Experiences of Youth in the Sex Trade in the Bay Area

By Nikki Jones and Joshua Gamson, with Brianne Amato, Stephanie Cornwell, Stephanie Fisher, Phillip Fucella, Vincent Lee, and Virgie Zolala-Tovar

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Chapter 1
Introduction: The San Francisco Bay Area

The San Francisco Bay Area, which includes nine counties and more than seven million residents, is known for its social and economic diversity. According to the 2010 Bay Area Census, 52.5% of residents in the region are white, 23.5% are Hispanic or Latino (of any race), 23.3% are Asian, 6.7% are African American, 5.4% identify with two or more races, and 10.8% identify as "some other race." In addition, 49.6% of the general population identify as male while 50.4% identify as female. In the period 2006-2010, the median household income was $75,989, with 9.7% individuals living in poverty (Bay Area Census N.D.).

Cities within the Bay Area vary widely along economic and demographic lines. This is particularly clear in the two cities that make up the site of this study, San Francisco and Oakland. In the most recent data on San Francisco (2010), 48.5% of residents identify as white, 15.1% Hispanic or Latino (of any race), 33% Asian, 6.1% African American, 4.7% two or more races, and 0.9% as some other race; in the period of 2006-2010, the median household income was $71,304, with 11.9% of residents living in poverty (Bay Area Census N.D.). In contrast, in the most recent data on Oakland, 34.5% of residents identified as white, 25.4% Hispanic or Latino (of any race), 15.1% Asian, 28% African American, 5.6% other races and 13.7% as some other race. In the period of 2006-2010, the median household income was $49,721 and 18.7% of residents lived below the federal poverty level (Bay Area Census N.D.).

There are over 1.5 million children under 18 years of age in the Bay Area, and youth in the Bay Area appear to be particularly vulnerable. In Oakland in 2012 (the most recent year for which data are available), 9% of teens ages 16 to 19 were neither attending school nor working, and 33% of children under the age of 18 lived in families with incomes below the federal poverty level. In San Francisco, in 2012, 4% of 16-to-19-year-olds were neither attending school nor working, and 15% lived in poverty (Kids Count Data Center N.D.).

Efforts to strengthen California's economic footing have also negatively impacted programs that serve at-risk youth. In 2010, California's budget for Child Welfare Services suffered a $133 million cut, and the education budget lost $5.4 billion for the year, with one result that

after-school programs, schools, and shelters have dramatically fewer resources to serve vulnerable youth populations (Grady 2010).

Due in part to these factors, the Bay Area has also become a key site for the commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) in the United States, especially for youth of color (MISSEY 2008: 3). San Francisco and Oakland were two of 17 U.S. cities that Estes and Weiner (2001) identified as particularly prevalent CSEC locations. Although population estimates are very difficult to make, one local San Francisco Bay Area program funded by the City of Oakland, the Sexually Abused Commercially Exploited Youth/Safe Place Alternative (SACEY/SPA) Program, has received over 600 referrals and assessed over 400 youth since 2006 (MISSSEY N.D.). Statistics from Alameda County on those youth who are identified and/or referred to social services indicate that nearly all are female and most are African American, followed by Latinas, Caucasians, Asians, and a variety of other ethnicities. The majority lives at or below the poverty line and has survived a number of forms of abuse and neglect, especially rape and sexual assault (MISSSEY N.D.). According to one local news report, the Oakland Police Department found that on an average night in Oakland, 100 youth are selling their bodies on the streets (Grady 2010). Another study in San Francisco of 149 commercially sexually exploited youth found that 61% had been raped one or more times, 55% were from the foster care system, 82% had been runaways, and 60% had been arrested for solicitation (Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation 2010: 2).

For these reasons, the San Francisco Bay Area—designated a "high intensity child prostitution" area by the FBI (Romney 2014)—is an opportune site at which to try to understand the phenomenon and to contextualize the relationship to other social problems, social hierarchies, and economic circumstances. Indeed, this was a main reason the Bay Area was chosen as a site as part of a larger national study, funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and overseen by the Center for Court Innovation. The study was designed 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), Chicago (IL), Dallas (TX), Miami (FL), Las Vegas (NV), and the Bay Area, 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; Schaffner et al. 2016; Wagner, Whitmer, and Spivak 2016). A multi-site report describes the overall study methodology; findings from a national and multi-site 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 multi-site report has a quantitative focus, this report and the other five site-specific reports endeavor to provide a rich qualitative account that reveals and gives voice to the experiences, perceptions, and needs of the relevant population of youth.

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

Chapter 2

Data Collection and Analytic Procedures

In May 2010, a research team was formed, recruited through a variety of university and professional networks. Out of 40 applicants, we selected 12 research assistants, of whom six remained for the duration of the project. The research team consisted of graduate students or advanced undergraduates in fields such as sociology, pre-medical study, public health, and sexualities studies. After reading a variety of background materials and a previous Center for Court Innovation research study conducted on the same topic in NYC (Curtis et al. 2008; Muslim, Labriola, and Rempel 2008), research assistants participated in a Center for Court Innovation-led training over two days in Berkeley, with presentations from service providers, further background on CSEC and working with traumatized youth, and the logistics of the study protocol. In June 2010, we held our own logistical meeting with the local research team in order to prepare research assistants to begin recruitment, addressing questions regarding the interview protocol, discussing strategies for interview recruitment, and planning the initial approach. The research team met regularly during the study period to discuss all aspects of the research process, from data collection to coding. These regular meetings also allowed for the discussion of any concerns that may have emerged during the course of the research process. The principal investigators were readily available to the research team (in-person, over the phone, and via email) to discuss any issues that emerged during the course of the study.

Recruitment and Data Collection

To be eligible for initial study inclusion, respondents needed to be between the ages of 13 and 19, and to report that they had at some time traded sex for money or other resources. In October of 2010, the Center for Court Innovation expanded the age eligibility criteria to include youth up to age 24.

We began preliminary research and recruitment along two avenues. First, we pursued meetings with service providers, both to further our own knowledge in the Bay Area and to solicit help with recruiting seed interviews for the study. One or both of the Bay Area research consultants accompanied Center for Court Innovation staff to meetings at the Center for Young Women's Development (CYWD), MISSSEY (Motivating, Inspiring, Supporting, and Serving Sexually Exploited Youth), SAGE (Standing Against Global Exploitation), and the Youth Justice Institute. Over the next weeks, we followed up with these organizations and

others (LYRIC and Larkin Street Youth Center in San Francisco, and East Bay Asian Youth Center, Banteay Srei, and later CALPEP in Oakland). Initially, our strongest emerging relationships were with MISSSEY and CYWD, both of which agreed to direct interested clients to the study and to post flyers. Other organizations either declined to help for a variety of reasons or agreed to help but in the end proved unable to do so (though we were able to leave flyers in many of these locations).

Our second avenue was preliminary fieldwork and field-based interviewee recruitment. Based on information from service providers, between June and October of 2010, members of the research team went on brief excursions to the tracks or strolls (city areas known for prostitution-related activity) in Oakland, and later in San Francisco, in order to better understand the best locations, times, and strategies for potential interviewee recruitment. We also made attempts at this time to conduct interviews at locations near the tracks, with limited success.

We used a dual sampling and recruitment strategy specifically developed for hidden and stigmatized populations, Respondent-Driven Sampling (RDS). Aiming to produce a representative sample with a broad cross-section of the target population (Heckathorn 1997), RDS works through an incentive system, where participants receive a monetary payment for recruiting their own peers into the study. This system ideally produces a "tree-shaped recruitment structure" (Heckathorn 2002: 18) that grows exponentially. In our research, initial participants, known as seeds, were identified and interviewed; they were then given monetary compensation for their participation in the interview and three matchbooks with a special sticker and number on the inside cover. (Initially we used paper coupons, but some informants suggested that these would be too easy to lose and raise suspicion from pimps or other interested parties; we switched to matchbooks to address such concerns.) These matchbooks served as RDS tracking referrals, and participants who wanted to be involved in recruitment were encouraged to give them out to other young people who were eligible to participate. The seed respondent received $20 at the end of the interview (increased to $40 later in the research process in an effort to more effectively build the interview pool), and $10 for each eligible person they referred to the study who brought in their matchbook referral, with a limit of three referrals. Each referral then received payment for their own participation in the interview and three new matchbook referrals to refer others if they so chose.

We interviewed respondents in a variety of settings, including at the Youth Employment Project offices in Oakland (near a major prostitution track); at Allen Temple in Oakland; at rented offices in San Francisco's South of Market neighborhood; at Sandbox Suites in the early period; and subsequently at Mercy Housing. On a small number of occasions we

conducted interviews in cars or in local fast-food restaurants near the track, or in parks or cafes convenient to a respondent. All interviews were conducted in English.

In addition to pursuing referrals from social service agencies, the local research team posted flyers in San Francisco and Oakland, online, and at general service agencies for youth. Flyers provided contact information, so potential participants could call a toll free number, text, or email in order to find out when and where the research team would be conducting interviews. Researchers also recruited in the field, distributing flyers in tracks or strolls. Recruitment of interview subjects posed challenging in this study, however. The referral system was partially successful, but participants in the Bay Area study did not refer as many peers to the study as anticipated: 66% of our interviews were seeds, while 34% were referrals.

The limitations on recruitment and referral may have to do with a variety of factors. Direct contact with potential interviewees in the field was proscribed by the study protocol. Other limitations stem from the need to protect subjects from potential danger, potential participants' understandable mistrust of outsiders seeking non-business transactions, and the relative invisibility of minors on the strolls. Potential respondents were likely wary that the study was somehow connected with law enforcement; indeed, several interviewees mentioned this concern. Social network dynamics themselves also appear to have worked against recruitment and referral effectiveness. Interviewees who came to us through agencies such as MISSSEY were attempting to leave the life and were therefore in the process of severing connections with youth still in the life—and staff members at such agencies were not interested in helping them renew those contacts for our referral purposes. Both on-track recruitment and referrals may have been hampered by surveillance by pimps, who were sometimes visible nearby. Participants who responded to paid advertisements may have been more likely to be solo operators with little connection to a network of similarly situated youth and thus unable to provide effective referrals. Participants who discovered the study through flyers at youth shelters or harm-reduction agencies were likely to have referrals to street youth but less likely to be connected to youth directly involved in prostitution. Finally, the researchers directly and indirectly reached many people who were outside of the age restrictions, but their contacts were primarily older than the targeted study population.

These issues in recruitment and RDS appear likely to have shaped the sample in important ways that suggest caution in drawing conclusions about the numerical prevalence of the population of interest in the Bay Area and elsewhere. Nonetheless, by utilizing multiple starting points and persistent approaches, the Bay Area study did recruit a substantial number of eligible subjects from a range of different types of engagement and social networks, and we are therefore confident that the sample allows significant, comprehensive insight into the variety of ways youth enter into sexual exchange markets, the dynamics of those exchanges

(especially managing threats to their wellbeing), exiting the market, and other core issues in experience of the population in the Bay Area.

Data Coding and Analysis

A total of 187 interviews were completed and uploaded to Dedoose, a qualitative research data analysis software. The preliminary analysis presented here is drawn from 136 interviews that were not excluded for concerns regarding validity or reliability.

A key concern that emerged early in the research project was ensuring that youth were actually in the age range that met the study criteria. Since the research protocol did not require proof of age, there was no way for interviewers to confirm the reported age of respondents; we suspect that this relatively lax enforcement policy encouraged pockets of respondents to lie about their age in order to receive the incentive for participation in the study. After uploading the interviews to Dedoose, we systematically reviewed them for reported age discrepancies, excluding those interviews that had both an age discrepancy and responses about whose veracity researchers had strong doubts. We also excluded interviews that were not completed. Of the 187 interviews, 51 interviews are excluded from this analysis because of concerns related to validity and reliability (n=136).

Prior to coding interviews, the research team met to discuss and generate a coding scheme that would capture the areas of interest contained in the interview guide along with other themes that were generated during the course of field research. This initial coding scheme was intended to be broad (it is often described as “bucket coding”). Generally, coding efforts would progress from this more general form of coding to coding for more specific phenomena that emerges during the course of data analysis. In this study, the research team was able to make only one pass through the data. As a result, the findings here should be read as preliminary and descriptive. See Table 1 below for a description of the demographic characteristics of the sample.

Table 1: Sample Demographic Characteristics

Age	%
14-17	14%
18.00	15%
19-20	43%
21-214	28%
Gender	
Cis Female	74%
Cis Male	24%
Trans (M to F)	2%
Trans (F to M)	1%
Sexual Orientation	
Heterosexual	48%
Gay or Lesbian	11%
Bisexual	36%
Other or No Response	5%
Race/Ethnicity	
Black/African American	47%
Multi-racial	21%
White	15%
Hispanic/Latino	11%
Asian/Pacific Islander	3%
Native American/Alaska	2%
Other	1%
Education Level Completed	
Grades 6-8	5%
Grades 9-11	48%
Grade 12	28%
Some College	19%

Chapter 3
Site Descriptions

The study was conducted in San Francisco and Oakland, each of which is distinctive in terms of the territory, operation, and demographics of their sexual markets. Specifically, 65% of our total respondents were interviewed in San Francisco, while 35% of respondents were interviewed in Oakland.

Oakland

The most economically marginalized of its non-white residents live in the flatland areas of East, West, and North Oakland (Haley et al. 2012). Much of what is considered an underage market in girls (primarily) takes place along International Boulevard in East Oakland. East Oakland neighborhoods are some of the poorest in the city. Academic opportunity and achievement are among the city's lowest (with more than half of the adults lacking a high school diploma), foreclosure rates are among the city's highest, and life expectancies are among the lowest (Haley et al. 2012). Such economic and social conditions ensure that a cohort of vulnerable youth will be accessible to a range of market facilitators who are looking to exploit them.

Research visits to the area also illustrated some spatial characteristics that are likely to help to sustain this market: the area along International Boulevard is easily accessible by the freeway. High Street is a well-used off-ramp that brings drivers directly into the market along International Boulevard. This market extends from "the dubs" to the upper 40s and beyond (including into the upper 90s and lower 100s); it shifts depending on police enforcement and competition from older women in the market, among other issues. There are also a series of side streets and alleys that are easily accessible to potential customers, along with a range of low-end motels that rent rooms out by the hour or night. The area is also easily accessible by public transportation.

San Francisco

Street prostitution in San Francisco is concentrated primarily in the Mission neighborhood, between 17th and 19th Streets and between Shotwell and Capp, and in the Tenderloin

neighborhood. According to our research, although alleged pimps have been found elsewhere, such as South San Francisco (Lee 2013), most exchanges of sex for money or other material resources by minors are arranged in or around the Tenderloin and Civic Center areas. This area of San Francisco has relatively high numbers of homeless or street youth, and shelters and services that serve homeless youth, such as Larkin Street Youth Services. Recent estimates put the number of unaccompanied children and youth living on San Francisco streets at nearly 2,000; of these, about 29% identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ) (Bajko 2013). The proximity to the tourist area of Union Square (and, for gay male tourists in particular, of the Castro neighborhood), along with the presence of many sex-related movie theaters and other businesses, has made the Tenderloin a destination for men seeking to purchase sexual services.

Chapter 4
Findings

Settings

Respondents discussed the locations and methods they use to find customers. In addition to recruiting customers in sites known for prostitution, commonly described as “the blade” or “the track,” they frequently reported recruiting (or being propositioned by) customers in other settings. It was not uncommon for respondents to report working in more than one type of setting. In some cases, a respondent may “graduate” from one site to another. For example, one respondent (Seed 109), a 24-year-old, multi-racial, transgender youth, reported moving from exchanging sex for money on the street to working as an online escort. She reportedly found a greater measure of control and safety when recruiting and arranging to meet customers online. She also found that she was able to charge more for an hourly rate than for a quick transaction on the street. Some respondents also reported being approached outside of the areas already known for prostitution, on the street, in bars and at bus stations. For some youth, these initial solicitations led them into the life.

A little more than half of the respondents reported using the Internet to recruit and arrange meetings with customers, citing web sites such as Redbook.com, Craigslist.com, backpage.com, and sugardaddyforme.com. Respondents reported using the Internet to arrange meetings with customers at hotels, spas (for example, the Hot Tubs on Broadway and Van Ness in San Francisco), or the homes of customers. For some, the Internet was generally seen as a safer way to acquire clients. Some respondents also believed that they had more leverage when arranging payment for services online. As one respondent (Seed 1), a 20-year-old, heterosexually identified, African-American woman, explained, “The street is cheap.” She cited competition from addicts, who would set low prices that others working on the track would then have to meet. On the street, she explained, there is some expectation that prices will be negotiated, while on the Internet the expectation is that the price is set ahead of time and is not renegotiated. Respondents also reported drawbacks to using the Internet to recruit or meet customers, including the difficulty in recruiting “regulars” from the Internet.

Participants did not simply operate within and across these settings, but many—particularly young women and girls—also developed judgments about the moral status of those in different sexual exchange settings; their own sense of self was shaped by, and shaped, the perceptions of the moral value of particular market locations. Women and girls who work “on the blade” (on the track) are generally held in low regard and are used as a reference

group for women and girls who possess, or perceive themselves as possessing, an elevated status position from working as an escort. As one respondent (Referral 5002), 23-year-old, heterosexually identified, multi-racial young woman, said:

> *I'd feel disgusting if I had a pimp who beat me all the time and I was on drugs. I would feel disgusting if I was just fucking hella cheap people or whatever. You know, just doing whatever for whatever. You know? Not having any boundaries or limitations. But I think, you know, I have a – I walk away feeling satisfied. I never walk away feeling like I was, I guess you could say "sold short." You know what I mean?*

Others point to the relative safety, higher pay, and time dimension (time spent at dinner, for instance, rather than a "quick fuck") of online-generated "dates" over street hustling. Several participants also stated that under no circumstances would they pick up johns or work the track in their own neighborhood, either because they do not want people they know to see them, or because they feel unsafe on the streets. Youth who chose to do so therefore were seen by these other youth as overly desperate and lacking in self-respect.

To outsiders, these distinctions may seem trivial, but they are meaningful for sexually exploited youth. The expansion of ways to recruit and meet customers may add to the negative stigma attached to working on the street. These distinctions reflect moral judgments about the type of young people who work the street, the Internet, who recruit from friends or associates, or a combination of each. Youth may use such distinctions to rationalize their participation in the market, to minimize a degraded status, or both. Interventions for youth involved in the sex trade that do not account for how youth frame their engagement in the market may risk alienating a subset of the population.

Population and Respondent Profiles

The market for sexual exploitation of young people in the Bay Area is significant, but participants in the market do not represent a homogenous group. Young people enter the market in different ways and participate or are coerced into participation for varying lengths of time. Some respondents' accounts suggested that their participation in the market was episodic and situational, as in the case of this respondent (Referral 8009), a 19-year-old black woman who identified as bi-sexual:

> *So I was like fine, I'm gonna do that shit too. It was only supposed to be a one-time thing 'cause I wanted weed and I was hungry. Then it's like okay if he's*

gonna pay, and he's paying a lot, I can make other guys pay a lot too. So I did it again. That was for a hotel room, though. Then I did it again. I'm not addicted to doing it. I do it only when I need stuff. Like I need food and I need clothes and I need a roof over my head for some nights at a time, so it's like, fine, fine. I wouldn't consider myself a ho like that. I'd consider myself probably like an escort. [Laughs] That's a good word for it. You get paid to do it, but it's not like you're doing it constantly. It's not your job, and I don't have a pimp. I'm not looking for every john to fuck. It's just when it's that dire need time, some things you gotta do. It's not by choice, but I mean that's the lifestyle I've been brought to all of a sudden.

It is likely that the episodic nature of participation varies with the level of violence and domination that youth experience: youth without pimps may feel as if they can enter the market when it is "dire need time," while those who are controlled by pimps are likely to exhibit far less control over when and how they participate in the market. In this section, we briefly describe common profiles of respondents in our study, which we have grouped into several types: *Pimped Kids*, whose participation in the market was controlled by an adult market facilitator who uses coercion and financially benefits from CSEC transactions; *Renegades*, who act as their own market facilitators; and *Street Kids*, homeless youth who do not see themselves as "in the life," but who engage in sex work sporadically in order to meet basic survival needs. These categories emerged from respondents' descriptions of their own participation in the sex market as well as the participation of other youth in the market. We present them here as a general typology, but further analysis would be needed to broaden the typology and to assess the relative prevalence of each type in the overall population of interest.

These types share the experience of some measure of coercion or exploitation, yet how they make sense of their participation in the market varies, as does their exposure to various risks and perceived benefits of participation in the market. While some of the adolescents and young adults we interviewed conveyed a sense of agency and purposefulness during interviews, adolescents' efforts to strategically manage highly constrained circumstances should not be confused with control. Young people in this study, like young people growing up in difficult circumstances in other settings, work to make sense of their lives under a set of constraining conditions including poverty, restricted access to education and employment, and family conflict or abuse.

Pimped Kids

Twenty-nine percent of the respondents cited experience with a pimp as a market facilitator.

All but one of those who reported experiences with a pimp as market facilitators were young women. Of those who had experience with a pimp, 22 were black, 4 were Hispanic or Latino, 3 were white, 9 were multi-racial, and 3 identified as another race or ethnicity. Twenty-two of these youth identified as heterosexual and 16 identified as bisexual (one respondent identified as gay and one declined to respond to this question). While youth seemed familiar with stories of girls who were "guerilla pimped"—a term used to describe instances where girls are kidnapped, held against their will, and then turned out by a pimp—actual experiences of girls who were coerced into the market in this way were not common in our sample. (It is likely that these youth were less accessible via the methodological approach we used in this study; see discussion above.) A subset of girls reported meeting a male stranger, either on the street or through peers, who then became her "pimp." The stranger-pimped kid narrative is characterized by the overt use of force and violence. Fear and coercion were evident in our interviews with pimped kids, some of whom worried about surveillance by pimps, and many of whom expressed vehement discomfort when asked to share pimp names (most of which were one-word nicknames).

More commonly, young women described what others have called "Romeo pimps"—men who recruit and seduce women into prostitution "through a calculated process that fosters an entrenched combination of fear and trauma bonding" (Jordan 2011). A male stranger invests resources into a period of courting designed to make a pimped kid believe that he is her love interest and not merely a pimp. During interviews, the line between love and coercion, and between boyfriend and pimp, was often blurred for these respondents, as this excerpt (Seed 84) illustrates:

> *Interviewer: So when you were working, who negotiated the prices?*
>
> *Respondent: The – my first love.*
>
> *Interviewer: And did you think of him as a boyfriend, or like, what did you think of him as?*
>
> *Respondent: Some days, he could act like a boyfriend, like he would want to be with me, and some days, he could act like a complete stranger. So yeah, some days, he was a boss, some days he was a lover. And some days, he was a discipliner…. I still love him to this day. I knew him since, like, it feels like all my life, and when we started going out, he was, like, the bestest friend I ever had. He still is the bestest friend, but you know, people change. But that's like*

the bestest friend I ever had…. I don't know what it is, but one day, he loved me; one day, he didn't.

As she continued, the respondent reported that this man made her work while she was pregnant; he had allowed her a two-year hiatus from prostitution to raise her son, but made it clear that once her child turned two she knew she would be required to return to prostitution. The confusing, conflicted, and conflated nature of such relationships—lover, boss, disciplinarian, best friend—were common in respondents' descriptions of such market facilitators.

Renegades and Collaborators

Respondents' narratives also revealed a range of actors who, while they were not identified as pimps, acted as "market facilitators" for transactions in which the youth exchanged sex for money; while 29% of respondents indicated having a pimp, 21% said that they had a market facilitator who was not a pimp. The nature of these relationships is likely to have implications for the development of useful interventions for girls.

Renegades. The large majority of the sample did not report working with a pimp as a market facilitator. Some participants in the study identified as or referenced "renegades," a colloquial term used to describe a young woman who exchanges sex for money or goods, but is not under the control of a pimp. In our sample, this profile appeared to be more common among young black women, but future research would be needed to confirm that claim. Renegades may enter the market in a pimp-pimped relationship before breaking ties and then facilitating future market transactions on their own. That was the case with this respondent (Seed 2), a 19-year-old young Black woman who identified as bisexual. After breaking her ties to pimps, she began to work for herself:

Interviewer: So when you worked on International were you working for a pimp or were you working for you?

Respondent: Myself.

Interviewer: By yourself. And how did pimps feel that you were

Respondent: [interrupts] They would sweat me! 'Cause they call me renegade.

At the time of the interview, the respondent reported that she was on an eventual path out of the life. She was no longer working on the street, but she continued to recruit

dates on the Internet because, she said, she is "in need of money." Operating as a renegade outside the control of a pimp can provide adolescent girls a greater sense of agency and control, as this respondent (Seed 69), a 22-year-old African-American woman who identified as bisexual, explains: "I've been sitting in the scene for so fucking long that I can sit around a fucking pimp that knows me and knows what I do but he can't fuck with me 'cause I don't have a pimp and I refuse to be pimped."

Since male pimps or bosses typically control the organization of sex work in public space, even young women who fit this profile remain vulnerable to violence at the hands of pimps. The respondent described earlier (Seed 101), who at times worked the track with her sister, illustrates this point:

> *Interviewer: Did you ever run into trouble [while working] with people who had pimps or pimps who wanted you to–*
>
> *Respondent: Yeah, a lot of pimps who wanted me, aggressive and tried to grab me.*
>
> *Interviewer: So when you say try and grab you, do you mean try and grab you off the street?*
>
> *Respondent: Yeah, trying to grab me off the street.*
>
> *Interviewer: How were you able not to have that happen?*
>
> *Respondent: Just walked away, just ran away.*

This respondent's comment resonates with responses from other youth who worked on their own but remained vulnerable threats of violence from pimps.

Collaborators. When asked to whom they gave their money, some youth—young women, especially—provided a response that suggested a mix of autonomy and collaboration with a male partner or intimate. In some cases, respondents reported being "in it together" with a romantic male partner; these types of responses included more egalitarian descriptions, with both partners working to provide for the couple's needs, than the typical "Romeo pimp" narrative. For example, when one respondent (Referral 8095), a 20-year-old, heterosexually identified African-American woman, was asked if she ever met customers through a pimp, she answered: "Never had a pimp. It was me and my boyfriend the whole time."

Occasionally, respondents reported that their romantic partner was also engaged in sex work, as this excerpt (from Referral 8009, described above) illustrates:

> *Interviewer: Do you share your money with anyone after you get it?*
>
> *Respondent: Yeah, my boyfriend. He don't punk me out of it, but we're both in the same situation. He does it too, so hey, we share the money. Not like that, but he does it too with the females. Takes them on dates and everything. I mean, you can't be jealous in a business like this really. Can't have a jealous relationship. I mean, I have my tendencies to sway that way, then it's like, "Okay, dude, we need the money." It's not like he's gonna leave me and go be with her, but still.*
>
> *Interviewer: So it sounds like you guys both do this work and then you both share the money. Is there any arrangement about how it's shared or is it you just kind of like–*
>
> *Respondent: No, it's like if we both—well, it doesn't matter who has more. It's like it all gets thrown into one pot.*

A small number of respondents described family members who served as market facilitators, such as Referral 5092, an 18-year-old, heterosexually identified, African-American woman whose entry into the market was facilitated by her cousin. Without her cousin's early influence (this respondent first exchanged sex for money at 15), she does not believe she would have entered the life: "I think if I would have never been hanging out with her I would have never been doing this stuff I was doing." The respondent reports having one steady and often rejects her cousin's efforts to recruit more customers for her:

> *Interviewer: Would you consider your cousin like a pimp?*
>
> *Respondent: Hmm-mmm. [Negative]*
>
> *Interviewer: No*
>
> *Respondent: Because even though she tried to get me in touch with new people I just stick with that one person because I knew him for a while and I trust him.*

Interviewer: And she doesn't like – you don't – you don't ever like pay for her for like helping you find? Yeah.

Respondent: Hm-mmm. [Negative]

Another respondent (Seed 101), an 18-year-old, heterosexually identified, Latina woman, reported that she and her sister, who began trading sex for money after getting involved with an older man at the age of 14, worked together on the street. The respondent reported feeling some pressure to earn money, but found little luck in applying for jobs at local fast food restaurants. Her entry to the market was also shaped by the comments of peers and friends who encouraged her to forgo low-wage jobs for the potential for greater earnings from engaging the market. "You have sex with men for free already, so you might as well get money," peers told her. She began to work the streets with her sister, who acted as a sort of mentor and also offered some protection.

Street Kids

Like some of the renegades or collaborators described above, street kids, who appeared to make up a considerable proportion of the San Francisco sample, typically reported engaging in sex work sporadically, as necessary to meet immediate needs for money, goods or shelter. Such youth typically did not work with market facilitators. Instead, youth found themselves propositioned on the street or found customers more opportunistically.

As opposed to identifying as "in the life," street kids tend to understand their involvement in sexual exchanges as one among a range of "hustles" they use to get by. Referral 2077, a 19-year-old, heterosexually identified, multi-racial woman, represents the street kid profile. This respondent was "kicked out" of her home and first exchanged sex for a small amount of drugs. On the street, she exchanges sex when she needs food or money: "It's not like an every-single-day type thing for me, but if I need something, I'll do it." Referral 4086, a 20-year-old, transgender respondent, also reported trading sex for money when it was needed. She explained: "It's not like I go looking for it all the time. It's just like when I need it and I have to, and I know that my cell phone bill needs to be paid or something. And that's when I go out and I go look for work or something." This respondent also reported that she stopped when she was involved in with a serious boyfriend and then would engage in the market again after a break-up.

The first experience of exchange reported by Referral 9048, a white, 21-year-old, heterosexually identified male, illustrates the sporadic, transitory, and situational nature in which street kids engage the market. He was born in a city outside of the Bay Area, leaving

home at 15. He was living in temporary housing in San Francisco at the time of the interview, and reported having exchanged sex for money over the previous two years. He described the process:

> *It's never really anything I go out of my way looking for. Like I just walk down the street, and people see that I'm a stray, homeless – a stray, homeless young kid. And you know, I get approached. First they come up to me like, "Hey man, can I get you anything?" You know, trying to be my friend, acting like they want me to get them something. And then it gets to, "You wanna make some money?" "Well, what's this about?" "Oh, you ain't got to do much. Just sit there and do nothing, and I do the rest." And you know, "What are you getting at?" "Just let me suck your dick. It'll only take like 10 minutes, and I'll pay you $40." And it's like what the fuck? The first two times, I said no and was like really, really, really creeped out about it. You know? And then it just took me being absolutely really, really broke and close to, you know, a bum point. And somebody offered me $200, instead of $40. And so I said, "Yeah. Sure."*

Similarly, Referral 3089, a 20-year-old gay youth who reported his racial/ethnic identification as "other," was 18 when he left home and first exchanged sex. He currently lives in a temporary shelter, and had not finished high school at the time of the interview.

> *It happened in the Castro. I didn't really plan it out. I did need the money but I was outside of a bar in the Castro and I was drinking, a friend of mine got me a 40 and I was just drinking, and this guy walked up to me and he just started talking. He was like, "I'll pay you for sex," and I'd never done it before so I was just really thinking more about the money and it was just gonna be over in a few minutes and I'll get the money and I'm out so…. So after that experience I started going back to it because it was just an easy way to make money.*

Nearly all the young cis men included in the study, most of whom were interviewed in San Francisco (28 of 32), seemed to fit the "street kid" profile described above. Twenty-one of the 32 cis male respondents reported that they were living in temporary housing (for example, a shelter) or on the streets at the time of the interview; almost half (15 of 32) were born outside of California, and most (26 of 32) reported a non-Bay Area city of birth. The disproportionate representation of LGBT youth among the population of youth living in San Francisco shelters and streets (Bajko 2013) was also reflected in the sample, with 11 of the male respondents reporting a heterosexual identity and the majority reporting a gay/bisexual identity (18) or other (3).

The majority of boys reported that they first left home prior to their 18th birthday, and most of these male respondents first exchanged sex in their mid-to-late teens. In general, these young men's accounts were not characterized by engagement with pimps: although 10 male respondents reported that they got help in getting customers, only one male reported using a pimp to get customers, and 13 reported using the Internet to get customers. Eleven reported working off the track exclusively, while 10 reported working both on and off the track. Adolescent boys, like female street kids, reported mostly engaging the market to meet basic financial and material needs and reported histories of trouble in the home, including experiences of victimization.

Market Entry

Nearly a quarter of respondents entered the market at age 13 or 14, and another 45% entered the market between ages 15 and 17. Youth pathways into the market are marked by instability and vulnerability. Respondents' accounts reflected common themes regarding youth entry, including sexual abuse as a child, problematic foster care placements, and economic insecurity. More than half of the respondents were not living with family members at the time of their interviews; many reported leaving or being pushed out of their homes because of economic instability in the home, and entering the market due to subsequent financial insecurity. A number of respondents reported that they would combine money earned from participation in the sex market with other forms of subsidized payments like food stamps, SSI or GA (General Assistance) in order to meet basic needs. For some, responses to questions regarding their entry into the market overlapped with what is commonly described as "survival sex," in which they traded sex acts to meet basic survival needs such as food and shelter.

Indeed, interviews with respondents reveal the cascading consequences of instability in their lives: instability in the home, for instance, may lead to state custody and foster care and to a lack of resources for transitioning into financially independent adult life. On the street, youth became vulnerable to being pushed or pulled into the sex market by a range of adolescents and adults, including strangers, family members, and peers who have some familiarity with the market. Youth who have been sexually abused as children may be especially vulnerable. For instance, Seed 114, a 21-year-old Latina woman who identified as bisexual and was sexually abused at an early age, saw a connection between her abuse at an early age and her participation in the market.

> *Respondent: As far as girls being prostitutes I believe it all comes and starts as far as them being molested or raped at a young age and it being taken from them, their*

virginity being taken from them. I believe that's where it starts from the beginning. Well, that's how it started with me, so I believe a lot of girls that I ran into who do work in this business have been molested.

Interviewer: What's the connection there?

Respondent: I'm not sure how to really answer that, but I wouldn't think they care anymore about their body…. I mean I can't really answer for anybody else, you know? But as for myself, I didn't care anymore because it was taken. I was sleeping and I woke up to my mother's boyfriend, and then she had a baby after, and to this day I still see him, so it's really hard. It's really hard.

Youth who come under tight control of pimps or other market facilitators may quickly find that the promise of some measure of financial security is lost as they become more deeply involved in the market. Money earned passes quickly through their hands. Adolescent girls (only one male respondent reported experience with a pimp), in particular, may find some solace in the shelter provided after entering the market, but this solace is likely to be short-lived as they find that they are sharing small hotel rooms or other crowded living spaces with others. The promise of financial security also comes with substantial risks, as girls must account for the omnipresent threat of violence at the hands of pimps and johns.

Fallouts with others of emotional significance can also hasten entry into the market, as in the case of a young man (Referral 2045) who reports that a fight with a girlfriend left him "with nowhere to go," leading to his trading sex for money:

I got in a fight with my girlfriend, and I was at the Civic Center waiting for the T train to come, and some old man just approached me and said, "Do you like my piercings?" And I had nowhere to go, and he was like, "Do you want to come with me to have a drink?" I was like, "Sure." Went to his house. One thing led to another. Talked me into it and gave me some money.

Responsibilities and obligations tied to motherhood can also exacerbate an adolescent girl's precarious financial position. In the following excerpt, Seed 116, a 17-year-old African-American woman, reports that her first experience exchanging sex occurred before she gave birth to her daughter and found herself in need of money. She found herself, at 15, with "no type of income," but with easy access to customers in the sex market in Oakland.

Respondent: I was pregnant at the time and my daughter was getting ready to come,

so I didn't have no type of income, so I started to pull dates that I would see off the street if I was going to the store or anything and that's how I really just got into it.

Interviewer: What kind of gave you that idea?

Respondent: Because I know people that had done it and they were pregnant and actually made something where they could actually live – I'm not gonna say live off of it, but actually kind of get by off of it. So I just looked into it…. A lot of them would just roll up on me and try to talk to me, so that's how most of the time I meet them.

As we discuss later, giving birth or the responsibilities of parenthood can also be a factor that pulls girls out of the sex market. A number of adolescent girls reported having children or becoming pregnant as a reason they stopped exchanging sex for money. The respondent above also explains that she acquired some familiarity with the market from others in her position who "had done it" before. This response highlights a common theme shared by respondents. That is, respondents (like Seed 101 described above) who found themselves in financially insecure positions were often advised by others on ways to trade sex for money. Other respondents also identified experienced sex workers, including family members, or a network of others loosely connected to the market as primary agents in their entry into sex work.

It was not uncommon for youth to report using drugs or alcohol. Indeed, when asked what they would first buy after receiving payment, more than one-quarter reported drugs or alcohol as their first purchase. For some, drug use also combined with other factors to make youth more vulnerable to market participation. For example, one respondent (Seed 1), a 20-year-old, heterosexually identified, African-American woman, shared that she was drunk and on ecstasy when a friend of her cousin's boyfriend suggested she turn a trick for money. She "agreed" but later regretted doing so. Despite her regret, her exposure to the fast money of the market led to her ongoing participation in the market.

Managing Threats

Youth involved in the sex trade are exposed to a range of threats to their well-being. They must contend with threats associated with securing and negotiating sex with customers along with the threat of arrest. Youth working on the track must also negotiate potential conflicts with others. Those working with pimps must also account for the threat of violence that often characterizes this relationship. It is not uncommon for people involved in dangerous work to develop a set of rules to minimize risk and danger. For example, youth quickly learn rules

about setting limits and prices for sexual transactions. They learn not to trust others. A number of respondents reported avoiding black men as customers. Some believed that this was a way to avoid interacting with potential pimps. Some reported this as a strategy recommended or required by a pimp (or other market facilitator) as a way to avoid being kidnapped by another pimp.

While pimps certainly expose youth to violence, respondents also report that they provided some measure of protection. The following respondent (Referral 9047), a 19-year-old, heterosexually identified, African-American woman doesn't have a pimp, but would act as if she did in order to stay safe:

> *Interviewer: So when you would get your money, did you ever share it with anybody?*
>
> *Respondent: No. It was kind of like I'd act like I had a pimp, but I didn't, so –*
>
> *Interviewer: Was it important to act like you had a pimp? How do you do that?*
>
> *Respondent: Well, you just like – I don't know. Nobody really like mess with me, as you can see. And, um, you know, you just act like you had a pimp, like you just, you know, "My pimp's over there," just in case – and like point to a parked car or something, and they'd be like, "Oh, okay." And like it was like always –*
>
> *Interviewer: This is like to johns, to customers?*
>
> *Respondent: Yeah.*
>
> *Interviewer: Okay.*
>
> *Respondent: Because if I acted like I didn't have a pimp, I probably would have got robbed. Like usually I just go like out at night. Like on the Saturday, Sunday – Friday, Saturday, Sunday nights, I do like four tricks and then go home, wherever home was.*

Instead of relying on a pimp for protection, for example, Referral 8009 (described above) trades drugs or small amounts of money with a person she describes as a "crackhead" for protection.

Avoiding Law Enforcement

Along with avoiding the dangers associated with sex work, avoiding interactions with the police seemed to be a primary concern for respondents, with most participants favoring working locations, times, or methods that would allow them to avoid contact with law enforcement. One respondent, Referral 52, a 17-year-old, gay male, summed it up this way:

> *Interviewer: Do you try and keep away from the police?*
>
> *Respondent: Yes, as much as possible. The less you bother them, the less they will bother you.*

Referral 2091, a 20-year-old, heterosexually identified, African-American man elaborated:

> *I'll try to keep away from police even if I'm not doing anything, I don't have anything on me, or anything, just because I believe they'll stop me and take me in because I look like somebody or 'cause – so it's a lot. To be honest, if they're driving the same direction I'm walking, I continue to walk that direction, and I'll either – I just act like nothing's happening. 'Cause I get a feeling of paranoia that they're gonna stop and come harass me, or they're watching me for some reason, or something. So I have to first tell myself that I'm fine and I won't be stopped. It's a process every time I see a cop car.*

While some respondents reported histories of arrest, for crimes ranging from drug sales to illegal firearm possession, most respondents did not report an arrest for prostitution. (There is one outlier in our sample, Referral 2004, a 21-year-old woman who identified as multi-racial, who reported being arrested multiple times for sex work.) Several respondents reported being ticketed by police for jaywalking, or open-container alcohol consumption on the street; they tended to interpret this as more generalized "hassling" by police, unrelated to sex work. While respondents were not likely to get arrested for involvement in the sex market, they did recognize the threat of arrest and the potential dangers of encountering "decoys" or undercover officers looking to lure them in and arrest them; they described strategies, as Seed 24, an 18-year-old, white woman who identified as bisexual, put it, "like being careful with prospective clients about what kind of language you use and things, and like you don't want to discuss specific sexual acts because sex for money is illegal." Seed 95, a 22-year-old woman who identified as heterosexual and multi-racial, emphasized the use of self-presentation and relocation to evade police surveillance:

> *Well, just 'cause you a prostitute doesn't mean you have to look like one all the time. You could look like a regular person in the streets, you know. Not wearing hella short clothes. You could be wearing jeans. You know, looking presentable. And then if, you know if they drive past, you just try not to – you try to leave that area. You know if you see so many police officers, okay, well, this area's bad, we got to go to another one.*

Two respondents (Referral 2004 and Seed 109) reported having a police officer as a customer; by Referral 2004's account, the officer still paid like a regular paying customer but then warned her to be more careful about other cops in the future.

In general, respondents' accounts suggested that law enforcement exercised discretion in dealing with youth suspected of involvement in the sex trade, with most police interactions resulting in some questioning and verbal warnings, but few arrests for prostitution. "I get stopped all the time," Seed 50 said. "Majority of the time all they say is, 'Go home.'"

Leaving the Life

Most youth expressed a desire to distance themselves from the market. When asked where they see themselves in ten years, a number of respondents shared what can be described as "white picket fence" dreams. One typical respondent (Referral 2032) imagined herself a college graduate with a degree in either criminal justice or cosmetology, and as "a housewife with a picket fence and two kids"; another (Seed 111) saw herself in "my own house, a child and a job," with "basically, a normal life, a normal, middle-class life where I can handle everything with no struggles." "I could say I could stop doing it but really I'm gonna need the money eventually and I'm gonna go back to it," said another (Referral 3089). "So I'm trying to get myself in college so I can get financial aid and support myself." He imagined himself years later, still in San Francisco "but having a job as a nurse and making good money, hopefully, and happy, most importantly."

Even with the vision of "a normal, middle-class life," few youth see an easy path out of their involvement in the sexual marketplace, as the conditions that led them into the life tend to lead them back into it when they attempt to leave. Accounts from those who tried to leave the life suggest that exiting the market is not a one-off event but a process; many report multiple attempts to leave the life. One respondent (Referral 9605), a 21-year-old, heterosexually-identified, African-American woman, explained that she tapered her participation in the market over time, moving from trading sex frequently to just a couple of times when she "kept coming on hard times." Another, a young man (Referral 2091), described spending

months at a time that "I'll go on just not doing it and spend time with my son and trying to find a job and things," even declining "clients" who call.

> *Then that won't work out, trying to find a job. Can't find things that'll pay for school. So then it's like, "Okay, well, I know how to do this, but I'm not. So then I might as well just go make some money real quick." I mean, if I can't get a job, I might as well get some money real quick and bring some money home.*

The theme of being "stuck" was a persistent one. One young woman (Seed 101, described above), who reported that she no longer traded sex for money, explained how difficult leaving can be, since ties to pimps and access to fast money keep some young women "stuck on it [the life]":

> *Once they hit a different age they're prone to really don't quit. They're just set on that money, and it's so different once you have a pimp. More than half of those women have a pimp out there, so it's not easy to like, oh, wake up one morning and, "I'm gonna stop doing this." Mainly they'll get killed or they'll get beat, especially if you're a woman bringing a lot of money to them.*

In addition to having to account for relationships with market facilitators, some youth may also find it difficult to relinquish access to the "fast money" they can make from trading sex. A number of respondents also reported owing money to people or institutions (banks or other financial entities).

In addition to those conditions described above, youth may also have addiction and abuse issues that strengthen their ties to the sex market and complicate efforts to leave: 85% of respondents reported using drugs, 19% reported that the first thing they buy when they get money is drugs or alcohol, and many also reported using drugs while engaging in sex market activity. Those in partnerships that involve some sharing (perceived or otherwise) of the money generated from sex market activity may also be more hesitant to give up a source of material support. In the excerpt below, a respondent (Referral 2023), a 19-year-old, heterosexually identified Latina woman, shares her plan to save money and leave the life, which then leads her quickly into her anxiety about her boyfriend-pimp's response to her plans:

> *Interviewer:* *What's the plan?*
>
> *Respondent:* *Me save all this money. I don't know if I'm just going to tell him I'm leaving, and how he's going to take that, or if I should tell him ahead of time and I'm*

leaving and once I'm able and on my own two feet. I don't know, I'm going to see how it works out.

For many young women, pregnancy and motherhood added simultaneously to the pressure to leave the life and the pressure to stay. For some adolescent girls, a pregnancy can become a turning point that encourages adolescent girls to stop working for a time. For example, one respondent (Referral 3047), an 18-year-old woman who identified as heterosexual and multi-racial, reported that she stopped working—for a second time—after becoming pregnant by a customer she considered a steady:

So like I stopped for a whole year and then after that year I was trying to get back up on my feet, then I really did need the money. And then boom, that's what happened. Like that time when I needed money, that's how I got pregnant. It was some dude, like a client that I had kind of often…. But I stopped because, you know, pregnant on the way and I don't believe in abortions. But I'm keeping it. I ain't telling him…. But I think it's a sign because it's like a sign for me to get my stuff together. It's like I'm growing up, I can't do another miss, you know what I mean?

Another respondent (Referral 8095), a 20-year-old, heterosexually identified, black woman, reported that her attempts to leave the life had been thwarted by the draw of the money, which always drew her (and her market facilitator/boyfriend) back in. It was only after she took on primary caregiving responsibilities for the baby of a cousin who was, in her words, "not fit" for parenthood, that she left the life:

She asked me to babysit, and I knew what babysit meant. Pretty much I'm going to have to keep your child. So that's why I really wanted my own place. Because for like the whole first year it was like, let's have fun with this money. And it was like okay, once I found that out [about my cousin's baby], I'm like—I told [my boyfriend] give me five months. He gave me five months. I told him what we had to do, and that was why we started like just stacking up our money, stacking up our money. She's been with me for like a year now. That's really why I stopped…. I haven't seen [my cousin] since the day I picked up that child. That's why I knew you need money saved up because—because it's in my hands, or I have to take the child to CPS. I consider that my own now.

Motherhood, however, also kept some young women tied to the life. Some young mothers reported using money from sex work to support their children. When asked if she had a pimp, for instance, one respondent (Seed 105) reported that she didn't have

one and joked, “My baby is my pimp. I give all of my money to her.” Another respondent (Referral 3092), a 20-year-old, Latina woman, reported that she traded sex for money as a means to the end of getting back her daughter, who was living with her parents because “it was either that or I was going to catch a CPS [Child Protective Services] case”:

> *It puts money in my pocket and it gives me money to send to my parents for my baby. So, that’s kind of what's driving me at the moment to do this, and basically I'm planning on doing this until I have enough money to get my own place, get steady and stable so I can get my daughter back.*

Other events, like going to jail, can also become a turning point for youth in the life. One young man (Seed 100), for instance, reported that going to juvenile detention for eight months was his avenue out:

> *And I guess when I was in jail for eight months I started thinking, “I’m too young. I mean, I’m too young to do this.” Because I was really kind of on the crystal, so that's basically why I was doing it. And when I was doing the eight months, I just, it popped in my mind—I didn’t need the crystal for the eight months I was in here, why I’m going to back on the streets and do it again?*

This realization, he said, was backed by the fact that jail “got me out of the area”—and from the gang in which he was involved—allowing him to “stay away from it and get your mind cleared.”

Youth with looser ties to the market (i.e., not controlled by a pimp) may have more control when it comes to structuring their exit from the market. Other tipping points may push youth with looser ties to the market toward leaving the life. For example, one respondent (Referral 9094), a19-year-old, African-American gay woman who was no longer working at the time of the interview, reported that her last customer—a man she met at Starbucks in North Beach, San Francisco—was her last because it “started getting weird,” she had “kind of [started] to feel guilty.” Just as importantly, she said, it had begun to affect her in school, where her grades “started slipping.”

In addition to the conditions that draft youth into the market and make leaving difficult, age shapes the experience of exit in significant ways. Three characteristics that mark adolescence are also likely to play key roles in the exploitation of youth and their efforts to leave the market: 1) an inability to consider long-term consequences of one’s actions; 2) impulsivity;

and 3) increased susceptibility to peer pressure (Steinberg 2007). Interviews also suggest that the market is ordered hierarchically by age. A number of youth worried that they would be too old for the sex market as they entered their late teens or early twenties; others expressed a common belief that if they didn't get out of the life by their early twenties their participation in the market would become a career.

It was not uncommon for respondents in their later teenaged years or early 20s (typically those who had once had pimps or who worked as "renegades" or in collaborative partnerships) to also offer a more critical reflection on their experience. For this group, it appeared that as they moved along the course of adolescent development they began to reconsider their involvement and connections with others in the market. Some were able to escape from controlling pimps. Some were even able to break away from the market altogether, while others continued their involvement, but without a pimp. The transition to adulthood is thus seen by the youth as an important moment, and it can thus be an important site of potential intervention. Respondents who perceived their value in the market diminishing as they aged were concerned that the longer the stayed the fewer other options they would have, yet carried with them the same financial challenges and constraints that led to their participation in the market at younger ages. Members of this group—youth aged 18 to 24—are ideal candidates to approach with resources that could facilitate their transition away from the market as they enter early adulthood.

Youth efforts to leave the life or cease involvement in sex market activity can be complicated by a lack of trust in adults and other authority figures that has accumulated over years of participation in the market. Asked if she wished there were adults who could help make changes in her life, for instance, one young woman (Referral 2000) responded, "I wouldn't believe them if they told me they could. I don't believe anybody, because I've trusted too many and it's gotten me not in good—I've just gotten screwed over, so I don't really trust anybody anymore." Still, many youth reported seeking services at a range of social service institutions in the Bay Area. Commonly mentioned social service agencies include Glide, Larkin Street, St. Anthony's and the Omega Boy's Club.

Many respondents identified secure employment and stable housing as necessary for ceasing sex-work activities. Use of social service agencies was extensive among respondents—roughly three-quarters reported making use of agency services at some point—particularly among those who self-identified as lacking permanent housing. Participants generally had very positive attitudes towards social service agencies they had used. However, many respondents expressed that they were not able to adequately meet their needs through use of such agencies, which they considered to be underfunded and understaffed. A few

respondents were also concerned that service agencies are located in areas in which they are vulnerable to heavy propositioning and reported such propositioning from other residents in shelters, for prostitution and drug use. When prompted to describe the perfect agency, participants indicated that this would include services including help with housing, employment, medical services (including mental and oral health), and other basic needs. A few respondents also identified agencies that employed people who "understood the lifestyle," could relate, and had previous experience with sex work. They spoke of someone like a "big sister," who would be "more understanding, more, like more, more focused on the future, trying to get me on the right path" (Seed 98; 19-year-old, African-American and bisexual woman); of "a community center with just girls my age that could just talk freely about their problems" and "call, check in, on a weekly basis," because "sometimes people feel like they don't have no love, they have to go out in the streets to find love" (Seed 91; 18-year-old, heterosexually identified, African-American woman).

Chapter 5
Conclusions and Implications

It is important to understand how youth in the sex trade make sense of their social worlds and the set of beliefs, attitudes and values that emerge from their efforts to negotiate a challenging set of conditions, many of which are structural in nature (e.g., financial insecurity). An understanding of how young people think about and navigate their place in the market can help to guide effective interventions. Those who seek to provide interventions for youth engaged in the sex market should understand the various ways in which youth are pulled into the market and the implications of the moral distinctions youth make about the different ways youth engage the market. An appreciation of how youth think about themselves, their behaviors, and each other may help to develop interventions that resonate more strongly with youth.

As illustrated in this report, youth engage in a number of ways. For those seeking to intervene in the lives of these youth, it's important to recognize that traditional understandings of the "pimp" may be limited, as much market facilitation takes place in the context of relationships that mix pimping with intimacy, and in which the girl herself does not necessarily see the relationship simply as one between pimp and pimped. Pimps and other market facilitators coerce some youth into the market and tightly control their participation in the market. Other youth may engage the market after breaking away from a coercive pimp or market facilitator. For some, a market facilitator may be a family member or an intimate. Youth can also be drawn into the market from a peer or family member with prior experience in the market. In some cases, youth may rely on their engagement in the market as a way to support others in the household, such as an intimate, other family members, or a child. Still others may engage the market periodically as a side-hustle to fill a gap in financial or material needs. An understanding of the variation of the ways in which youth enter and participate can help stakeholders to develop targeted prevention strategies that are sensitive to youths' experiences and developmental trajectories. For example, it is clear that youth engagement is characterized by coercion, yet the accounts provided by youth also reveal a sense of agency as they work to make choices within the constraints of the market and their often-precarious financial circumstances. A strength-based intervention would reflect an appreciation of how youth make sense of their involvement while also providing the short-term and long-term resources that one would need to leave the market for good.

Many of the youth we interviewed had tried to end their engagement in the market. Some youth felt drawn back to the market because of the quick access to money or other resources. That youth have made attempts to leave the market suggests that they are making bids at change. Future research should examine these efforts more closely and should pay special attention to the timing of these efforts. Understanding how the increased social and cognitive capacity that accompanies transitions to early adulthood and the hierarchical age ordering of the market, which places the greatest value on young girls, can usefully inform interventions. For example, it is possible that efforts to leave the market may intensify as youth transition to adulthood, since there is a general sense among youth who work on the track that a young woman is on the road to becoming too old for the market as they enter their early 20s. Those who participate in the commercial sex market after this age may begin to do so as a career. This suggests that interventions targeted at youth aged 18 to 24 might provide key turning points for youth. Agencies who work with youth that have engaged the commercial sex market online might pay special attention to helping youth remove pictures or other evidence of their online identities from the Internet. Access to such resources (akin to tattoo removal for former gang-associated youth) may help draw youth into already existing programs.

The lives of the youth are often characterized by instability and vulnerability. A primary pull into the market for the subset of youth who engage the market sporadically (for example, homeless youth or street kids traveling regional circuits) is financial and material. If, in contrast to renegades and other youth with a deeper engagement with the market, these youth do not see themselves as "in the life," then interventions framed as "leaving the life" are not likely to resonate with this group. Instead, working to strengthen the safety net for these youth by increasing access to safe shelters, food and other material resources are likely to be more effective. Other harm-reduction strategies for young adults are also likely to be useful. For those youth who are leaving the life, a consistent, graduated organizational or institutional commitment over a multi-year period should help youth to develop tangible skills that they can use to earn money in the legal market. For all youth in the sex trade, effective efforts at intervention should reflect an appreciation of the factors that pull them into participation and the challenges they face when contemplating an exit from the market. For many, participation in the market may meet very real financial needs. When possible, social services agencies should provide these needs. Resources that would be especially useful thus include: access to secure housing; funding for transportation; access to training or educational opportunities that could provide a bridge to legitimate ways to earn money for youth aging out of the life; access to mental health resources; and access to material resources to meet immediate needs of youth, especially youth with children.

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