through weekly letters from prison. In one of them, he wrote that much of what people say and write about pimps "suffers from misunderstanding and misrepresentation of the role of a pimp." He worried that the people making judgments about pimps have not actually met pimps or gotten to know what they do. After we sent Nomad our abstracts about pimping for the upcoming American Society of Criminology meetings in November 2011, he urgently wrote back and insisted that academics have got it all wrong. According to him,

> The only thing a pimp prey (sic) on is money, but chasing after under age girls is sick! If a man deals in supplying kids to other adults for sex, then he's not a pimp, he's a C.S.M. (Child Slave Master). You cannot confuse the two, a C.S.M. and a pimp is (sic) two different occupations. A C.S.M. thrives off the innocents, as well as the naivety of children. A pimp provides assistance to adults who consentually (sic) engage in acts of prostitution. Where's the crime in that?

Nomad and his friends were particularly insistent that the common view of pimps recruiting the women they manage through guile or violence was a Hollywood fantasy and that many times they had been actively recruited by women who had heard about their good reputation, or that partnerships had been initiated in a mutual way.

Some sex workers that we met in their late 20s and early 30s who saw their work as a career corroborated Nomad's vision of mutuality and conveyed stories about winning over "good pimps." One woman in her late 20s, whose mother was the manager of a brothel, told us that until she could save enough to start her own brothel, she would rather work with a "real pimp" than for a madam in an escort service. When asked what a real pimp is, she succinctly stated, "A real pimp is not trying to get money from a girl, she wants to give it." She described somebody who is strong, makes sure you do the right thing with your money, introduces you to the right customers, gives you advice about how to play men, and forces all the creeps out there to show you some respect. When asked if such people really exist, she said yes, of course, "but there are only maybe six of them in this whole city and most of them are already taken up with their girls."

Commercial Sexual Exploitation

Finally, researchers did encounter a small number of situations that seemed to fit the pattern of abuse covered under the TVPA and described in the CSEC literature. One of these cases involved a 17-year-old girl who identified as black and heterosexual and who had been born and raised in Atlantic City with her older brother and her mother. She reported completing her eleventh year of school a mere month or so before the interview. She was interviewed in front of a two-story house with a porch on both floors. During the interview, a man who researchers believed to be the girl's pimp remained nearby, but he was asked to move when it became clear that his presence was hindering her ability to answer questions. He went upstairs to the second-floor porch, but the girl was still clearly uncomfortable, repeatedly looking up at the porch. It became increasingly clear that the girl was giving little thought to her responses and was merely attempting to finish the interview as quickly as possible. Rather than seriously considering her responses, she offered one-word responses with no elaboration. Finally, the interviewer asked the girl if she was scared and told her to just write yes or no on the paper. The girl took the pen with what the interviewer remembered as a shaking hand and wrote down the word "Yes."

In another case, we interviewed a 16- and a 19-year-old at night in a pizzeria. They had been referred by a spot pimp, who had convinced them to be interviewed despite their concern that their pimp did not want them speaking to us. They said that he was out of town that night and figured that the interview would be an easy way to make $40. As the older one put it, "I need some cigarettes and some diapers, and there ain't no money around the house." She was a Latina, had a young child, and claimed to be the pimp's girlfriend. She said that she prostituted herself and gave him the money. She insisted that he was a decent guy and that he spent most of the money on her.

The 16-year-old, who was African American and quite heavy, seemed to be somewhat disassociated. She indicated that her pimp was her foster father and said she did not like having sex with strange men. She boasted that her pimp never touched her sexually and seemed proud to say that he did not let her stay out late on school nights. The interview had a strange furtive feel with both women keeping an eye out, as if they were afraid that their pimp or one of his friends might see them. When asked if she needed any help,

the 16-year-old was emphatic about wanting to stay with him, arguing that he was more caring and more concerned for her future than her biological parents or any of the other foster parents with whom she had been placed.

Conclusion: Is Child to Adult as Victim is to Criminal?

The last two cases described seem clearly to involve commercial sexual exploitation and we would agree with CSEC activists that such abuse must be uncovered with whatever investigative tools are available and addressed with full social, psychological, and legal recognition of the victims' reduced potential for consent. However, the rarity of these cases in our research suggests that the resources and policy interventions dedicated to this issue are utterly out of scale with the actual problem. Moreover, our data indicates that perhaps the least important factor in determining whether a person is being coerced or manipulated by a pimp or a sex trafficker is age itself. Without respect to age, the overwhelming majority of the over 400 market-involved young people we interviewed in New York City and Atlantic City, and the many more we met or observed during our 2 years of research, would likely be trading sex for money with or without being involved in any of the types of relationships we described above. In short, these young people exchange sex for money not because they are being held and trafficked as "sex slaves" but because they have drug habits, are attempting to survive on the streets on their own, are escaping from difficult family situations, and exist at the lowest stratum of a socio-economic and cultural system that is failing them.

Currently, the minimum wage in the USA is $7.25 an hour and jobs offering such paltry wages rarely carry health, education, or childcare benefits. As is always affirmed during discussions about raising the level of the federal minimum wage, it is intentionally set low in order to encourage high youth employment levels, as more than half of all minimum wage employees are between the ages of 16 and 24. Despite these admirable intentions, unemployment for this group consistently remains over 20% in the USA. This is typically considered acceptable because youth employment is expected to be supplementary to parental support. It is for this reason that the government and universities determine financial aid packages for tertiary students based on parental tax returns, and President Barack Obama recently raised the age at which "children" can remain on their parents' work-based, private health insurance policies to 27. Childhood is clearly extending further and further into the lifecycle in the USA, and it has had a devastating impact on the subjects of our study: adolescents who, for whatever reason, find themselves attempting to live independent lives and to survive on the street.

While some of our respondents were engaging in prostitution to support self-destructive drug habits, many of them sought independent adult lives due to terrible family situations that had already taken away the cloak of childhood that is expected to cover most American adolescents until sometime in their late teens or early 20s. Regardless of how they were spending their money or living their lives, they were clear and articulate about the fact that the market facilitators, adult or otherwise, who were part of their lives were typically the least of their problems. At the end of each interview, we asked our respondents what they would need if they wanted to get out of "this life." Out of a total of 101 responses from 80 respondents who answered (some gave more than one answer), 63 responses were related to the need for employment, stable income, help with drug addiction, housing, and education. Not one of our respondents indicated that they needed to be protected from a violent pimp or sex trafficker, and, as noted above, those who may indeed have needed such an intervention, despite not indicating so, were extremely rare.

Whether an affective kinship-based relationship, a transient household unit, a relationship of opportunity, or an exclusive management relationship, the associations in which these market-involved adolescents were involved often constituted the only or the most crucial foundation for their support network. Any social policy that fails to take account of the complexity of such relationships by flattening them into a one-size-fits-all pattern based upon the arbitrary division between "child" and "adult" endangers them. Age differentials are important to consider in both social and legal attempts to understand and address the relationships between market-involved-adolescents and those who benefit from their sexual labor. However, a social policy based on the idea that a market-involved 16- or 17-year-old, living independently, possibly with children, is a priori a child victim with needs utterly different from an 18-year-old, now magically transformed into an adult criminal, in similar circumstances, potentially ignores the needs of both groups.

In the absence of a comprehensive reform of the low wage, low autonomy, socio-legal framework of adolescence in the USA and a dramatic decrease in youth unemployment levels, it is unlikely that a significant number of adolescents who habitually trade sex for money will be dissuaded from doing so either by the enforcement apparatus of the TVPA or by the moral crusading of the CSEC movement. While it is of course necessary to protect any child from commercial sexual exploitation and while there is a need for efforts targeted at the problem, the funding and resources dedicated to it should be determined by rigorous research into its nature and scope.

Policymakers should rethink this incursion of the sex trafficking model into the policies and practices governing

prostitution and, instead, focus on addressing the question of what market-involved adolescents need and how to provide it to them. Where force, coercion, and manipulation is occurring in these markets, domestic violence and kidnapping laws, along with the social service "best practices" that accompany them, should be utilized to handle victimizers and attend to the needs of victims. Meanwhile, funding for interventions aimed at helping adolescents, under and over 18 years of age, combat drug addiction, continue their education, obtain stable housing, and build marketable job skills should be increased and more effectively utilized.

Market-involved adolescents need safe spaces free of judgment and social services that recognize their dignity and autonomy. This can be done in a policy context that respects the current age of legal consent laws of each state and grants the vast majority of the market-involved adolescents we encountered in our research the legal right to their sexual subjectivity. Within this type of policy environment, culpability and agency should not be determined a prior but rather by drawing on a thorough knowledge of the particulars of each case accompanied by an independent body of research that can situate and contextualize those particulars within a comprehensive understanding of the social dynamics of youth participation in illegal sex markets.

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