THE VOICES OF SURVIVORS: AN EXPLORATION OF THE CONTRIBUTING FACTORS THAT ASSISTED WITH EXITING FROM COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION IN CHILDHOOD

A dissertation
presented to the Faculty
of Saybrook University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Psychology

by

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Oakland, CA
May 2017

Approval of the Dissertation

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Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology

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Abstract

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According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), cases of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) have increased considerably in the United States over the past few years, with over 1.1 million reported cases (ECPATUSA, 2017), particularly in the Northern California San Francisco Bay Area. From a strengths-based trauma-informed perspective, this study explored the factors that assist youth with exiting the life associated with CSEC. The primary research question was, "What can be learned from the lived experiences of women who successfully exited childhood commercial sexual exploitation and perceive themselves to be functioning well despite this history?"

This qualitative study employed semi-structured interviews with 13 predominately women of color, average age of 25 (range 21 – 26), who successfully exited the *Life* after enduring an average of 4 years (range 1 – 9). The average age for the group for becoming exploited was 13 (range 8 – 17), with all exiting during their 17th year. A thematic analysis identified 20 themes organized under three primary categories. The first category, Self-Defined Wellness (4): naming of self-outside the Life, positive family connections, breaking the cycle,

and embracing the term *survivor*. The second, Describing the Life (6): sex for goods, surviving the *Game*, pimp control, wanting to be loved/look good, contributing family factors, and the grooming process. The third, Exiting Process (10): naming one who has exited, others depend on me, not profitable to exit, fear keeps you in, thinking about leaving, the role of family, pending motherhood, wanting to be free, sustaining exit, and professional systems not accessed. There were four recommendations from survivors: active listening, encouragement, non-judgment, and don't leave when we push. Two anecdotal themes emerged: treated like garbage by the legal system, and I thought I was grown.

The study design uniquely positioned the voices of survivors as experts in relation to expanding knowledge about the exiting process and in offering recommendations for youth-at-risk, family members, and providers. Contributions include underscoring the importance of bearing witness to youths' stories as part of resiliency/recovery and valuing the complexities of family relationships/dynamics in the exiting process. Implications for advocacy, research, and practice are discussed.

Dedication

There are a great many people who have influenced my academic and professional career and helped me obtain my lifelong dream. First and foremost, I dedicate this work to my parents, who, with their constant devotion to my early education, lit a fire in me at the age of 12 to pursue a doctorate. Next, I dedicate this to my amazing husband, John, who, when he found out my heart's desire since the age of 12 was to get my doctorate in psychology said, "Go get it!" At the age of 45, I began my doctoral studies. He was the wind beneath my wings when I struggled. His gentle encouragement consistently and constantly allowed me to believe in myself and my abilities, especially at times when I believed I was not smart enough, strong enough, or capable of completing this endeavor.

To my incredible daughter, Katherine, who continues to inspire me to facilitate change in the world and to attempt to make it a better place for her. My dream would be a world where the commercial sexual exploitation of children no longer exists.

To the countless individuals, I have had the honor to work with over the past years who have been commercially sexually exploited as children, who are still in the *Life*, who break my heart with their stories, who give me hope with their strength and resilience, and for whom this work intends to provide transformative social change for.

Acknowledgments

I wish to thank my committee members who were always more than generous with their time and expertise. A special thanks to the amazing Dr. Theopia Jackson Ph.D., my committee chair, for her *countless hours* reflecting, reading, and demanding excellence, as well as giving words of encouragement throughout the entire process. Her continued inspiration and support ensured my trek across the finish line! Thank you to Dr. Joel Federman, Ph.D. and Dr. Joy Meeker, Ph.D. for agreeing to serve on my committee. You are the walking embodiments of *Transformative Social Change* and continue to inspire me daily! I would like to acknowledge and thank Saybrook University for allowing me to create a study, for which I have great passion, with which I seek to utilize to create change in the world.

Additionally, I want to thank my beautiful sister Toni, who is always there with her beautiful heart, her amazing grace, kindness and ebullience! She inspires me to be a better person. I am grateful to my dearest best friends, Dawny, CJ, and Cynthia – who endured countless hours of ranting during this process, and kept me afloat with their encouragement.

Lastly, I am grateful to my team at Corbett Group Homes, (especially Cindy and Smitty) who celebrated every step of progress I made in this journey, and allowed me the time, when necessary, to focus solely on this project. And, to my esteemed Saybrook colleagues, my cohort of January 2013, who began this journey with me: Hillary, Amanda, Adina, and Kim. Together we inspire, motivate and push each other to the finish line!

Table of Contents

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) is not a new phenomenon in the United States. There is historical evidence of the sexual exploitation of minors going as far back as the beginning of the 17th century in the land that later became the United States. The practice of indentured servitude to get to the new world meant sexual exploitation for many unaccompanied girls and boys. Later, when the population began expanding along the Atlantic coast and westward, most Northeast and Mid-west brothels were staffed with Asian and European immigrants with the majority of them were under legal age (Regello, 2007). As a result of the expansive nature of this abuse through the centuries, the child welfare movements that sprung up in the 1920s and 1930s did so in response to the sexual exploitation of children that had become rampant (Myers, 2008).

Apart from sexual exploitation for commercial purposes, thousands of underage children are exploited within their own homes by either relatives or neighbors (Curtis, Terry, Dank, Dombrowski, & Khan, 2008). In recent years, the commercial sexual exploitation of children has gained increasing recognition as the most neglected type of child abuse in the United States (Reichert & Sylkwestrzak, 2013). Among immigrants, poverty is a leading cause for the commercial sexual exploitation of children, although it does cut across social strata (Ives, 2001). Homeless youth, runaways, and what has been termed *throwaway* youth, make up most the victims, although even children from affluent families are often victims.

The forms of exploitation include the molestation by acquaintances and family members; involvement in pornography, phone sex, escort services, Internet sex/webcam, nude/semi-nude dancing, modeling, stripping; and pimp-directed prostitution among the girls and usually homosexual sex for boys (Conaway, 2013). Other forms of exploitation involve survival sex,

which includes trade for shelter, food, and clothing, and bartering for sex, which includes trade for drugs and gifts. In other instances, girls who find themselves as part of a gang engage in commercial sexual activities as part of their contribution to the financial welfare of the gangs (OJJPD, 2016). Despite these apparent problems, many treatment programs for the exploited youth and those at risk are not well known or their rates of success evaluated. Therefore, this study aims at increased understanding of promising therapeutic practices for abused children that populate this segment of society.

Unfortunately, many cases of sexual exploitation are not reported, even though information related to phone tips regarding exploited and missing children has been made increasingly available. These tips increased from 20,000 in 2000 to 100,000 in 2004 in the United States alone; although, it is not clear whether the increase was due to increased awareness or more cases of exploitation, or both (Curtis, Terry, Dank, Dombrowski, & Khan, 2008). The wide gap between tips and incidents of exploitation indicate a possibility that millions of youth in the United States are either already being sexually exploited or at risk of exploitation.

Research conducted by Crowell (2010) indicates that CSEC results in trauma and other adverse health implications that interfere with a child's psychosocial and physical wellbeing. The implications are worsened by the fact that there are few residential treatment programs to address their needs once they are separated from their abusers. In this regard, the problem of CSEC is not only an issue of public interest but also a problem that requires counteractive effort from every member of the society. Boxill and Richardson (2007) stated that among the factors that lure children into exploitation include poor family functioning, history of sexual abuse, lower socioeconomic status, and poor school achievement. These factors are difficult to control because they are unique to different individuals. However, an attempt to deduce lessons from

women who have exited commercial sexual exploitation in childhood is a practical way of addressing the problem. By studying the most effective approaches to exiting CSEC, it might be possible to develop mitigation and prevention strategies that can be adopted by individuals, society, and government/non-government agencies.

This research was motivated by the fact that data detailing the experiences of survivors of CSEC could add insight for programs that aid with exiting commercial sexual exploitation. The information could be valuable in planning CSEC programs. Additionally, CSEC agencies, as well as governmental entities involved in CSEC, could benefit from more comprehensive and descriptive data as presented in this study on what can be effective in these programs. This research could assist in decision-making regarding CSEC policies, laws, procedures, and education of families that have had a loved one involved in commercial sexual exploitation.

Personal Significance

I have worked directly with youth who have been commercially sexually exploited as children (CSEC) for over 17 years as the founder and Chief Executive Officer of a non-profit therapeutic residential program for youth in the foster care system. I have personally witnessed the damage, devastation, and destruction that can happen to youth once they enter the life of commercial sexual exploitation, which is often referred to as *the Life* and the volume of resources required to attempt to empower a youth to successfully exit the Life. I have studied CSEC for many years as a graduate student and as a provider of CSEC services, and have also furthered my education and knowledge by taking advantage of training by national leaders such as Rachel Lloyd with Girls Educational and Mentoring Services (GEMS) and Nola Brantley (Nola Brantley Speaks). I have been fortunate to be invited to present on CSEC at various conferences including the Shared Hope International Juvenile Sex Trafficking (JuST)

conferences, the American Association of Children's Residential Centers (AACRC) conferences, and the California Alliance for Children and Family Services (CACFS) conferences.

While many people here in the United States, are under the illusion that it is mostly an international phenomenon, the reality is that this exploitation is in our own backyard, effecting children of all races, genders, and socio-economic status. I have felt powerless over the years, as youth after youth has been recruited, groomed, and eventually exploited while in my care, and I have been unable to locate either evidence-based or promising practices that effectively work with this vulnerable population. Thus, my goal became my passion to attempt to truly identify the factors that empower a minor to successfully exit the Life.

The Study

Purpose of the Study

As of this writing, there have not been any evidence-based practices identified that indicate efficacy in effectively helping minors successfully exit commercial sexual exploitation (The California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare, 2016). There are promising practices such as survivor-led programming and harm-reduction, but providers are still at a complete loss as to how to effectively empower a youth to successfully exit. Additional complexities include: (a) slowly increased awareness among youth services organizations; (b) law enforcement, mental health agencies, and medical personnel; (c) the strength and complexities of organized crime; and (d) fragmented local service agencies that are unaware of effective strategies which help a youth with the exiting process. The fact that many minors who have been sexually exploited do not report or seek treatment has created a barrier to successful curbing of commercial sexual exploitation among the youth (Ives, 2001). There is also a complete lack of understanding on how to effectively work with CSEC to encourage successful

exit and a transition out of commercial sexual exploitation or the Life. Women and girls will say they have been in the Life if they were commercially sexually exploited for a while (Common Sex Trafficking Language, n.d.)

Commercial sexual exploitation of minors entails a range of criminal activities that degrade, demean, and threaten the psychosocial and physical wellbeing of these children. Therefore, there is a need to advance the understanding of factors that can assist victims of commercial exploitation to successfully exit the Life. Survivors of the Life who are willing to share their stories are invaluable resources to further expand our knowledge of this extremely vulnerable population.

Research Questions

The emphasis of the research questions was to focus on the exiting process and not necessarily any of the psychosocial issues that contributed to being commercially sexually exploited (CSE). Therefore, the primary research question was, "What can be learned from the lived experiences of women who successfully exited childhood commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) and perceive themselves to be functioning well despite this history?" Secondary questions included:

1. How did women who experienced commercial sexual exploitation in childhood describe their perception of functioning well as adults, despite this history?
2. How did women describe their exiting story or process from commercial sexual exploitation in childhood?
3. What, if any, recommendations did they suggest for children who are trying to exit?
4. What, if any, recommendations did they have for professionals working with such children?

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The issue of human trafficking and sexual exploitation is not new. Indeed, there is a whole chapter in the United States (US) code that discusses human trafficking - *Chapter 78: Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA)*. In this Act, a person who coerces another person to engage in a commercial sexual act (CSA) is guilty of exploitation. According to TVPA, CSA refers to any sex act on whose account something valuable is given to any person or received by any person. Commercial sexual exploitation in childhood (CSEC) has been historically closely related to CSA. However, CSEC is the exploitation of minors through prostitution, pornography and physical abuse for financial gains. Since early centuries, some people have been using CSEC as a means of earning a living. History has shown that sexual exploitation has thrived regardless of the complexities of the Life of the victims of sexual exploitation. CSEC adversely affects a victim's health, and psychosocial and physical wellbeing (Clayton et al., 2013). Although there have been studies focusing on sexual exploitation (Adams, Owens, Small, United States, & Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2010; OJJPD, 2010) some of which have led to the formulation of laws and regulations such as the TVPA, the issue is still a problem in the US and around the world.

Globally, the International Labor Organization estimates that there are 4.5 million people currently trapped in forced sexual exploitation and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency (OJJPD) estimates sex trafficking to victimize more than 200,000 children in the United States annually (OJJPD, 2016; The Polaris Project, 2013). As of this writing, there is no data available on the exiting statistics for CSEC, but there is some data on adults who have been CSE and their exiting process. Adults typically have an age of entry into CSE between the ages of 12-14, and while resources for children are minimal, the resources available for adult are

much scarcer (Estes & Weiner, 2001b). Once someone who is CSE hits adulthood, varying factors such as survival sex that entails exchanging sex for basic needs such as food, shelter, mental health issues and trauma, and substance abuse issues begin to play a much larger part in the exiting process. Adults attempting to exit who lack education and job skills or have criminal histories are often unable to gain legitimate employment, thus, they feel compelled to resort to CSE (Cimino, 2012). This literature review begins with (a) an overview of CSEC, including its roots to in human trafficking, followed by (b) a representation of CSEC within historical and cultural contexts, (c) the face of CSEC, and (d) CSEC as organized crime.

The existing approaches to exiting CSEC are then discussed, which includes (a) the personal efforts of survivors, (b) legislative efforts, (c) healthcare efforts, and (d) mental health efforts, after which (e) a summary is provided.

Overview of CSEC

Ties to Human Trafficking

Human trafficking has many facets, which include the sexual exploitation of adults and children, forced labor and domestic servitude. Human trafficking has been defined by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) as the:

> …recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs" (FBI, N.D.).

Human trafficking can be conceptualized as a form of modern day slavery. According to the Polaris Project, an international non-governmental organization, human trafficking enslaves over 20 million people around the world (Human Trafficking, 2015). It

includes domestic servitude, sex trafficking, forced labor, bonded labor, child labor, and forced marriage, and sex trafficking is identified as, "Women, men or children that are forced into the commercial sex industry and held against their will by force, fraud or coercion" ("Slavery Today | Different Types of Human Trafficking - End Slavery Now," n. d., n.p.). The commercial sexual exploitation of children is especially heinous, as it involves children, who are powerless against adults who attempt to coerce and control them via any means necessary. It seems the term *CSEC* was first coined in 1996 in Stockholm at the World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation (ECPAT Internaional & World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, 2001). Since then, it has become the universal term used to indicate that CSEC is not a choice, and that the child is treated not as a child, but as a commercial sexual object.

Sex trafficking is international and national in nature. There are many contributing factors that increase vulnerability to commercial sexual exploitation, which include child sexual abuse, substance abuse, and varying socio-economic factors. Human trafficking has become more profitable than drug trafficking for a single reason: men, women, girls and boys are seen as a reusable resource, unlike drugs, which can only be used a single time (Economics of Trafficking, 2009). This fact is the sole reason why human trafficking is the fastest growing illegal industry in the world.

Child sex trafficking or commercially sexually exploited children (CSEC) is defined as "an exchange in which one or more parties gain a benefit – cash, goods or kind – from the exploitation for sexual purposes of someone aged below 18" (ECPAT International, 2008, n.p.). There are three primary and interrelated forms of commercial sexual exploitation of children: (a) prostitution, (b) pornography, and (c) trafficking for sexual purposes. Other forms of commercial

sexual exploitation of children include child sex tourism, child marriages and forced marriages. For the purposes of this literature review, the focus will solely be on CSEC. Additionally, CSEC has a long-standing history that cuts across countries, cultures, and socio-economic status. CSEC is not limited to specific countries, cultures, spiritual beliefs, or ethnic groups. Social determinants such as war and poverty form part of the history of sexualizing children.

CSEC as an International Problem

The problem of CSEC is not unique to any one country but is an international problem manifesting itself differently in different countries. According to the Polaris Project, of the estimated 20 million victims of human trafficking globally, 68% are trapped in forced labor, 26% of them are children, and 55% are women and girls (Polaris, 2016). Globally, at least 20.9 million adults and children are bought and sold worldwide into commercial sexual servitude, forced labor and bonded labor, and about 2 million children are exploited every year in the global commercial sex trade. It is one of the most lucrative businesses for international traffickers, earning almost 99 billion a year (Human Trafficking by the Numbers, 2016). In 2015, an estimated 1 out of 5 endangered runaways reported to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children were likely child sex trafficking victims (Polaris, 2016).

While the emphasis of this literature review is on females, it cannot be emphasized enough that the issue of CSEC is not solely limited to females. As of this writing, there are minimal studies published that indicate the prevalence and scope of male commercial sexual exploitation. One study (Curtis et al., 2008) states that as many as 50% of youth being CSE are males, yet most resources and studies continue to widely emphasize females. In 2013, a study conducted by ECPAT International, researchers found through anecdotal evidence that boys enter a life of trafficking around the same time as girls, at approximately 11-13 years of age (Country

Monitoring Reports, 2014). Of the 40 participants in the ECPAT study, almost half (18) said they would engage sexually with minor males (Conaway, 2013). Dank (2011) conducted a study and discovered:

> The most shocking revelation was that while 87 percent of the 4000 sample of children interviewed expressed a desire to exit 'the life', a great number of youths perceived their 'work' as a curious and fascinating lifestyle, rather than being coerced into it by a pimp. In fact, most boys were not 'pimped' in the traditional sense but instead recruited by familial procurers or "friends" who didn't manage their work per se but rather facilitated them by offering shelter or referring them to buyers in exchange for clients or a share of their earnings. (p. 18).

The ECPAT study provides an interesting glimpse into a few of the differences and possible challenges of identifying males who are CSE as well as some of the issues of providing resources to those youth once identified.

To understand the context of sexual exploitation of children in the contemporary world, it is reasonable to look at the historical context first. CSEC has a long-standing history that cuts across cultures. Social determinants such as war and poverty form part of the history of sexualizing children. The next section provides a brief history of sexual exploitation of children from the perspective of cultural documentation and social determinants. For example, commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) as a means for earning a living has existed since the most early documented times. Sacred Prostitution, practiced among the earliest Sumerians, Cyprians, Sardinians, and Phoenicians was an annual ritual where each woman in the community had to meet once a year, and, for a symbolic price, have sex with a foreigner as a sign of hospitality (Staff, 2016).

From a historical perspective, commercial sexual exploitation has been known to exist for millennia based on references made to it in the Bible and it is well documented that slaves were sexually exploited by their masters during biblical times, which refers to the period covered by

the writings included in biblical scriptures as present in the old and new testaments, and the use of slaves for sexual use was a common practice in ancient times. For instance, the Bible mentions the concubine law of Exodus where Israelite daughters sold by their parents were sexually exploited by the buyers without being their wives (Greenberg, 1996). Additionally, there are several biblical stories regarding Israelite patriarch relationships with slave women. For instance, Hagar, Bilhah, and Zilpah were the female slaves of Sarah, Rachel, and Leah and could be used as substitute mistresses (Elliott, 1857) for these women's husbands. Further, in biblical times there existed the concept of *bonds-woman* that permitted fathers to offer an unmarried child as debt repayment (Hezser, 2011; McGinn, 2004).

Despite the fact that the practice of sexually trading or bartering children was outlawed by both Biblical law and the Talmud, it was still practiced. Various regulations were provided to prevent children from being sold for the purposes of sexual exploitation. However, not all parents had the capability of providing for their children; therefore, some provisions permitted the sale of daughters to become prostitutes because of the poverty of their birth families (Hezser, 2011). The law of debtors and distribution of poverty protected children from the permanent cycle of poverty, and while the laws were highly valued, the commercial sexual exploitation of children existed where young boys and girls were forced into prostitution. Gender hierarchical laws and the commercial sexual exploitation of children were not blamed for sex crimes, but they were closely linked.

Throughout history and today, groups or individuals who were considered to have a lesser status in the community were likely to be exploited. Uneven distribution of power also creates an avenue for abuse. This is commonly seen as a distorted form of the interpretation of the actual faith and tenets of religion. Today, there are exclusive extremist groups (who function

outside regular rituals and traditions), which claim affiliation with specific spiritual practices such as Islam (Boko Haram and ISIS) who engage in CSEC; however, it must be noted that these specific groups are functioning well outside of the spiritual tenets to which they claim affiliation. The Muslim faith specifically forbids adultery/fornication, and by extension, prostitution (Abdul-Rahman, 2007). In the Hindu Faith, there are extremists in the poorest towns and villages of provinces of the states of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh (India). Multi-generational poverty and a caste system perpetuate the commercial sexual exploitation of young girls, and they are identified from birth as *Devadasi* (McVeigh, 2011), which is a Hindu spiritual tradition that marks children as "servants of God", an ancient practice which once might have won a female child a future of comfort and respect, but now, some extremists doom her to a squalid life as a prostitute from the age of 13. The twisted interpretation of the Hindu tradition *allows* the commercial sexual exploitation of young girls by extremist priests in the name of dedicating them to deities. This form of cultural tradition has degenerated and became a source that provides girls for use in brothels across major cities in the world.

While there are many published articles that discuss Muslim and Hindu extremists and their participation in CSEC, there are very few publications that mention current Christian-affiliated involvement in CSEC. The Philippines is a country where over 80% of the population identifies as Catholic and another 10% identifies as Christian (Lipka, 2015). However, the Philippines is frequently noted as having very high rates of CSEC and for being the fourth country in the world with the most number of CSEC and authorities have identified an increase in child molesters travelling to the Philippines (Confronting Trafficking and Prostitution in Asia, 2015). The Philippines is ranked under Tier 2 Watch List in the 2009 Trafficking in Persons Report of the United States (US) State Department due to the Philippine government's alleged

failure to show evidence of progress in convicting trafficking offenders, particularly those responsible for labor trafficking. The point of mentioning religion and faith with CSEC is to illustrate that CSEC surpasses traditionally accepted spiritual belief systems and rather, is a form of slavery that caters to socio-economic philosophical social systems, and ultimately demand.

CSEC in Our Own Backyard: Problem in the United States

While many people here in the United States, are under the illusion that it is mostly an international phenomenon, the reality is that it is in our own backyard, affecting children of all races, genders and socio-economic status. Even though the known statistics indicate that over 74% of CSEC are in the foster care system, that data is only available due to their status in one of many systems, including child welfare and juvenile justice (Global Sex Trafficking Fact Sheet, 2011). The youth who are always typically identified as CSEC tend to be what are identified as the *throwaway children*—those youths identified as being in the foster care system, children of color, and runaways. The reality is that all youth are vulnerable to grooming, recruiting, and commercial sexual exploitation here in our own backyard.

Brief historical overview CSEC in the United States. It is important to note that the commercial sexual exploitation of children is not a new phenomenon in the United States. There is historical evidence of CSEC going as far back as the beginning of the 17th century in the land that later became the United States. As mentioned in the introduction in this dissertation, the practice of indentured servitude as a way to get to the new world meant sexual exploitation for many unaccompanied girls and boys. Later, when the population began expanding along the Atlantic coast and westward, most Northeast and Mid-west brothels opened and were populated with Asian and European immigrants with the majority of them well below 18 years of age (Regello, 2007). Prior to the 21st century, the minimum age of consent for sexual intercourse in

most American states was 10 years, and in Delaware it was only 7 years (Dabbagh, 2012). Robertson (2005) estimated that during the 1820s, that 76% of rape victims were under the age of 19 and the 1894 textbook, *A System of Legal Medicine*, reported that the "rape of children is the most frequent form of sexual crime" (Robertson, 2005, p. 543). It is reasonable to deduce that children were also exploited and/or transferred for materialistic gain even then.

There is also a strong history of specific racial or ethnic groups who were targeted for sexual exploitation of adults and children. Prior to the passing of the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution in 1865, the commercial sexual exploitation and sexual exploitation of African-American and Native American Indian women and children had been occurring since long before the founding of the United States. In an early example, in 1694, a free African-American woman, Francis Driggus, served as a servant to John Brewer. Mr. Brewer took Ms. Driggus to court for fornication, as a response to Ms. Driggus seeking to end the sexual abuse and defilement. Faust (as cited in Trent, 2010) who wrote the biography of James Henry Hammond (a pro-slavery Governor and Senator from South Carolina) documented that Mr. Hammond sexually abused his female slaves and that the sexual exploitation was one of the most intrusive ways "masters asserted their dominance over their slaves as it further removed a slave's right to her own body" (p. 4). Masters forcibly paired *good breeders* to produce strong children that he then could sell at a high price. Resistance brought severe punishment, often death (On Slaveholders' Sexual Abuse of Slaves, n.d.). Masters also intentionally impregnated their slaves so they could have more workers to work their fields allowing them to take on more land (Gordon, 2014).

During the California Gold Rush in the late 1840s, Chinese merchants transported thousands of young Chinese girls, including babies, from China to the United States. They sold

the girls into sexual slavery within the *red light district* of San Francisco, which was the district in which prostitution was carried on without police interference. Girls could be bought for $40 (about $959 in 2017 dollars) in Guangzhou, and sold for $400 (about $9596 in 2017 dollars) in the United States. Many of these girls were forced into opium addiction and lived their entire lives commercially sexually exploited (Rogers, 2010). The enslavement of Native American Indians is less well-known, but was a common practice among the Spanish, French, and English colonies (Deer, 2010). Prior to the European first contact and eventual conquest of the America's, slavery among the Native American-Indian people looked much different. American-Indians, who were taken as slaves by other tribes as a means to strengthen and grow the tribe, were typically integrated into their captors' communities.

After the European first contact, the nature and scope of slavery became much different. From as early as the time of Columbus and the indigenous people of the Caribbean, violent sexual predation was taking place. Sexual violence perpetrated by European men represented the earliest form of institutionalized and officially sanctioned "sexual slavery" in the Western hemisphere. In many instances, Indian men were killed in battle, but the women and children were taken captive by the Europeans and used for sex, labor, or profit. Most historians agree that this behavior was one-sided. Failing to protect minority groups from criminal behavior has been identified as a key source of societal oppression—and it is this oppression of the groups that underpins the dominant social structure. The victimization of prostitutes has traditionally been outside the bounds of the law—in that the act of solicitation itself is a crime. Traditionally, victims of crime who had been engaging in illegal behavior at the time of the victimization have not encountered the same level of protection or compassion as an *innocent* victim. In the context

of Native American-Indian women and children, for the last 500 years, prostitution was often the last resort in order to avoid starvation and death (Deer, 2010).

Prevalence of contemporary CSEC in the United States. In June of 2003, the FBI launched the *Innocence Lost Initiative* due to the fast growing problem of domestic commercial sexual exploitation of children (Smalley, 2003). The *Innocence Lost Initiative* identified 13 cities functioning as hubs for CSEC including the California Bay Area, Las Vegas, Minneapolis, and Dallas. Since the founding of the *Innocence Lost Initiative* (as of June 2012) the FBI has had over 1,010 trafficking convictions and has recovered over 2,100 children from a life as exploited victims of prostitution. It is a national problem that likely goes far beyond the 13 cities and requires growing awareness (Halpern & Hardie, n.d.). According to the Polaris Project (2016):

> In 2016, an estimated 1 out of 5 endangered runaways reported to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children were likely child sex trafficking victims. Of those, 74% were in the care of social services or foster care when they ran. (p. 1)

The face of CSEC: Our children. The following could be considered a composite depiction of what happens to children who get caught in the web of the Life of prostitution. In this generic case, a 12-year-old girl who is an A-student has parents who are going through a bitter divorce. She begins to feel isolated and alone. She goes to the mall with her friends and notices a cute older boy, who begins talking to her. She cannot believe it when he begins paying attention to her. He asks for her number, she hesitates, but then figures her parents will not even notice, so she gives it to him. He texts her right away, and soon she is secretly meeting him at the mall by herself, and skipping school. He tells her he loves her, and she feels he is the only person in the world who understands her completely. After a short time, she has sex with him and believes he will love her forever. A bit later, he tells her he owes a friend some money, and the friend will hurt him if he does not pay. He asks her to have sex with his friend, as that will pay

off his debt. The young girl says, “No”, but then her boyfriend hits her. She is stunned, and cannot believe this is happening. She then agrees to have sex with her boyfriend’s friend, hoping that will make him happy. Afterwards, her boyfriend tells her he is proud of her, and she feels a little happy again. The above is an example of the typical experience for girls and shows how easily it can be the story for any girl, regardless of ethnicity/race, socio-economic status, and any other criterion. CSE can happen to any child, at any time, and all children are vulnerable. According to GEMS (Lloyd, Rachel, 2014), children are most at risk for recruitment into CSEC who: (a) walk to school or to the store alone, (b) own or have access to a computer with limited adult monitoring, (c) are attracted to consumer goods, (d) desire to develop romantic relationships, (e) sometimes feel insecure, (f) feel misunderstood, (g) fight with their parents, (h) sometimes feel their parents do not care, (i) want more independence, (j) test boundaries, and (k) take risks. Based on the above, which can be typical for most youth, it is easy to see where a child becomes vulnerable to exploiters and pimps and how it happens in our own backyard.

The Child Next Door: Global Psychological Determinants

CSEC is prevalent in every aspect of society both in the United States and in the rest of the world, and there are no boundaries or limits on where CSEC can occur. The underlying causes of the national and international sex trafficking of children include poverty, gender discrimination, war, organized crime, globalization, greed, traditions and beliefs, family dysfunction, and the drug trade (ECPAT Internaional & World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, 2001). Table 1 is a small snapshot of country-specific nature and type of sexual exploitation including servitude, cage prostitution among others, and the contributing factors that make victims vulnerable. The table was derived from essays written by this researcher (Corbett, 2015) documenting the history, contributing factors and societal

complexities regarding the commercial sexual exploitation of children. It clearly shows how poverty, unemployment, gender discrimination, educational inequality and the glamorization of the sex industry significantly contribute to CSEC.

Table 1. Sampling of the globalization of CSEC

Country	**Victims**	**Nature of Commercial Sexual Exploitation**	**Factors that make victims vulnerable**
Nigeria	Young Women	Prevalent in brothels, street outcall/escort services, in male/pimp controlled, campus, and international border.	Culture: Infertile females being cast out Poverty (Terfa, 2013)
Ghana	Older women Younger women	Prevalent in brothels and streets (Meshelemiah, 2013)	Sex tourism Many women are uneducated/undereducated
Kenya	Young women and children	Prevalent in brothels, streets, and place of work (Njue, Rombo, & Abuya, 2013).	Early marriages, Sex tourism, Poverty, Education deficit, Child Labor
Morocco	Young girls	Prevalent among streetwalkers; bar/hotel prostitutes; escort/call girl services; hotel/brothel prostitutes; and dancers/entertainers (Frost, 2013).	Sex tourism. High unemployment rate for women. Oppression of women (Cerqueira-Santos & Koller, 2013)
India	Young girls	Trafficking (1.2 million children) 100,000-160,000 Nepalese girls are in brothels. Cage prostitution – placing girls in cages for display (Medora, 2013)	Poverty Myths that having sex with virgin girls will cure diseases
China	Young girls	Prevalent in entertainment industry, hair salons, and massage parlours (Jia & Yiyun, 2013).	Education inequality among girls
Israel	Young boys	Trafficking for sex purposes	High

	and girls	Exploitation in brothels (Graetz, 2013).	unemployment among illegal immigrants
Russia	Young women and children	Prevalent in elite clubs and salons. Women Working as chambermaids and maids Street prostitutes and those who work in brothels. Station or road/roadside prostitutes.	unemployed/under employed workers (Zubkov, 2013)
Netherlands	Foreign Minors	Trafficking for CSA (Kara, 2009)	Legalization of prostitution
Brazil	Children under 18	Trafficking for sex purposes (Cerqueira-Santos & Koller, 2013)	Unemployment
U.S.	Children	Domestic CSEC (Smalley, 2003)	Growth of commercial sex industry

Poverty. Notably, poverty plays a significant role in the commercial sexual exploitation of children. In areas around the world that struggle for the most basic of human needs, it becomes commonplace to trade sex for food, shelter, and clothing. For example, poverty is rampant in Africa, and significantly impacts CSEC. In Kenya, the traditional form of CSE involves early marriage for young girls, a practice still common in such areas as Kajiado, Transmara, Moyale, Wajir, and Mandera (Njue et al., 2013). In 2014, there were over 2.4 million orphans, many of whom are introduced to young marriage by their extended families. Most of the commercial sexual exploitation of children can be attributed to tourism and poverty. However, there are suspicions that much of the abuse, which is gender-based violence, occurs within the home, and the perpetrators are relatives of the victim. A study conducted by the Kenyan government and United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) in 2006 discovered over 15,000 girls on the west coasts of Kenya engaged in casual sex. Over 52% of the Kenyan population live at or below the poverty line and in 2002, over 250,000 children

were living on the street. UNICEF estimates that over 40,000 under the age of 18 are commercially sexually exploited.

While poverty seems to indicate the primary motivation for involvement in commercial sexual exploitation, there are additional factors including Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), government instability, educational deficits, and violence related to the Kenyan 2007 elections. Over half of the population of Kenya lives at or below the poverty line. A study conducted by the United States Department of Labor estimates that over 79% of children are working in the harshest conditions including agriculture, logging, and mining. Children also work in domestic services, which allows them to become vulnerable to CSE (United States Department of Labor, 2010). Culturally, Kenyan men may engage with young girls sexually as they have they notion that engaging sexually with a minor will protect them from HIV/AIDS. Additionally, many believe that having sex with a virgin will have a cleansing effect on those who have HIV/AIDS (Njue et al., 2013).

Substance Abuse. There are minimal studies linking substance abuse and CSEC on a global scale, however a study in Pakistan indicates that children were lured into prostitution by making them dependent on drugs (Sultan, Rathore, Samdani, & Zafar, 2010). In Bangladesh, CSEC occurs in registered brothels as well as in streets, parks, and bus stations, involving children as young as 10 or 11 years of age (ECPAT International, 2003). The children in street-based prostitution are harassed by the police, are cheated by customers, suffer theft, and lack basic amenities to handle the business of daily life. Many boys become involved in criminal activities to earn money. For many children drugs are the only escape from physical and mental pain. Vulnerability to HIV/ AIDS is a fact of life for all sexually exploited children.

Although brothels are high-risk environments for all children who live there due to exposure to various drugs and other forms of desensitization, girls in brothels are better off materially and physically than those on the street, despite lacking freedom of movement. *Chukris* or bonded sex workers, suffer particular exploitation, paying off their debt with their earnings, and are forced to work daily, without respite (O'Connell Davidson, 2005).

Gender discrimination. Gender inequality is widely prevalent in South Asia. Girls and women in South Asia face harsh discrimination that compromises their right to survival, growth, development, protection, and participation in normal life activities. Girls in many parts of South Asia lack equal access to education with boys, so the region is home to the largest gender gap in education levels in the world. South Asia is also the only region in the world where men outnumber women. An estimated 79 million women are 'missing' through discrimination, neglect, and violence. Gender-based violence is common given the patriarchal structures in the region. This is illustrated in emerging statistics on female infanticide, honor killing, acid burns, mutilations, dowry deaths, and numerous other forms of violence against girls and women. Sexual violence is directly linked to increased vulnerability amongst girls and women to sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV/AIDS. Gender-based violence tends to increase in refugee situations. More than 26 million refugees, asylum-seekers, and internally displaced persons are registered worldwide, and millions more are unregistered, with fully 50% being girls and women.

Discrimination of women and girls is also reflected in male control over female sexuality and, to some extent, the legitimization of prostitution of young girls and women. Deep rooted inequality in structures and systems within families and communities, perpetuated by cultural

norms and practices, are factors to consider in combating commercial sexual exploitation of children in South Asia (ECPAT International, 2014).

Trafficking of women and children is often considered as interchangeable with sexual exploitation. However, while the two are certainly inter-linked, as trafficking often leads to commercial sexual exploitation, trafficking should be recognized as a process involving "other forms of exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, and servitude" (Jordan, 2011, n.p.).

The nation of Morocco, located on the northern west coast of Africa, has approximately 32,000,000 residents. It has coastal areas both on the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean, which creates a ripe environment for sex trafficking due to its high volume of tourism. Ninety five percent of the population identifies as Sunni Muslim and the other 5% identify as Christian (Frost, 2013). All law is based on *Sharia* Law, which dictates marriage, inheritance, custody, guardianship, and more, for women and children. According to Frost (2013) employment opportunities for women are rare, and they experience an unemployment rate of 30% in North Africa. Women turn to prostitution to support themselves and their families, even though prostitution is illegal, and by becoming involved in it, they can face imprisonment. There is a lack of data to indicate the age ranges of those involved in the sex trade; however, a study conducted in the 1990s indicated that 15-22% of women who reside in rural, poor villages were engaged in prostitution. The types of prostitutes include streetwalkers, bar/hotel prostitutes, escort/call girl services, hotel/brothel prostitutes, and dancers/entertainers. There appears to be more educational and employment opportunities for those living in oil-rich countries compared to those living in oil-poor Arab countries.

While it is difficult to discern the level of prostitution in Morocco, one researcher (Frost, 2013) analyzed sexually transmitted diseases as an indicator of unprotected sexual activity. This type of analysis was utilized as a potential indicator due to the limited amount of power a woman has in requesting that a partner use a condom and/or the volume of sexual partners a woman may have in a certain period of time. The researcher gathered data over 5 years; however, there was very limited information on youth response. In one specific study, women who attended health clinics were assessed and 44.3% of the women who came to the clinic had issues with their vaginal area. A separate study, conducted by the World Health Organization, reported that 19% of sex workers had chlamydia (Frost, 2013).

According to the United Nations Department of Social and Economic Affairs (2014), the population of India was estimated at 1,267,401,849 as of July 1, 2014, and an estimated 1.34 billion in 2017 based on figures from http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/india-population/, with 80% who are affiliated with the Hindu faith. It is estimated that over 250 million live at or below the poverty line, where basic needs including food, shelter, clothing, sanitation, and medical care are not available. Seventy five percent of those living at or below the poverty line live in rural areas. While there are laws and hefty penalties and punishments for CSEC and trafficking, it is rampant all over India. It is estimated that 600,000-800,000 individuals from India are trafficked internationally: eighty percent are women and 50% of those are minors. UNICEF reported that over 1.2 million children are trafficked annually. It is estimated that there are over 10 million prostitutes and over 30% are young children in the highest demand due to their age. Reports by UNICEF estimate an increase of 8-10% per year due to increased demand as of 2011 (Medora, 2013).

According to Medora (2011), in Bombay, young children as young as 9 years old can be purchased for 60,000 Rupees, which would be $1300 USD at secret auctions. Arab men bid against Indian men for the youngest girls believing that having sexual relations with someone who is *pure* will cure them of syphilis or gonorrhea. The fear of HIV/AIDS has increased the already high demand for young girls who are virgins. It is estimated that 5,000-7,000 Nepalese women are trafficked annually into India and that between 100,000-160,000 Nepalese girls are in brothels. The girls, who are used in *cage prostitution* in the Red Light Districts of Bombay or Kolkata, are mostly minors from Nepal and Bangladesh. C*age prostitution* involves being locked in cages and placed on display for potential customers. The largest cities for CSE are Sonagachi in Kolkata, Kamathipura in Bombay, G.B. Road in New Delhi, and Budhwarpeth in Pune. The Bombay Red Light District is estimated to take in $400M USD annually (Frost, 2013).

Young girls who are commercially sexually exploited are tortured, imprisoned, sexually abused, placed into solitary isolation, and raped repeatedly until they become compliant (Frost, 2013). The Red Light Districts are considered to be psychologically and physically traumatic, painful, and damaging. Young girls are sold by their parents into the sex trafficking industry and are bought and sold many times. They live in squalid conditions, with refuse, sewage, and rat infestations in their living cubicles. The pimps, financiers, and police take the great majority of the money earned by a female, who is commercially sexually exploited. Women and girls are left with almost nothing after all of their debts are paid.

There are many reasons that young girls become commercially sexually exploited in India. These include: social customs, inability to get married, ignorance about sex education, prior incest and/or rape, early marriage and desertion, widowhood, survival, leaving an abusive

husband, and the inability to get along with in-laws. Most women and girls enter commercial sexual exploitation involuntarily (Frost, 2013).

Female sex workers have existed for thousands of years in China, through changes in ideology and society. In 1949, The Chinese government began to consider those who were commercially sexually exploited as victims of the old social order and tried to resolve it. They created free medical treatment and job training to facilitate the exit from commercially sexually exploited situations. However, what occurred was the elimination of public brothels, while commercial sex still exists but has stayed hidden (Jia & Yiyun, 2013). The commercial sex industry has evolved as hidden establishments in the entertainment industry, hair salons, and massage parlors. It is related to social inequality, poverty, crime, illness, and ethical issues. Gender and education inequalities severely limit a girl's chances of obtaining a job. According to Jia and Yiyun, there are 7 tiers for commercial sexual exploitation based on work environment, prices, and clientele:

- 2nd wives (*baoernai*) – who function as second wives to prominent men – act like proper wives and sometimes raise children together;
- Lovers (*baopo*) – who are escorts and/or sex companions for an agreed upon period of time;
- Work in entertainment (karaoke halls and clubs);
- Telephone girls (*dingdong xiaojie*) who solicit customers under the guise of massage services;
- Small-scale venues (3-6 workers) that offer sex at beauty providers, baths, body and foot massage parlors. Located in the poorer sections;
- Streetwalker (*jienu*) who solicit clients on the street or in parks;
- Women and girls who provide sex to male migrants who live in urban slum dwellings in construction sites (*gongpengnu*).

In 2000, it was estimated that 133,000-489,000 women were engaged in commercial sexual exploitation. But due to limitations in gathering data, the actual number could be much higher. In 2008, the Chinese Ministry of Public Security arrested more than 100,000 prostitutes

and clients. It is unknown how many of that number were minors; however, it is evident that poverty, power, and control play a significant role commercial sexual exploitation (Jia & Yiyun, 2013).

The Child Next Door: Domestic Psychosocial Determinants

Within the United States, CSE victims come from all backgrounds, sexes, nations and economic levels. According to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJPD), the average age of entry into CSE is 12-14 years of age (Adams et al., 2010). In a 2011 report by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, over 95% of sex trafficked victims were female, and over 54% were 17 years of age or younger (as cited by OJJPD, 2016). Challenging popular belief or bias, data indicates that 20% of victims are Caucasian, 20% are Hispanic, and 33% are African-American, statistics that challenge popular belief or bias. The data indicates that over 77% are United States Citizens or permanent U.S. residents and less than 15% were undocumented or qualified aliens (Banks & Kyckelhahn, 2011).

Although research has indicated that most CSEC victims tend to be female, recent literature has expanded that view to include men and boys. While the focus of this Literature Review is on females, it is important to note that a study conducted by Bryan (2014) in New York City, determined that 40% of CSEC cases in the city involved male victims. The disparity in reporting is most likely because males tend to not have a pimp or exploiter, and rather self-exploit for survival sex. Table 2 provides a snapshot of the reported cases, gender identification, and total number of minors identified. The table was derived from essays written by this researcher (Corbett, 2015) documenting the history, contributing factors and societal complexities regarding the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

Table 2. Summary of overview of national issue of the problem

Year	Reported Cases	Top States	Gender Identification	Total Number of Minors
2016 (as of 9/2016)	2,367	California (344); Texas (257); Florida (170); New York (128); Illinois (88)	Males (122); Females (2,032); Gender Minorities – Transgender (27)	970
2015	4,136	California (781); Texas (337); Florida (302); Ohio (233); New York (217)	Males (168); Females (3,780); Gender Minorities – Transgender (35)	1,379
2014	3,598	California (685); Texas (346); Florida (251); New York (205); New Jersey (128)	Males (173); Females (3,250); Gender Minorities Transgender (26)	1,322

The commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) of children has many contributing factors, which include childhood sexual abuse, early sexual initiation, family facilitated sexual exploitation, and emotional abuse (Ahrens, Katon, McCarty, Richardson, & Courtney, 2012). According to Ahrens, Katon, McCarty, Richardson, and Courtney (2012), youth who have a history of child sexual abuse, and have been in the foster care system have a higher chance of being vulnerable to the manipulations of an exploiter for sex trafficking. In their study, Ahrens et al. found that if the youth had a history of child sexual abuse, the chances of engaging in transactional sex, and particularly within a year of emancipation, increased substantially. However, this finding was statistically significant only for females, not for the males involved in the study. Another study by Abramovich (2005) indicates that the prevalence of childhood sexual

abuse is two to three times higher than that of the general population. However, the researcher also noted various studies that indicate the childhood sexual abuse is not prevalent in various studies of adult prostitutes. In support, Bagley and Young (1987) studied ex-prostitutes (n=45) and non-prostitutes (n=36) and found that 76% of ex-prostitutes were sexually abused as children and 46.7% had an early initiation to sex, mostly before 15 years.

A study by Silbert and Pines (1983) also showed that ex-prostitutes are victims of CSEC. In this study, 60% of the 200 current and ex-prostitute participants had a 60% prevalence rate of childhood sexual abuse. Over 70% indicated childhood sexual abuse as an influencing factor for engaging in prostitution (Silbert & Pines,1983). In another study, Potterat, Martin, and Romans (1999) studied sex workers who were given a semi-structured interview. These results were compared to those from the Otago Women's Child Sexual Abuse (OWCSA) study (Potter, Martin, & Romans, 1999). The study revealed that sex workers' families were of lower socioeconomic status and had experienced more parental separation than the OWCSA families. The mothers of sex workers were the breadwinners in their families. Sex workers described both parents as less caring than did the OWCSA women. They were significantly more likely than the OWCSA women to report childhood sexual abuse. The sex workers were more likely to have left home early, to have become pregnant before the age of 19 years, or to have not completed high school. However, in a study conducted by Wilson and Widom (2010), which evaluated five potential variables (early sexual initiation, running away, juvenile crime, school problems, and early drug use), only early sexual initiation remained significant as a mediator for involvement in CSA.

In a comparison case study conducted by Potterat, Rothenberg, Darrow, and Phillips (1985), the results of the interviews indicated that only one of the 14 prostitutes interviewed had

been sexually molested; however, seven of the prostitutes admitted to running away, which was the same number of non-prostitutes who indicated running away. Most reported was negative family relationships and poor nurturing while growing up (Potterat, Rothenberg, Darrow, & Phillips, 1985). However, in a study conducted by Nadon, Koverola, and Schluderman (1998), the results indicated that running away behavior was significantly more involved in later involvement in prostitution vs. sexual abuse because it is a common means of survival for minors without an education or work experience. In addition, Widom and Kuhns (1996) found that childhood sexual abuse and neglect are indeed significant indicators for adolescent entry in prostitution. They also determined although childhood sexual abuse was significant for early entry, when runaway behavior was controlled, the significance of early entry was reduced.

Poverty. Economic vulnerability as expressed in poverty coupled with race and gender influence the presence of oppression and inequality in the American society. The intersections of each of these conditions taken together provide a more accurate picture of the incredible disparity that exists in social groups in the United States. The FBI has identified various hubs in the United States for the commercial sexual exploitation of children and these include Atlanta, Oakland, and Minneapolis (Walker, 2013). The commercial exploitation of children and youth in urban areas characterized by extreme poverty, further identified by the over identification of a single ethnic group (i.e. African American) as an indicator that poverty, race, and the degradation of females through sexual exploitation intersect.

Poverty, in its purest form, is seen in the inability to meet basic human needs, which include food, shelter, and clothing. Human beings are driven by necessity to ensure their own survival including illegal or degrading means if no other avenues are available. When analyzing poverty and race, the intersection where they often meet is in what is called the inner city. For

purposes of this review, inner city is defined as an area where there is an overconcentration of poverty that interacts with racial discrimination (Wilson, 2012).

In the 1980s and 1990s, men in the inner city lost their ability to obtain gainful employment, as employment opportunities blossomed in suburban areas and they were forced to find other means to feed themselves and their families. Impoverished areas were fertile ground for desperate people seeking a way out. Some of them chose the path of earning a living by selling the sexual services of children. When male unemployment became such a serious concern, males turned to illegal forms of employment to be able to provide for their partners and children (Sharkey, 2013). These illegal forms of employment would include drugs and pimping. In a multi-generational study, it was discovered that poverty compounds stress, violence, and exposure to other unstable environments for youth and children, which in turn, was related to a decline in the motivation to successfully leave the inner city. According to Keating (2001), the Black male unemployment rate in 1990 was 3.7 times the White male unemployment rate, which reflected a 42.3% increase from 1980, and Black women's unemployment rate was 3.2 times higher than that of White women. As of May, 2017, African-American (7.5%) unemployment in the U.S. is more than twice that of Caucasians (3.7%) (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017).

Sharpe (2005) pointed out that as the more affluent Black families left the inner city in the 70s and 80s, many women who remained behind in the inner city had been empowered by the sexual revolution to work where more jobs for women were available. Of that group many found they did not need men for economic support as they had in the past. Some also discovered they could receive welfare more easily than men if they had children, which added to their feeling of value and self-worth. This shift emasculated many Black males and took away their desire to pursue marriage and many of the roles that came with it, which included breadwinner,

patriarch, and leader. Women, thus, became the primary breadwinners, and more commonly, men would attach themselves to women, albeit in an inferior position. Also, women shifted their focus from their men to their children. Mainstream motherhood and fatherhood role modeling in the inner-city had become scarce, and marriage was almost nonexistent (Sharpe, 2005).

According to the FBI, the commercial sexual exploitation of children seems to be in all areas; however, it seems that it is most concentrated in areas that have significant poverty such as Oakland, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Atlanta, and New York (OJJPD, 2016). So, how does poverty result in a young girl becoming a part of CSEC? There are a variety of factors: The breakdown of the family with stress and violence that is indicative of the urban inner-city; The multigenerational lack of viable education in the area; The lack of viable work, forcing men and women in the inner-city's to seek illegal means for food, shelter, and clothing; The breakdown of sexual barriers related to respect and fast money ignites in both the men who become pimps and women who become prostitutes to develop positive feelings that come from others seeing them as living a life of glamour and respectability.

When stress, violence, and exposure to unstable environments become the norm, other aspects of the family become eroded such as sexual restraint and respect for the female sex. Seeing the female as a viable object for food, shelter, or clothing by selling her body, regardless of age, is demonstrative of the degradation of the family as well as a further indicator of the desperation of poverty. In the 80s the crack epidemic had encroached into nearly all impoverished areas in the United States including into the lives of children; by the early 90s those youths were entering the public school system. A study conducted in 1998 indicated that 85% of arrestees for prostitution tested positive for crack, which indicates that girls were not only addicted to crack, but selling their bodies for sex for crack (Sharpe, 2005).

While the commercial sexual exploitation of women has been around for thousands of years, the current iteration of it in the sexual exploitation of children is not and has not ever been widely accepted, at least not publically. However, the sexual revolution of the 60s and 70s contributed to the freedoms regarding sex and sexual awareness. It also contributed to an increase in teenage pregnancies among poor Black women. Teenage pregnancies shortened the years between generations, which created very vulnerable populations (Sharpe, 2005). In the inner-city today, girls are exposed to sexual trauma and violence at the earliest ages, which include sexual assault, exposure, and coercion (Miller, 2008). Fear for safety at certain times of the day, especially in the evening and the need to avoid specific groups of people known to cause harm further adds to the trauma and chaos young girls in the inner-city face. According to Miller, girls feel more vulnerable and at-risk for violence than their male counterparts. This was due to reports that the males would carry weapons such as guns for safety. Without the mainstream role modeling of a two-parent household, boys are growing into men who exaggerate their idea of manhood and women exaggerate their idea of being female (Miller, 2008) in ways that incorporate the most negative aspects of both. Women, who are dressing to enhance their sense of femininity, might not know they are inflaming the already inflated male idea of conquest and domination, power and control. Multi-generational poverty in the inner city provides a vast grooming ground for commercial sexual exploitation. There is desperation for survival, and a lack of well-grounded male and female role modeling. Long-term unemployment creates stress and anxiety on families already under duress. Clearly, attacking poverty would help address some of the growing issues related to the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

Substance abuse. Powder cocaine, which was considered a recreation drug of the affluent population in the 70s, became available to the inner-city poor in the early 80s in the form

of crack cocaine due to its inexpensive price, quick high, and quick profit. Prior to the advent of crack cocaine in these poor communities, women were not known to have significant substance abuse issues compared to men. After crack cocaine came into the picture the poverty ridden Black communities were ripe for crack exploitation. Crack cocaine has had a devastating effect on poor Black women in America. Its use grew to epidemic proportions, specifically amongst the poorest areas in the United States and penetrated many aspects of life. Babies born addicted to crack cocaine to mothers addicted to crack produced a massive social issue. In a study conducted in 1994, many women who were given a harm reduction methodology for crack cessation while having their children removed from their care and placed foster or state care facilities, ended up losing their right to parent due to their overwhelming crack cocaine addiction. Additionally, women who were identified as poor and as struggling with low self-image regarding being a good mother, who were also addicted to crack cocaine made the problem seem insurmountable (cited by Sharpe, 2005). Many of the children removed from their primary caregivers were placed with cousins, grandparents, or other family members, which exacerbated the burden of these other families who were parenting others' children. While in the 60s and 70s the community would be able to support the needs of these children, the sheer volume of removals and placement with extended family members pushed the system to the limits with little hope for relief. Babies in utero whose mothers used crack cocaine during the pregnancy are often born with cognitive and/or developmental delays. It is important to note that the affluent classes used powder cocaine while crack cocaine was primarily targeted for and used by people of color (Sharpe, 2005).

CSEC as an Organized Crime

Many youth who become CSEC quickly get embroiled in trafficking rings that resemble

organized crime. A review of cases since 1990 found that traffickers in the U.S. tended to be smaller crime groups and trafficking rings, gangs, loosely organized criminal networks, entrepreneurs, and other corrupt individuals (Richard, 1999). Not only is there human sex trafficking slavery, but also, it is big business. It is the fastest-growing business of organized crime and the largest criminal enterprise in the world. Once these children become involved in CSE, they often are forced to travel far from their homes and, as a result, are isolated from their friends and family. Few children in this situation can develop new relationships with peers or adults other than the person victimizing them. The lifestyle of such youths revolves around violence, forced drug use, and constant threats. Many youth become entangled in organized crime networks where they are trafficked nationally. Criminal networks transport these children around the United States by a variety of means—cars, buses, vans, trucks, or planes—and often provide them counterfeit identification to use in the event of arrest (Walker-Rodriguez & Hill, 2011).

Organized crime is defined as "transnational, national, or local groupings of highly centralized enterprises run by criminals who intend to engage in illegal activity, most commonly for money and profit" (FBI, n.d., n.p.).

The International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates that international sex trafficking is a 99 billion a year industry, and as a means to generate income, CSEC is extremely profitable (Polaris, 2016). In the United States, pimps primarily manage the business of CSE. A landmark study released by the Urban Institute (2014) covers a wide variety of topics related to the underground commercial sex economy; it provides some of the most revealing data on those who coerce women and children into prostitution (Dank et al., 2014).

The business. A pimp is defined as an individual who controls the actions of and lives

off the proceeds of one or more women who work the streets ("CSEC Terminology," 2016). Generally, pimping becomes trafficking when "the threat or use of force, coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power or vulnerability, or giving payments or benefits to a person in control of the victim" is present. In the Urban Institute study, nearly one-third of the pimps interviewed said they entered the underground commercial sex economy because they grew up around it (Dank et al., 2014). Exposure to sex work as children made the trade seem like a normal, achievable means to earn a living. Studies have suggested it is not unusual for individuals who grew up in neighborhoods where prostitution was prevalent or have family members engaged in sex work to enter the field. Other research has found that individuals working in other illegal underground economies, such as drug dealing, sometimes move into the facilitation of underground sex markets (Curtis et al., 2008).

The Johns. The Schapiro Group conducted a study of the *Johns*—people, usually men, who purchase the sexual encounters with those being sold and engage in CSEC in 2011 in Georgia (The Schapiro Group, 2011). The purpose was to describe the adult men who exploit adolescent females by paying for sex with them. The survey explored those who responded to advertisements for sex with young females, how men buy sex with adolescent females, and the implications for demand-side interventions. The authors found that 12,400 men each month in Georgia pay for sex with a young female; of that number 7,200 of these men end up exploiting an adolescent female. These men account for 8,700 paid sex acts with adolescent females each month, which means that each adolescent female is exploited an average of 3 times per day. While many of the men who exploit these children are not seeking adolescent females per se, just under half are willing to pay for sex with a young female even when they know she is an adolescent.

Recruitment. As expected, recruitment is the most important component of any pimp's business model. Pimps recruited individuals of all ages, genders, and races. However, multiple pimps noted that White women are more profitable in the sex market and easier to manage (Dank, 2014). Pimps recruited sex workers in different spaces, such as scouting at transportation hubs, mass transit stations, nightclubs, strip bars, malls, high schools, college campuses, local neighborhoods, as well as through online and social media channels.

Grooming. Pimps appeal to individuals' emotional dependencies and economic needs through *finesse pimping*, meaning they approach possible candidates for the sex trade by using kindness, and feign caring. The study found that different forms of coercion and fraud, sometimes independent or even free of physical violence, are used by pimps to recruit and control employees. These forms of coercion and fraud included feigning romantic interest in the form of the *Romeo pimp*, emphasizing mutual dependency between pimp and employee, discouraging women from "having sex for free" (OJJPD, 2016 p. 6), promising material comforts and establishing a reputation as a *good* pimp.

Pimps responded to rule violations in multiple ways, including physical violence, isolation, and confiscating possessions. Even in the absence of clearly articulated rules, pimps used discipline to exert control over employees and encourage dependency. Those that admitted to researchers that they use violence indicated that physical violence was always used in conjunction with other forms of coercion. Respondents cited coercion through psychological and emotional abuse, as the most common form of punishment (Dank, 2014).

In terms of revenue, about 18%said they impose a dollar figure quota that employees would have to earn each day. These figures range from $400 to $1,000, depending on the day of the week. Other pimps said that, instead of requiring quotas, they incentivize performance by

collecting and depositing cash at the end of every night so that the group starts each day without money. If the employees want to ensure food, lodging, and other necessities, they would have to go out and earn more money (Dank, 2014).

Peer recruitment. Pimp-managed *employees* played a critical role in recruiting individuals to engage in CSE. Employees approached individuals, encouraged friends to engage in prostitution under the pimp, bolstered the pimp's reputation, and explained the business to recruited individuals (Dank, 2014).

Marketing: Selling children. In this age of technology, gone are the days when women, girls and boys hung out on a *track* or the *stroll*, terms used to define specific areas in a city for solicitation. Marketing is now underground, on the Internet, where anonymity rules. In 2010, myredbook.com was launched as a website that offered prostitution services using graphic photos and descriptions. In 2014, the CEO of myredbook.com was arrested and over $1.28M in assets were seized, profit he made from the website alone (Mintz, 2015). In October 2016, the CEO of backpage.com was arrested on the charges of pimping children and it was estimated he made millions off of his online brothel (Vasel, 2016). As of this writing, backpage.com is still online and children are available for purchase. Craigslist.com is also a provider of online CSE advertisements, and the website has yet to incur any criminal charges. In the Schapiro Study (2011), Craigslist.com represented 84% of the transactions per day and backpage.com represented 16%. Based on all the societal and psychosocial complexities, it is easy to see why it is so incredibly challenging to exit commercial sexual exploitation. All the before mentioned issues and challenges have been instrumental in driving curiosity regarding the exiting process and attempting to discern what elements, specifically, facilitate the exiting of CSE.

Getting Out of CSEC: Exiting the Life

The exiting process is extremely complex, and it's estimated that recidivism is quite high; however, as of this writing, there is not any firm data found supporting an exact number. The terminology of *the Life* emerged from the lifestyle; however, it is unknown how and when the shift occurred. It is suspected that the glamorization of pimp culture highlights the lifestyle as something desirable and hence the term *the Life* emerged (Pimping, 2013). Having looked at the factors that contribute to children becoming vulnerable to CSEC, the next section focuses on exiting commercial sexual exploitation. The section looks at survivors in terms of their characteristics as well as the treatment models that are available for victims of CSEC.

Survivor Efforts

Even if the child welfare agencies were not required to intervene with the victims of CSEC under the current California Welfare and Institutions Code (CWIC) Section 300, the truth is that the CWS staff is working with many survivors and victims of such crimes. Understanding the emotional, psychological, and physical harms that are related to CSEC and the Stages of Change Model (SCM) (Prochaska & Velicer, 1997), the youth experience as they try to exit the CSE informs the requirement of many victim services across various agencies and continuum of care response that includes interagency approaches that ought to be utilized. Many systems and agencies have created practices, protocols, and policies to address the concerns of children who are sexually commercially exploited, including law enforcement, judicial systems, education systems, healthcare systems, and welfare systems; however, they often do not work together. Also, of significant issue is that these agencies are not listening to the survivor's themselves, nor engaging with survivors as *subject matter experts* and this creates additional problems when trying to work with youth in the life and understanding what will effectively empower a youth to

exit. While many agencies state they engage survivors by hiring them into consulting or training roles, the reality is that there is little to no information on what is effective in treating a youth who is actively in the life of CSE.

Legislative Efforts

Benefits. Anti-trafficking legislation, which involves the legislation covered in the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA), was created to put an end to human trafficking. It gives a tool of evaluation that is useful in rating nations regarding their ability and efforts to curb the trafficking of humans. Through the United States State Department, every country is allocated a "tier" that is a measurement of how individual nations conform with the policies of anti-trafficking, with the third tier being the lowest ranking, which is assigned to nations that have the lowest compliance rating. To have a designation as tier three nations would have adverse significance, which could cause sanctions from the United States government (Lalor & McElvaney, 2010).

In addition, the TVPA sets a minimal standard to follow while fighting trafficking by using the model of "3 Ps". This model includes preventing human trafficking, protecting victims of trafficking, and prosecuting the trafficking offenders. The elements of prosecution and prevention of the "3 Ps" method are rooted in the model of victim-response to trafficking of humans. Response to the needs of such victims of trafficking is often less complex compared to resolving the main causes of human trafficking, which includes uneven economies or war and conflicts (Institute of Medicine (U.S.) & National Research Council (U.S.), 2013). The United States congress has reauthorized TVPA at least four times. The most current reauthorization is the Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act of 2015, which included some focus on sex trafficking. The "3 Ps" are always included in the Palermo Protocols, three protocols that were designed by

the United Nations to supplement the 2000 Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime. The protocol highlights:

> …effective action that can combat and prevent the trafficking of people. It includes measures that can be used to prevent such trafficking and penalize the traffickers to protect the trafficking victims. A number of countries, which includes United States, have implemented and ratified the Palermo Protocols. Since the protocols were implemented, the numbers of convictions and prosecutions for human trafficking has increased globally. The TVPA and the Palermo Protocol are the global examples of measures that are available internationally to be used in combating legal and setting precedents that hold state parties to be accountable for curbing sex trafficking. (Institute of Medicine (U.S.) & National Research Council (U.S.), 2013, p. 3)

Limitations. Prostitution legalization refers to decriminalization of prostitution between two consenting adults. The aim of legalization is to separate violent, harmful, and other illegal activities such as human trafficking, sexual abuse and coercion, sexual slavery, and prostitution of minors that are common in adult prostitution. Some countries have legalized prostitution, while in other countries prostitution remains illegal. The legalization of prostitution acts as an incentive for sex tourism and trafficking of children for CSA. On the other hand, unenforced prohibitions create a black market that makes children vulnerable. Rather than blaming victims, it would be more reasonable to cope with the traffickers more fervently (Crawford, 2007).

Notably, feminists have diverse perspectives on the legalization of prostitution. Some are supportive while others are critical of sex work. Feminists against prostitution argue that prostitution represents male dominance over females and a form of the exploitation of women, which results from the conventional patriarchal order (Crawford, 2007). Anti-prostitution feminists argue that the sex work has a negative impact on both the society and the prostitutes themselves, as it supports stereotypical views of women as sex objects (Crawford, 2007). Other feminists argue that prostitution is work and is a valid choice for anyone to choose. Feminists who support legalization of prostitution tend to differentiate prostitution from forced sex. In the

feminist world, there are three perspectives of prostitution including abolitionist perspective, the outlaw perspective, and the sex work perspective none of which focus on the role of the judicial and legal system in dealing with the vice.

Further, through the years, the deeply flawed approach to policing has continued to feed this crisis, and has prevented positive change from taking hold. We are investing too much in a system that relies too heavily on law enforcement to solve non-criminal problems, and it is not working (Cornelius, 2013). It would appear that Black youth are disproportionately criminalized, which places them further on the spectrum of serious behavioral issues, and lifelong stigmatization and negatively impacts their ability to become accepted, contributing members of the White dominated social system. According to the Department of Justice Law Enforcement and Administrative Statistics, which the Oakland Police Department last contributed to in 2000, indicates that 24% of sworn police personnel are African-American, 16% are Hispanic and 45% are Caucasian (Reaves & Hickman, 2004). This is not reflective of the ethnic population of the city in 2000, which is 35.7% African-American, 21.9% Hispanic, and 31.3% Caucasian.

According to the FBI, the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children is a widespread problem in the United States that is growing annually, and it appears to be challenging to pinpoint exact numbers related to ethnic demographics or socio-economic foundations (Halpern & Hardie, n.d.). Where statistics do exist, the numbers of African-American or Hispanic females tend to have a disproportionately higher rate of involvement and arrests than their Caucasian counterparts. This appears to be a trend in various areas around the country, regardless of density of African-American and Hispanic to Caucasian ratio. In a life of poverty and gender inequality, violence continues to exist because of the many complex and overlapping issues that are not being adequately addressed. These root causes are directly related to the exploitation of children,

who have been identified as *throwaway children*; these are the children caught in a cycle of violence – one that includes emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. They fall prey to pimps who lure or coerce them into the world of exploitation and prostitution (Anderson, 2009).

Health Care Efforts

While a number of program strategies and models that give services to victims of commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) have been taking place for more than 10 years, the lack of evidence-based intervention, identification, and prevention programs available to inform such practices and programs underscores the need for extra work in this sector (Schauer & Wheaton, 2006). Currently, the state and federal efforts are underway to respond to the current gaps in practice and knowledge of CSEC to better meet and recognize the victims' needs. While this literature review is not exhaustive, it intends to highlight the current components and efforts that merit extra attention when considering residential placement types and the service provision to the vulnerable population. It appears there are shifts in legislation to not criminalize youth who are CSEC but instead to provide mental health and other supportive services.

In 2006, the Senate Bill made human trafficking a serious offence in California. The new legislation enacted a program of victim assistance that was funded by the State of California. Forms of CSEC include child sex tourism, escort services, stripping, and pornography. Other forms of sexual abuse include child enticement for sexual abuse, rape, and enticement of children for sex. Once recognized, the victims of CSEC often have experienced disparate treatment that varies depending on the systems with which they entered, the coordination level of the agencies, and the county in which they live. Some, but not all California counties have access to CSEC providers. At the time of this writing, California does not have system guidance and protocols

that are meant to intervene and serve in situations of youth exploitation. Historically, probation and law enforcement have been the main systems that address the victims of CSEC; however, this has been changing. Since the victims of CSEC were primarily processed and viewed in the criminal justice system as delinquents, a number of CSEC victims get arrested for prostitution for an offense instead of being offered any specialized service. Therefore, the initial efforts of awareness by CSEC concentrate on encouraging the police to see and treat such youth as victims rather than offenders. Consequently, there is evidence of change in conceptualizing CSEC as a special form of child abuse (Crowell, 2010). With the increasing awareness of CSEC, states have introduced and passed new legislation that offers harsher punishments for exploiters and traffickers and provides programs of assisting victims of CSEC. Suitable programs of intervention for the victims of CSEC give vital resources that ensure that youth can have access to services to escape situations of exploitation.

While one of the main duties of Child Welfare Services (CWS) entails the prevention of child abuse and the neglect of children, the duty of CSE only has been applicable in familial victimization. Currently, the youth in California who are exploited sexually by someone other than the family members do not fall in the current code of California Welfare and Institution (CWI). Consequently, reports made to services of child protection on behalf of the youth who are exploited do not trigger the county child welfare system to respond. In the past, the main motive for lack of commitment by the systems of child welfare include lack of sufficient training, inadequate resources, an overabundance of cases, and the notion that CSEC victims ought to be handled in the juvenile justice system. Even if the agencies of California welfare are not required to interfere with the victims of CSEC, the reality is that the staff of CWS is already working with survivors and victims of such crimes whether or not they identify them as such. Studies reveal

that more than half and sometimes as much as 85% of the victims of CSE have a history with the child welfare system (Walker, 2013). Researchers have discovered that child sexual abuse augments the risk of exploitation and is the most common feature of girls who are commercially sexually exploited. In fact, studies prove that the greatest number of cases include children who have experienced abuse before they were initially exploited commercially (Lalor & McElvaney, 2010). Most of them are children who abscond from their homes to escape the sexual abuse and then are recruited to CSE.

Sex exploiters and traffickers often target youth who are easily accessible and vulnerable. Youth who run away from their homes, treatment centers, foster homes, or group homes are highly vulnerable to traffickers who exploit them. Research confirms a relationship between CSEC and running away (Walker, 2013). Research supports the hypothesis that most prostituted women have been runaways (Flowers, 2001). Exploiters are known to look for youth at group shelters or homes. Recognizing the probable risks that relate to participation in the system for children in the child welfare system can assist the professionals of CWS to identify and address both risk and continued exploitation among these adolescents and children within the care of the state. The foundational premises of practices that are centered within the family and within the welfare system also apply to implementing and developing service with the victims of CSEC. Youth and their families, who come to the attention of CWS, need to be offered individualized and tailored services so that new family systems can be promoted to give the child permanency. The system of child welfare concentrates on addressing neglect, abuse, and trauma especially those who are applicable to meet the requirements of victim trafficking. Advocates state that the agencies of child welfare should be accountable for supporting survivors and victims of such crimes as part of their inclusive charge (Walker, 2013). The caseworkers of child welfare serve a

significant role as providers who support services for victims who fall prey to child abuse. In this position, the professionals of child welfare can help ensure that the CSEC victims have access to necessary services. Highlighting the capability of the CWS professionals to take part in the response and identification of such victims is critical to develop a nationwide response to CSEC and could expressively the services of CSEC victims.

Mental Health Efforts: Models Supporting Recovery for CSEC

To date, there is little if any evidence-based programming that indicates efficacy with empowering a youth who is currently being CSE to successfully exit the Life. Currently, models such as Survivor-Led Programming, the Harm Reduction Model, the Stages of Change Model, and the Public Health Model have emerged as potential promising practices. Many agencies nationwide focus their programming on the therapeutic processes *after* successful exit such as with Trauma-Focused CBT; however, while a youth is currently being CSE and is actively in the life, the data, research, and programming available are extremely limited.

Survivor-led programming. Agencies such as GEMS in New York, Breaking Free in Minnesota, and MISSSEY in Oakland have long championed the benefits of survivor-led programming. The belief being that someone who has been in the Life is the best person to educate and empower someone to believe in the possibility of exiting. This is similar to the widely accepted Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) / Narcotics Anonymous (NA) model of a sponsor being the best person to coach a newly sober person through sobriety. Kurtz (1979) explained that a sponsor must be a person who identifies as an alcoholic and has progressed in the recovery program and is willing to share the experience with others in ongoing support of another alcoholic who is working to attain or maintain sobriety, a concept present in all AA/NA literature.

What is impactful about survivor-led programming is that someone who has successfully exited the Life is uniquely able to understand the lived experience of the youth, the struggle of trying to exit, the many attempts to try to exit, and the pull of the Life. Similarly, a survivor is able to understand recidivism or relapse back into the Life better than anyone else. A survivor, trained in the Stages of Change, is uniquely positioned to possibly guide a youth out of CSE with education, encouragement, understanding, and guidance.

Stages of Change Model (SCM). The Stages of Change Model is designed to assist physicians and clinicians to facilitate change in patients with addictions. It has since been widely applied to deal with behavior problems (Todres, 2010). Other models concentrate on patient failure and non-compliance, but SCM focuses on the readiness of the patient to make a change and appreciates barriers to change and as well as assists patients to anticipate a relapse to prevent it. This model is grouped into five stages: pre-contemplation; contemplation; preparation; action; and maintenance (Prochaska & Velicer, 1997).

Pre-contemplation is marked by a person's unwillingness to change his/her behavior. Individuals in the contemplation stage can evaluate the barriers and advantages of changing. In the preparation phase, the person plans to transform his/her behavior by making small changes to test how a complete modification might feel. In the action stage, the person changes behavior by taking certain remedial steps. The maintenance and relapse prevention stage requires the integration of the new behavior into the individual's daily life. More often, individuals regress to earlier stages before firmly establishing new practices (Cohen, Deblinger, Mannarino, & Steer, 2004)**.** The usefulness of SCM in CSEC is in the integration of the stages of exploitation. Motivational interviewing is one way to guide persons through these stages, which is a collaborative process developed to strengthen motivation for change through engagement,

empowerment, therapeutic relationship building, as well as determination of personal goals (Silverman et al., 2008).

Harm Reduction Model. Many minors attempt to escape the sexual exploitation business but end up relapsing and returning to the street and their exploiters. Relapse is common, and the potential harm, along with increased health risk of the exploitation and life on the street, is of enormous concern. The Harm Reduction Model (HRM) has been employed to help people who were exploited as children and later engaged in commercial sex. The model was initially developed for people who used psychoactive substances and were unable to stop (Silverman et al., 2008). It focused on the prevention of harm related to a particular behavior instead of prevention of it, and what happened to the persons who continued to be involved in the problematic behavior despite the dangers. For example, the implementation of needle exchange to limit the spread of HIV and Hepatitis in IV drug users. Since its narrower beginnings, HRM has since been used to deal with risks caused by problematic behaviors besides the use of drugs. For CSEC, the model suggests that teenagers will for a time, continue to be exploited, be unwilling to leave the exploitative association as well as not recognize the value of any meaningful change in behavior (Patterson, 2005).

The HRM is designed to meet individual's needs *where they currently are* in their lives by concentrating on the risks and harms related to exploitation. Thus, HRM for CSEC educates the minors concerning myths about safe sex and protection. The model builds on sexually exploited children's strategies, but does not conflict with their culture and tradition. This increases their options for self-determination, control, and autonomy, and values their unique differences. Dangers related to exploitation can be decreased by self-assertion (Patterson, 2005). Thus, preventive measures should be incorporated to reduce potential harm related to diseases,

pregnancies, and infections. If any danger occurs, CSEC victims will have access to adequate medical and mental health care that may include mobile delivery of services. The majority of CSE victims support the HRM, arguing that it enables them to care for each other in a safe way and empowers them to make informed decisions (Najavits, 2002). The purpose of HRM is to create a supportive environment, to decrease danger, and to improve the minors' quality of life, which has the potential to result in empowerment.

Public Health Model. CSEC is caused by a combination of factors: people who purchase, sell, and are sold for sex; the view of prostitution by the society; *hypersexualizing* youth displayed in the media, as well as community factors (Silverman et al., 2008). Some studies argue that the public health model (PHM) is best suited to address the above factors by exploring the causes of the problem on the level of the society as well as developing intervention strategies for the communities, perpetrators, victims, and families (Najavits, 2002). Those who support PHM state that the past criminalization approach has not resulted in any meaningful change towards the aim of eliminating human trafficking; therefore, the PHM could be more efficient (Patterson, 2005). PHM identifies an issue and addresses it by investigating the root cause of the identified problem, which in this case, is human trafficking. Once the cause is established, the PHM approach aims to address the cause by replacing public perceptions. Therefore, transforming the view of the society about CSEC provokes changes in social behaviors (Todres, 2010). It focuses on prevention as well as the identification of risk factors than can assist in identifying vulnerability and facilitate earlier interventions that reach people at-risk before traffickers do. By creating evidence-based strategies, maintaining a focus on prevention, addressing public perceptions or behaviors that result in human trafficking as well as involving

relevant stakeholders to address the issues, it is believed that it will get closer to the aim of preventing human trafficking (Patterson, 2005).

Conclusion

Due to the complicated factors described previously, CSEC victims need to interact with distinct government levels and with several professionals and agencies among many sectors, including courts, public health, schools, mental health, probation, and social services to efficiently develop a system of care. There should be coordination and communication among many victims and providers of support to ensure that youth get all the necessary services. Working with survivors, as *subject matter experts* is vital in understanding this population, what their needs and vulnerabilities are, specifically related to successfully exiting the Life. However, mechanisms that support communication and sharing of information are not in existence among the several services providers and the care systems, which interact with the victims of CSEC. Coordinated efforts might also bring improved collection of data. Such data could inform more effective and targeted intervention strategies for the victims of CSEC.

Collaboration might engender intervention at many levels of improving awareness, identifying victims, preventing entrance into the Life, sharing of resources, collecting data, and coordinating responses. Noting the promise of interagency and multi-sector collaboration, the literature reveals the developing emphasis that is taking place on the design of multi-sector approaches. Such approaches range from multidisciplinary group to formal relationships that depend on a memorandum of understanding (Schauer & Wheaton, 2006). It is a hopeful sign that in support of collaboration of various sectors, the department of justice has funded communities to establish task forces that are acting against human trafficking, which include local and state law enforcement, victim service providers and investigators.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The methodology and research design selected for this qualitative study included semi-structured interviews and the data was analyzed using Breckner's (as cited in Wengraf, 2001) method of thematic analysis. This chapter presents: (a) the researcher's background; (b) the participant recruitment process including the selection criteria and informed consent; (c) the procedure for conducting the semi-structured interviews; (d) the data collection involving the interview protocol, the semi-structured interview questions, and transcript verification, and (e) data analysis.

Researcher Background

As the principal researcher for this study, I have extensive experience in interviewing in a variety of settings. Prior to entering the field of children's residential care and mental health, I was a high-end recruiter for software and hardware technology companies with the responsibility of screening and interviewing potential candidates for mission critical positions. After being employed in that field for over 10 years, I transitioned to children's residential care where I have found my home for the past 17 years. I founded a non-profit therapeutic residential program for minors in the foster care system. Since founding, I have established 4 residential programs, one that is solely devoted to minors who have been commercially sexually exploited as children, which utilized a Harm Reduction Model (HRM) coupled with Survivor-Led Programming (GEMS, My Life/My Choice). I also founded a drop-in center to serve youth who have been commercially sexually exploited, which provides alternative programming to those youth; it includes processes such as Expressive Arts Therapy, Yoga Therapy, and Independent Living Skills, and others. In December 2016, I closed the CSEC residential program due to a variety of factors which included: (a) local law enforcement; (b) California Department of Social Services

– Community Care Licensing Division (CCLD); and (c) staff turnover and staff trauma. Local law enforcement was unwilling to partner with my agency, and instead sought to view our CSE children as criminals by targeting them in sting operations and harassing them unduly instead of viewing them as victims of extreme complex trauma; California Department of Social Services – Community Care Licensing Division (CCLD) is the regulatory body that licenses the agency as a residential provider for the State of California. It refused to allow any exceptions to their regulations regarding this marginalized population. For example, when working with youth currently in the Life a provider must be tolerant of youth absconding without permission (AWOL) on a frequent basis. CCLD mandated that the agency follow a CSE child when they AWOL, regardless of staff safety. CCLD also mandated one-on-one supervision for all placements in the program, while the compensated rate for my agency did not support that volume of staffing. And finally, victims of CSE deserve to have constant, stable, trained staff. Due to the complex trauma the youth exhibited, staff burnout occurred quickly and the agency struggled to manage turnover challenges with training.

My agency now serves a total of 18 youth at a single time, and over 80 youth per year, with an average length of stay of 110 days. I have been responsible for the screening and interviewing of all potential employees including residential counselors, program managers, social workers and clinicians. Also, I have been responsible for all intakes for potential new clients and conducting interviews with youth who have been removed from their homes due to caregiver abuse and neglect. From May 2014-December 2016, I screened CSEC youth for potential placement in our CSEC specific residential program from its opening until closure. In the scope of my employment, I have interviewed hundreds of vulnerable youth and have gained expertise ensuring a space where youth can feel comfortable being candid and open.

Additionally, I feel skilled in monitoring or recognizing any distress that might be expressed by interviewees.

As a Caucasian middle-class middle-aged female who has never been commercially sexually exploited, my primary bias lies in how much I empathize with the lived experience of these survivors. This is an issue I confront frequently in my daily work with youth. I intentionally avoid the terminology of *rescue* and avoid a stance of *rescuing,* as I believe that disempowers children and adults who have successfully navigated an exit from CSE. As a Caucasian female, I frequently work with varying cultures and ethnic groups. As someone trained extensively with marginalized populations and populations overrepresented in the foster care system such as African-American and Hispanic populations, I can quickly establish trust and rapport with the youth I work with as evidenced by my continued positive connection with youth after they depart placement, even under the poorest of circumstances. I believe that it is with empathy, understanding, and genuine lack of judgment that I can successfully navigate interviewing survivors of CSE and obtain the information requested, without causing additional trauma by asking irrelevant or traumatizing questions.

Participants Recruitment Process

Recruitment

It is impossible to gauge the sheer number of CSEC survivors located in the California Bay Area, as there is no data available as of this writing. It is only possible to estimate numbers based on data released from Heat Watch (www.heatwatch.org) which states that there were 486 youth identified as CSEC or at-risk for CSE from January 1, 2011 – March 20, 2015 and that over 80% of the human trafficking cases reported in the State of California were in the California Bay Area (Heatwatch, 2016). Participants for this study were recruited via the recruitment flyer

(Appendix A). I approached agencies that serve adults over the age of 18 who have been commercially sexually exploited in childhood utilizing the *Site Permission Letter* (Appendix B). I did not approach potential participants individually. However, agency staff might have, at their discretion, approached potential participants who they felt could have been appropriate for the study. Agency staff were not informed or notified by the researcher which persons were considered for the study, nor was I aware of the recruitment agent, thus, ensuring further confidentiality. There are three agencies in the California Bay Area where recruitment flyers were posted:

a. WestCoast Children's Clinic (www.westcoastcc.org): WestCoast Children's Clinic (WCCC), founded in 1979 by faculty and students of the Wright Institute (www.wi.edu), Berkeley, Ca. WCCC provides mental health services to promote the healthy development of children and families through therapy, education and advocacy, regardless of family income. They have a specialized program working with CSEC (WestCoast Children's Clinic | A private, non-profit children's community psychology clinic, 2016)(WestCoast Children's Clinic | A private, non-profit children's community psychology clinic, 2016).
b. San Francisco SafeHouse (sfsafehouse.org): The San Francisco SafeHouse was founded in 1998 with the sole intention and focus of working with women who have been commercially sexually exploited and who seek a life of sobriety and emotional health ("SafeHouse," 2015).
c. Motivating, Inspiring, Supporting, and Serving Sexually Exploited Youth (MISSSEY)(www.misssey.org): MISSSEY was founded in 2007 with the sole purpose of engaging minors who have been or are currently commercially sexually exploited.

> MISSSEY is one of the few *survivor-informed* agencies in the State of California ("MISSSEY," 2013). Since its founding, MISSSEY has served over one thousand CSEC youth.

Additionally, I emailed professional colleagues a copy of the recruitment letter along with an introductory letter (Appendix C) and posted on several professional listservs.

Selection Criteria

Interested participants contacted the researcher using the researcher's assigned Saybrook University email address or via the researcher's cell phone number, which was indicated on the recruitment flyer. Upon initial contact, the policy and procedures of the study were explained, what the potential risks and benefits were by participating in the study, and confidentiality and safety maintenance was explained. All participants were screened for selection criteria. Only individuals who met all selection criteria and expressed an interest in contributing to the study's goals were selected for further participation. I did not consider for the study any adult with whom I have worked previously, further ensuring confidentiality and minimal bias.

For this study, I hoped to recruit from 6 to15 participants until saturation was obtained. The rationale for a range of 6 to 15 participants was based on the anticipation of the richness of data, as well as researcher's time constraints. While saturation determined most of the qualitative sample size, other factors dictated how quickly or slowly this was achieved in a qualitative study. Charmaz (2014) suggested that the aims of the study are the ultimate driver of the project design, and, therefore, the sample size. She suggested that a small study with "modest claims" (p.114) might achieve saturation quicker than a study that is aiming to describe a process that spans disciplines. Other researchers have also elucidated further supplementary factors that can influence a qualitative sample size, and therefore, saturation in qualitative studies. Ritchie and

Lewis (2003) outlined seven factors that might affect the potential size of a sample:

> …the heterogeneity of the population; the number of selection criteria; the extent to which 'nesting' of criteria is needed; groups of special interests that require intensive study; multiple samples within one study; types of data collection methods use; and the budget and resources available" (p. 84).

It is important to note that all participants were members of a vulnerable population due to their history of complex trauma while being commercially sexually exploited as well as the pervasive bias against individuals who have been involved in the commercial sex industry. Extreme care was taken during all stages of the investigation to protect the safety and confidentiality of the participants.

In summary, the intention was to recruit at least 6 participants and continue recruiting until saturation of information was achieved. Participants were over the age of 21 and no older than 26 years of age. They resided in the California Bay Area, identified as survivors of commercial sexual exploitation in childhood, and had been out of the commercial sex industry for at least 2 years. They reported they were functioning well, were comfortable with speaking, reading and writing in English, and were willing to participate in a 60-90 minute audio taped interview. They also expressed an interest in sharing the avenues in which they successfully exited the commercial sex industry.

Potential participants who responded to the recruitment flyer were initially contacted by phone and screened to determine eligibility to participate. The selection criteria were as follows:

- Females between the ages of 21 – 26
- Reside in the California Bay Area
- Identify as a survivor of commercial sexual exploitation as a child
- Out of the life for at least 2 years
- Report that they are functioning well as an adult

- Comfortable speaking, reading, and writing in English
- Willing to participate in a 60 – 90 minutes' audio-taped interview

Consent

During the face-to-face interview, I, as the primary researcher, thoroughly explained what my proposed research entailed, its potential benefits, and any risks to the participant. I also took the time to allow participants to ask any questions or clarification of anything that might not have been understood. Written consent to participate in the study was obtained from all participants in accordance with American Psychological Association (APA) ethics (2002) and Saybrook University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) policies and procedures (Saybrook University, n.d.). The Saybrook Institutional Review Board approved this research study on December 22, 2016. Additionally, the participants were informed that their interviews would be recorded and that a transcriber other than the primary researcher would be hired to transcribe the interviews. The transcriptionist signed a confidentially agreement. A $50 Visa Gift Card was offered to compensate for time and transportation. Upon completion of each individual interview, I uploaded the interview to the transcription agency (Rev.com) and typically received the transcribed interview within 3-4 hours. I immediately sent the transcription to the participant and mailed the $50 Visa Gift Card the same day. I was motivated to expedite the providing of the gift cards due to the extreme poverty I witnessed in most the participants.

Procedure

Individuals that consented to be participants were interviewed individually face-to-face. Interviews were semi-structured and were anticipated to last approximately 60 - 90 minutes. Participants could choose to be interviewed either in a private room within a library or similar meeting place such as a community center. At the end of the interview, each participant was

provided with a resource list (Appendix D) constructed by the researcher based on known free services in the area that work with members of this special population.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Qualitative methods of research differ from quantitative methods in their means of inquiry. Qualitative studies offer more direct benefits for participants in the moment – their own meaning-making, self-discoveries, and validation of having their stories witnessed. Such methods seek to describe a phenomenon in a rich and holistic manner and to understand how people interpret their experiences (Creswell, 2007; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Robson, 2011). Whereas, quantitative methods are more suited to reducing data to measurable variables that can be generalized to larger populations or statistically measuring cause and effect qualitative methods are a better fit for discovering the experience of what is being researched. Among many approaches to gathering data, one method of obtaining qualitative data is using semi-structured interviews.

The semi-structured interview approach is an open-ended format in which questions are used as a guide with two intentions. The first is to provide for the researcher the ability to adequately obtain data related to the study's research question, and the second is it gives an opportunity for the participants to sufficiently depict their lived experiences (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton & Patton, 2002). According to Bourdieu and Accardo (1999), "it is not simply a question of collecting *natural discourse* as little affected as possible by cultural symmetry; it is also essential to construct this discourse scientifically, in such a way that it yields the elements necessary for its own explanation" (p. 80). Utilizing Bourdieu and Accardo's approach enabled this researcher to tie in specific questions, which were relevant solely for the purposes of specific project. The semi-structured interview model was

selected for a variety of reasons. First, special care, consideration, and honor needs to be properly given to each participant who is willing to share personal details about the exit and recovery from commercial sexual industry. Secondly, since the purpose of the study is to discern specific aspects that aided exit from commercial sexual exploitation, it was essential that the interviewer not prompt for specific cookie-cutter responses. In summary, semi-structured interviews are a valid means of data collection for this study due to their ability to capture a participant's individual conception of a phenomenon.

Research Question

The emphasis of the research question was to focus on the exiting process and not necessarily any of the psychosocial issues that contributed to being commercially sexually exploited (CSE). Therefore, the primary research question was: *What can be learned from the lived experiences of women who successfully exited childhood commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) and perceive themselves to be functioning well despite this history?* Secondary questions included:

1. How did women who experienced commercial sexual exploitation in childhood describe their perception of functioning well as adults, despite this history?
2. How did women describe their exiting story or process from commercial sexual exploitation in childhood?
3. What, if any, recommendations would they have for children who are trying to exit?
4. What, if any, recommendations would they have for professionals working with such children?

Data Collection

Interview Protocol

The Interview Protocol (Appendix E) was divided into two sections that included background and interview questions. The question design was based on professional experiences and curiosities, as well as findings from literature.

Background questions. Per Lincoln and Guba (as cited by Robson, 2011), obtaining demographic information can assist with *credibility, transferability, dependability,* and *confirmability.* The five background questions were limited to age when interviewee entered the Life, current age, gender identity, sexual orientation, and racial/ethnic identity. The purpose of obtaining the age of the subject when she entered the Life as well as current age was to ensure credibility and dependability with the information provided, since I was seeking only to obtain information from women who entered the Life before the age of 18, as well as ensuring time and distance from the experience, by requiring a 2 year period post-event, which is why I only chose to interview women who were over 21 at the time of the interview. Ensuring credibility and dependability requires an age limit of 26 to guarantee that the lived experience of being CSEC and the exiting process was still a current memory. The purpose of obtaining gender identity, sexual orientation and racial/ethnic identity was to provide wealth and breadth to the anonymous identities of the brave women willing to share their stories of exiting CSEC.

Semi-structured interview questions. After obtaining demographic or background information, participants were asked questions via a semi-structured interview model. A semi-structured interview is a qualitative interview that is defined by a pre-set question guide. It aims to provide in-depth findings through informal discussions with participants (Collis & Hussey, 2003).

This interview method was chosen over unstructured or structured interviews, because this study intended to answer the research questions by asking specific questions, but not so unstructured that it would have generate useless data, and not so structured it might have miss unanticipated, but worthwhile information. The semi-structured approach also provided the researcher with the ability to probe answers, which is particularly useful in responses whereby more explanation was needed to fully understand the participants' experiences. For this study, the interview protocol consisted of 17 primary interview questions, in addition to unpacking or probing questions. For example, the first question was, "To get started, I wanted to get a sense of who you are now. How would you describe yourself? Tell me about the person you are today." The purpose was to allow the participants to voice their own descriptions of their state of well-being and to identify those factors that they perceive to have been helpful to their functioning. The order of the questions was designed to afford rapport building between researcher and participant, increase participant comfort, and encourage a willingness to share the stories.

Transcript Verification

At the end of the interview, participants were offered the opportunity to review the typed and de-identified transcript if they wished to ensure that all identifying information has been eliminated. Rev.com Transcription Services transcribed the audio taped interviews after they signed a confidentiality agreement. Creswell (2007) advocated having the participant review the final report to verify accuracy. If they agreed, the transcribed data was sent to the participants for verification immediately after transcription. The participants were given the option to have the transcripts sent either through email or US mail, and a self-addressed envelope was provided. A cover letter (Appendix F) providing directions accompanied the transcript, and a $50 Visa gift card was immediately mailed for time and transportation. The $50 Visa Gift Card was sent

regardless of transcript review. However, 100% of the participants reviewed and replied to the transcription review request. Participants were asked to send any corrections or comments back to me within 2 weeks. At least 3 days after sending the transcript, I called the participant, asked them to return the transcription within the requested time frame and clarified any possible questions they had.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis, unlike quantitative analysis, has no concrete or universal rules, the ultimate structure of making sense of and developing interpretations of qualitative data are the responsibility of the researcher (Patton, 2002). The researcher is, thus, tasked with organizing the data, interpreting meaning of the data, categorizing these meanings, and ultimately reporting the results (Patton, 2002). Creswell (2007) described this process as continual analysis to develop deeper understanding of the data, followed by presenting the results of analysis. This results in an interpretation of the larger meaning of the data.

Data was analyzed as outlined by Breckner's (as cited in Wengraf, 2001) method of thematic analysis. This method of analysis was designed to be a flexible approach that provides clear steps to accomplish coding, identifying themes within data, and ultimately reporting a comprehensive and accurate representation of the data set. According to Wengraf (2001), data is organized in five steps:

1. "The analysis of biographical data (BDA), addressing the chronology of experiences of the lived life, the lived-through past.
2. The analysis of the interview text in a thematic field analysis (TFA), aiming to reconstruct the structuring principles of the story-as-told; its gestalt.

3. The construction of the case history, on the basis of addressing how events have been experienced in the past, and how patterns of orientation and interpretation and self-presentation developed genetically out of these past experiences.
4. Microanalysis of small selected pieces of text aiming to analyze in depth the interrelation between past experiences and their presentation and to check hypothesis developed before and in stage 3 above.
5. Finally, based on the results of the previous four steps, a discussion of the inter-relations between the life history and the told story, contrasting the two, aims and formulating a structural hypothesis about the principle of connection between the life history and the told story. This is known as *identifying the case structure*.

Individual participant interviews were conducted until a saturation point was reached. Saturation was defined as the point at which no new themes emerge from the data (Robson, 2011). To identify a saturation point, data analysis was simultaneous with data collection.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This section examines the findings of the analysis of data collected in this study. In addition, it discusses participant demographics, themes, and patterns that emerged during the semi-structured interviews. The emphasis of the research questions was to focus on the exiting process and not necessarily any of the psychosocial issues that contributed to being commercially sexually exploited (CSE). Therefore, the primary research question was: *What can be learned from the lived experiences of women who successfully exited childhood commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) and perceive themselves to be functioning well despite this history?* Secondary questions included:

1. How did women who experienced commercial sexual exploitation in childhood describe their perception of functioning well as adults, despite this history?
2. How did women describe their exiting story or process from commercial sexual exploitation in childhood?
3. What, if any, recommendations would they have for children who are trying to exit?
4. What, if any, recommendations would they have for professionals working with such children?

Participant Profiles

Participants were recruited via mass emailing to community agencies and the recruitment flyers were posted along known *tracks* (areas known for commercial sexual exploitation). The *tracks* where recruitment flyers were posted were International Blvd in Oakland, CA; the Tenderloin District in San Francisco, CA; and Monterey Rd. in San Jose, CA. In total, 15 potential study participants contacted the researcher. After completion of the screening process, 2 potential study participants were excluded due to either being over the age of 26 or stopped

responding to the researcher after the initial screening process was completed. The interviews were carried out between January 12th and 30th, 2017 and commenced after being offered to review and sign the Informed Consent document, and assuring anonymity to all participants. This was followed by the completion of the demographic questionnaire, as well as the reassurance that a false name would be would be utilized in linking their questionnaires to the audio-recorded interviews. There were a total of 13 participants with eight interviews taking place in public libraries and the remaining five in local fast food establishments. Out of respect and to ensure confidentiality for participants in this study, the researcher elected to use fictitious names. A biographic narrative approach was chosen given its focus on the gathering of stories on the individuals lived experiences, the way the experiences unfolded with time (Bang, Baker, Carpinteri, & Van Hasselt, 2013), as well as the way they were located within the individual, historical, and cultural setting. The study participants were requested to narrate their stories with regards to their exiting of commercial sexual exploitation. As an essential part of their narratives, the participants were also asked to clarify their experiences and aspects that not only enabled them to develop resilience but also offered them the motivation and means of exiting commercial sexual exploitation. The information for each of the participants was accurate for each based on the date the interview occurred.

Ann was a 23-year-old self-identified Hispanic bisexual female who entered the Life at the age of 15 and exited at the age of 17. She disclosed during the interview that she lived with her father when a female friend initially recruited her. She disclosed that both of her parents were addicted to methamphetamine, and that the addiction contributed to early exposure to a highly sexualized environment, which involved her father buying her stiletto boots at the age of 13. She

successfully exited CSE after being arrested and agreeing to substance abuse residential treatment as an alternative to incarceration.

Helen was a 23-year-old self-identified African American heterosexual female who entered the Life at the age of 12 and exited at age 17. She disclosed during the interview that she lived in an intact family unit, and believed she became vulnerable to recruitment because her parents did not teach her to "see her body as a temple" and that they were only focused on "their business and religion". Her boyfriend recruited her. She successfully exited CSE after getting pregnant with her son.

Tina was a 26-year-old self-identified African American bisexual female who entered the Life at the age of 15 and exited at age 17. She disclosed during the interview that she initially lived with her mom and then her grandmother after her mother's incarceration and was recruited by her boyfriend. She successfully exited CSE after getting pregnant with her son.

Rhonda is a 25-year-old self-identified African American bisexual female who entered the Life at the age of 11 and exited at age 17. She disclosed during the interview that she lived with her mom and grandmother and was recruited by her boyfriend. She successfully exited CSE after getting pregnant with her son; however, she disclosed that she switched to being a drug dealer after her son was born, stating it was *safer*.

Donna was a 25-year-old self-identified African American heterosexual female who entered the Life at the age of 13 and exited at age 17. She disclosed during the interview that she lived with her mother and sister when her female friend recruited her. Her mother was extremely ill, and Donna stated she had to "sell herself" to get money for her mother's medical treatments. She successfully exited CSE after her mother passed away and she felt responsible for her younger sister.

Patty was a 25-year-old self-identified African American heterosexual female who entered the Life at the age of 13 and exited at age 17. She disclosed during the interview that she lived with her mother and younger siblings when a female friend recruited her. She successfully exited CSE after getting pregnant with her son.

Mary was a 24-year-old self-identified African American, Hispanic, and Caucasian mixed race bisexual female who entered the Life at the age of 11 and exited at age 17. She disclosed during the interview that she lived with her mother and older sister when she, too, was recruited by a female friend. She was in the Foster Care System for a few weeks when she was 14 and went to an inpatient therapeutic residential program out of the state when she was 14. She stated the program was unsuccessful. She successfully exited CSE after realizing she "hated the lifestyle" and felt "immense shame" and after she became pregnant with her first child.

Gabby was a 21-year-old self-identified Hispanic heterosexual female who entered the Life at the age of 17 and exited at age 17. She disclosed during the interview that she lived with her devoted father and her older sister when a female friend recruited her. She successfully exited CSE after getting arrested in a *sting* operation with law enforcement.

Sophia was a 25-year-old self-identified Caucasian heterosexual female who entered the Life at the age of 8 and exited at age 17. She disclosed during the interview that she lived in the foster care system from the age of 8 and lived in "very abusive foster homes" whose supposed foster parents "pimped her out". When she was 12, she left her foster home and began living "on the streets". She successfully exited CSE after her pimp was arrested and she testified against him.

Jayla was a 25-year-old self-identified an African American and Caucasian bisexual female who entered the Life at the age of 15 and exited at age 17. She disclosed during the

interview that she lived with her grandmother and two uncles, who were drug dealers, and became homeless "by choice" because she wanted to become a "prostitute" to impress her boyfriend. She successfully exited CSE after getting pregnant with her son.

Ashley was a 25-year-old self-identified Caucasian queer female who entered the Life at the age of 15 and exited at age 17. She disclosed during the interview that she had lived with her father and was recruited by a female friend. She successfully exited CSE after realizing the "extreme shame" she felt living every day, and confided in her father, who provided her with the resources for a successful exit.

Cora was a 25-year-old self-identified mixed race of Pacific Islander and Caucasian heritage. She was a bisexual female who entered the Life at the age of 12 and exited at age 17. She disclosed during the interview that she lived in an intact family unit, and at the age of 15, she ran away from home and became homeless. A female friend recruited her. She successfully exited CSE after getting incarcerated for solicitation.

Camille was a 26-year-old self-identified African American and Caucasian bisexual female who entered the Life at the age of 12 and exited at age 17. She disclosed during the interview that she lived with her mother and two brothers and her boyfriend was the one who initially recruited her. She successfully exited CSE after her brothers found her in a motel and rescued her. Her pimp was arrested and she testified against him.

In summary, as noted in Table 3, the 13 participants' average age of entry into CSEC was 13 and the actual age of successful exit for all was 17. All the participants identified as female, and when asked for their ethnicity/race 5 participants identified as African American, 1 identified as Hispanic, 2 identified as Caucasian and 4 identified as Mixed Race (Caucasian, African-American, Hispanic, African-American and Caucasian, and Pacific Islander and Caucasian) and

one participant identified as "Portuguese". When asked their racial/ethnic identity 7 participants identified as African American, three identified as Hispanic, two identified as Caucasian and one identified as Mixed Race (Caucasian, African-American, Hispanic). One participant identified as "American with ethnic parents" and one only identified as mixed. Further, 7 participants identified as bisexual, one identified as queer, and five identified as heterosexual.

Table 3. Participant Profiles in Order of Interview

Name	Age (years)	Ethnicity/ Race	Racial/Ethnic Identity	Sexual Orientation	No. of years in the Life	Age Range
Ann	23	Portuguese	Mix	Hetero	2	15-17
Helen	23	AA	AA	Hetero	5	12-17
Tina	26	AA	AA	Bisexual	2	15-17
Rhonda	25	AA	AA	Bisexual	6	11-17
Donna	25	AA	AA	Hetero	4	13-17
Patty	26	AA	AA	Bisexual	4	13-17
Mary	24	Mix: Black, white, Hispanic	Mix	Bisexual	6	11-17
Gabby	21	Hispanic	Hispanic	Hetero	1	17-17
Sophia	25	Caucasian	Caucasian	Hetero	9	8-17
Jayla	25	Black and White	AA	Bisexual	2	15-17
Ashley	25	Caucasian	Caucasian	Gay	2	15-17
Cora	25	Pacific Islander and Caucasian	AA	Bisexual	5	12-17
Camille	26	AA and Caucasian	American with Ethnic Parents	Bisexual	5	12-17
Mean	**25**	-	-	-	**4**	-
Median	**24**				**5**	
Range	**21-26**				**1-9**	

The participants numbered 13, a number that was established as adequate following the reaching of the saturation point of the data (Fusch & Ness, 2015). While the intention was to seek a minimum of 6 participants, it was only after reaching the involvement of 13 participants that it appeared that content validity had been reached, and that no further coding was necessary. The interviews progressed successfully, and the narratives of the participants echoed comparable themes. This researcher began analyzing the data by utilizing thematic analysis and coding to understand the overall themes in the data sets. Thematic analysis required getting to know the data well through reading and re-reading, and then, it required taking time to react on the insights being extracted from the data. This researcher then went back to the data for further analysis until meaning-making occurred and established line-by-line code — carefully examining words, phrases or sentences for data relevant to the overall research question. The codes were then marked onto the transcripts. After line-by-line coding, the abstracted codes were then grouped logically – 'like with like' – and a tentative label was allocated. The final step was to establish relationships conceptually by establishing a hierarchy of categories and sub-categories.

The following section details themes that were produced from the data using the biographic-narrative approach. Through data collected during the participant interviews, varying themes emerged describing the experience of being commercially sexually exploited as a child and the exiting process. There were 25 themes that emerged and were grouped under three categories. The first primary category was Self-Defined Wellness. Four themes fit under the category of Self-Defined Wellness: (a) naming of self-outside the Life, (b) positive family connections, (c) desire to "break the cycle", and (d) embracing the term "survivor". The second primary category was describing the Life, which had seven themes: (a) sex such things as goods,

money, clothing; (b) surviving the Game; (c) pimp control; (d) wanting to be loved and look good; (e) contributing family factors; and (f) the grooming process.

The third primary category was the exiting process. Ten themes fit under the category of the Exiting Process: (a) the naming of one who had exited the Life, (b) others depend on me, (c) not profitable to exit, (d) fear keeps you in, (e) thinking about leaving, (f) the importance of family, (g) pregnancy, (h) wanting to be free of psychological and physical violence, (i) sustaining exit, and (k) lack of contact with professional systems.

Four themes fit under the category of recommendations for professionals and/or family and friends: The recommendations include: (a) active listening, (b) encouragement, (c) non-judgment, and (d) don't leave when we push you away. Additionally, two anecdotal themes emerged: (a) feeling treated "like garbage" by the legal system and (b) "I thought I was grown".

The first set of interview questions investigated participants' impressions of their current functioning. For this section, five questions, each with one to two follow up questions, were asked during the interview. These research questions produced four themes, which identified distinctive responses regarding how someone who exits commercial sexual exploitation in childhood (CSEC) views who they are. All the participants felt that they were in a better, stronger emotional space and described themselves in a very positive manner. Jayla described herself as "strong. Everything I've been through has built me up and made me strong. I have been able to get to a place now where I like who I am and where I've gone."

Current wellness was wide ranging. Three of the participants (Gabby, Sophia, Mary) disclosed they were homeless, but extremely committed to staying out of the Life. It appeared their definition of "wellness" seemed to stem from not only exiting commercial sexually exploitation in childhood, which was extremely admirable, but also due to their commitment for

staying out of the Life, even when experiencing desperate circumstances. Gabby said, "I may be homeless, living out of my car, but I am not selling myself, and I am proud of that", where Mary said, "I'll work two or three jobs to stay out of the Life. I am living from day to day in motels, but I'll never go back to that life. I believe I am better than that now." Whereas those participants who were living with someone they identified as family (spouse/partner, child, relative) seemed to be able to incorporate being CSEC into their living history as well as many current accomplishments (stable housing, employment, education). Ann, who was living with her grandmother, stated, "I am strong, and blessed. I will never go back to the Life. I believe in myself, and my future. I'm going to school and have a job that I am proud of", and Gabby said, "I am proud of how far I have come. I'm taking two classes at the junior college and really loving it. I also have a part time job I'm proud of."

Emerging Themes

Naming of Self as Outside the Life

The first theme that emerged was that their identified perception of self was very positive. While the participants used differing and various ways to give themselves identifiers, there were many similarities amongst them. When initially asked this question, all the participants described themselves in a positive way and a few became very emotional describing who they are now. The participants used a total 25 positive words to describe themselves. The words endorsed by more than six participants were happy (12), blessed (10), strong (8), focused (8), and powerful (7). Twelve of the participants used the term *happy* or a word that is similar. Helen said, "I am happy now, happy where my life is and that my past is behind me," and Tina said "I am content with who I am today. I know I'm a work in progress, but I finally love ME." For Cora, her words were, "I am at a stable place in my life where I am happy now." Ten

participants used the term *blessed* or something similar. Ann said, "I am blessed." Mimi said, "I am so fortunate to be alive," and Jayla said, "I am so lucky." Eight of the participants used the term *strong* or similar to describing them and then described how they see themselves as strong. Helen described herself as, *"*a strong woman who is now a better mom because of my life experiences. I am now a more conscious, strong, smart-minded beautiful woman and a hardworking, focused determined mom.*"* When Sophia described herself, she said, "I am strong as hell," and Ashley said, "I am tough, I cannot believe I am where I am now compared to where I was." Eight of the women used the term *focused* or similar when describing themselves. Helen said, "I am focused and determined to be the best mom I can be," and Rhonda said, "I am motivated to stay out of that lifestyle." For Ashley, her comment was, "I am determined to be a better person that I was before." Seven used the term *powerful* or similar to describe themselves. Donna said, "I am a powerful, beautiful woman, and no one can take that from me ever again." Patty said, "I am powerful and strong, and I will never feel powerless again." Camille said, "I am incredibly strong, and even now, I am amazed I survived what I have survived."

Connections with family. The participants were asked about their current functioning and what/who helped them. A total of eight participants credited current family connections. Six of the 13 participants credited their children as an essential aspect of their health and healing. Tina said that she *"*made a stand to be mom,*"* while Rhonda said, "I am doing everything I can for my kids. I am a great mom, and they are my #1 priority," and Patty said, "being a mom makes me want to be out and stay out of the Life. I don't want my kids exposed to any part of that lifestyle." Two participants responded that their connections to their families were an integral part of their well-being. Ann credited her grandmother for being her *rock* and for giving her unconditional love that allowed her to heal from her trauma. Gabby stated, *"*My dad found

out I was a prostitute, and he immediately gave me his unconditional love and support, which has made all the difference in the world."

Breaking the cycle. The third theme that emerged involved a desire to *break the cycle* and be better parents than they perceived their parents to be by being aware of the abuse and neglect that contributed to their grooming into the Life. This theme evolved when the participants were describing their current functioning and life. Six of the participants embraced this theme. Helen, a mother of three young children, stated, "I am an excellent mom. That's one thing I have a lot of pride in is that I am better than my parents. I love my kids and without love, trauma cycles through the family." Rhonda, a mother of two children said "I am doing everything I can to give my kids what I didn't have. I now go to therapy to work on my stuff so that I can be a better mom to my kids than my mom was to me."

Embracing the term *Survivor*. The fourth theme involved the term *survivor*. Participants were asked directly their thoughts on the term *survivor*. The purpose of asking this question stems from a desire to know whether women who have successfully exited CSEC name themselves as *survivors* or if that is terminology only professionals use to describe women who have successfully exited, but that the women themselves do not necessarily identify with that terminology. Eleven of the participants embraced the word as a positive way of describing themselves. For Camille, a married mother of two, the word meant, "We are *survivors* because a lot of people don't make it out. Some get dragged further down that black hole. Some kill themselves or are murdered. It's very scary to think of how it could have ended." Rhonda stated:

> We are survivors, strong soldiers in a long hard war but the outcome is that we are glad to survive and defeat what was designed to break us. It fits me because I could have let me take me down and I lose myself. I survive something I didn't know how to prepare to survive. I took a chance believing that it was something

> to advance my level in the game. I wanted to sell drugs and be more of boss. But I survived because it was designed to break me and weaken my mind as a woman and what my chances of life could be.

Sophia, a young women who lived in her car with her beloved dog, said, *"Survivor,* 'cause we survived something so much worse than hell", Cora said, "*Survivor*, because so many of us don't get out," and Rhonda said, "I am a *survivor* of the situation and I got out." The prevailing theme appeared that the terminology truly fit their experience and successful exit. All the participants appeared very proud of their successful exit from CSE and vocalized sadness of those they knew who did not successfully exit. There were two participants (Mary and Gabby) who felt the term *survivor* was too encompassing and that their past did not identify them. Mary said, "Everyone is a *survivor* of something*."* For Gabby:

> Everybody is a survivor. I don't like the word survivor. I survive every day and everybody survives every day. Everyone is a victim, everybody's been through something. Why label yourself as survivor? Everybody has a story, my story is not your story, but everybody has a story. This word is used very loosely because everyone uses it says they are not a victim now, but if you say you are a survivor you are saying you are a victim. My past is just what I went through. It's part of my story, but that's not who I am now .

Describing the Life

The second category was made up of a set of interview questions where participants were asked where they were living upon recruitment into the Life. There were two questions, I asked, "What does the phrase being in the life mean to you?" and "With whom were you living before you entered the Life? These two questions were followed by one to two follow up questions, during the interview. All the participants expanded on their recruitment experiences and reasons for their survival while in the Life, which included pimp control, and what they saw as contributing factors. These research questions produced six themes, which described their time

and survival of the Life, contributing factors of their entry into the Life, and the grooming process.

Sex for goods. The first theme in the category emerged during the inquiry about their definition or description of the concept being in the Life. The first theme that emerged involved the phrase, *in the Life,* as being forced to have sex for goods such as money, clothes, food or other necessities or wishes. All the participants echoed similar terminology describing what the phrase in the Life meant. Jayla explained, *"*It is being forced to have sex for money, clothes, food consciously or unconsciously, willing or not willing it's still the Life. Tina said, "it's really a game, and it's all about the money. Selling myself for anything my man was willing to throw my way". Mary said, "my boyfriend got me hooked on drugs, so then I was selling myself for drugs, and it was all downhill from there," and for Gabby, "I was in the Life, you know, selling myself for anything – food, drugs, a place to stay the night – anything." Ann said, "Once you start having sex for money, you will start using drugs because of the people around you. Then, you are having sex just to support your habit".

Surviving *the game*. When being asked to describe the term the Life, all the participants endorsed language that gave emphasis to the powerlessness they felt while in the Life and feelings of being in a constant state of survival, which emerged as the second theme. Tina stated, "It's a game. It's a game of survival and making sure you survive to live another day," while Sophia responded, "a life of survival or the game of who will live and who will die. It's a scary painful, lonely life." Tina said, "it's survival, and your thoughts and feelings don't matter anymore; it's all about getting that money" and for Cora, "it's like surviving hell. Every day was a struggle to survive and stay alive—cause the smallest thing could happen and bam! You're gone. I saw too many of my friends get killed over nothing." For Tina:

> It's survival. It's really a game. It's about the money, it's about the hustle, and it's about the mentality. You have to be a strong person to be on the streets you know. You have to be on guard you know, because people try to play you, you know, pimp you out, take your money. It will take your mind, body, and soul. It will take all of you.

Pimp control. Ten of the participants spoke about pimp control, which became the third theme in the category. The participants who worked for pimps noted that they were constantly under threat, and according to Heather, "when you have someone stronger than you deciding all your moves, it is fear that keeps you in. He would threaten and beat me so I couldn't leave." For Mary, her pimp not only threatened her life but also threatened her family in case she made any attempt to leave:

> I had a man for two years and it was cruel. From the torture and beatings to pulling your hair and just trying to break you down mentally. And treat you like you ain't shit. They want to treat you like your shit. You know, after a while so it's like things are straining on you and you start looking at yourself different. You know you don't recognize yourself anymore.

For Sophia, "I was homeless and got this boyfriend, who became my manager. He controlled every part of my life to where I didn't see myself as anything more than something for sex".

Wanting to be loved. None of the participants were asked directly about reasons for recruitment into the Life; however, all the participants mentioned the desire to be loved and look good. This was a significant factor during the recruitment process, and became the fourth theme in the category. For Camille, she felt, "just like a lot of girls looking to look pretty, ride around in nice cars and have someone take care of them. And they will do whatever." Ann said, "I wanted to be loved and I liked the attention I got from the guys," and Sophia said, "I started getting the attention I wasn't getting from my foster parents, and I liked it. It took a while for me to see it was so empty, and not real." Mary said, "All I cared about was looking good and

getting that attention. It felt so good"

Contributing family factors. The sixth theme in this category involved family functioning at the time of entry in CSE. The purpose in asking these questions involved positioning the participants as experts in their own lives and their lived experiences. When asked where/with whom they were living at the time they entered the Life, all the participants elaborated on their family histories. There were three different types of contributing family factors: *family dysfunction*, *lack of attention/supervision*, and *family recruitment*.

When discussing *family dysfunction*, 11 of the participants mentioned varying problematic issues that occurred in childhood that contributed to early entry into CSEC. According to Ann, "both of my parents are drug addicts, and my mom left when I was young. My dad started doing drugs with me when I was 13." For Tina, "my dad was never around anyway, and then he went to prison. My mom tried, but she couldn't cope, and so I went to live with my grandma, who was an alcoholic." Gabby said, "my mom left when I was young; I never saw her. Her use of meth and heroine…and she is still addicted today." For Ashley, "I was molested at a young age by a family friend, and no one believed me".

Ten participants mentioned a lack of *attention/supervision* as their contributing factor in childhood to early entry into CSE. Gabby said, "my dad worked 2-3 jobs after my mom left. He tried so hard, but he just wasn't around much 'cause he was working" and according to Donna, "my mom was so sick, I had to do everything. I just felt so alone all of the time." For Helen, "my parents made their jobs and their religion more important than their kids. They spent more time doing their own thing instead of making sure they raised their kids right. They were never around."

Three participants mentioned *family recruitment* as a contributing factor to early entry into CSEC. For Ann, "my dad would pick me up and drop me off for dates. He was transportation for me and sold me to his friends who were dirt bags," while Sophia said, "my first foster father raped me and sold me when I was 8," and for Cora, "my brother's best friend became my boyfriend, and my brother knew what was going on; I think he encouraged it."

Of the 13 participants, only one had been in the foster care system for an extended length of time, while another had been in the foster care system for 2-3 weeks as an intervention by her mother. All the other participants had been living with either both parents (4), or a single parent/caregiver (9), when the recruitment into CSE occurred. Sophia, who had been in the foster care system for the longest period, did appear to have the most challenging time with current functioning. She disclosed she was homeless and unemployed, but was committed to staying away from the life and maintaining her emotional health. She also stated that being in the foster care system, *"*made it worse and made me believe that being in the life was better than being in the foster care system and suffering." Mary and Jayla stated that they should have been placed in the foster care system based on their family dysfunction, and wished they had been removed from their primary caregivers due to a history of abuse and neglect. For Ann:

> I'd been groomed for this my entire life. My parents were both addicts and my father is womanizer, and a lot of my role models of prostitutes and my mother was a dancer and god knows what else. When my mom left, it felt like I was being groomed, like my dad was buying me weird outfits when I was 13. We're talking thigh high leather stilettos. It was just bizarre. My first real trick happened when I was 15.

Ann and Sophia stated that one or both of their parents had been directly involved in their recruitment into the life by directly pimping them out to customers.

All the participants disclosed a range of abuse and/or neglect during their upbringing and stated that the abuse/neglect were the contributing factors to their vulnerability to being recruited

into *the Life.* The theme evolved from family functioning into initial recruitment into CSE. For Mary, her initial entry into the life was out of "defiance" to her mother, whom she felt was not involved in her life. Helen and Donna stated that had they been given "love, respect" and "an open heart" they believed they would never have entered the Life. For instance, according to Helen, despite growing up in a family with both parents, the father and the mother were preoccupied with their religion and businesses and did not take time to teach her what was appropriate and how to take care of her body. Thus, the parents did not teach her how to care for her body as *her temple*. She stated her father was not there for her emotionally, and her mother neglected to teach her about sexuality or her body and she ended up getting attention from other people who used her commercially, sexually exploiting her. Ann, who got immersed into commercial sexual exploitation at the age of 15 years observed that one of the key reasons why she found herself in the lifestyle was because her parents did not care enough to teach her and care for her emotionally. Ann stated that she felt like her parents were grooming her for commercial sexual exploitation by both being drug addicts, and her father bought her items that she stated were *inappropriate* for a 13-year-old girl including thigh-high patent leather stilettos. Ann also noted that her mother was an exotic dancer. Ann said, "I was groomed my entire life to be a *ho*. My dad did drugs with me, had girls at the house who dressed in skimpy outfits that I thought was cool, I wanted to be like them." Given this observation, one can observe that the lack of attention from the parents resulted in her getting immersed into commercial sexual exploitation as the people who should have paid attention to her emotional needs ended up contributing to her becoming CSE. The breakdown in the family, therefore, resulted in her entry into the commercial sexual exploitation industry. Ann stated that it was the substance abuse rehabilitation center and her renewed connection with her grandmother that helped her

successfully exit. On the other hand, Gabby, also noted that her family played a key role in her entry into the commercial sexual exploitation industry given the observation that she was not only neglected by her parents but they were not also there for her. According to Gabby, she was brought up by her single father, the man she considered her only real parent, and he was fully immersed in his job. He made frequent attempts to be there for her and ensure that she got the necessary attention; however, his work would not allow him to be there. Consequently, with irregular visits by her mother, who was a drug addict, was not there for her emotionally. Gabby stated her mental health also played a key role in her immersion into the lifestyle.

The grooming process. Participants were not asked directly about the grooming process; however, when discussing where they were living upon entry into the Life the grooming process was discussed and seventh theme emerged. All 13 participants discussed how they were groomed and recruited into the Life. Seven of the participants were recruited by a female friend, and 5 were recruited by a boyfriend. Sophia's foster father recruited her when she was 8 years old.

Mary, one of the participants who was recruited by a female friend, said, "it was my best friend. She told me about a party where I could make a lot of money, so I went." Donna explained, "I started hanging out with some girl friends who were older than me. The next thing I knew, I was out on the track." For Camille, who was recruited by her boyfriend, she stated, "we were homeless for a while and couch surfing. I was around all these people that I thought were awesome. I wanted to be like them, so I started dressing like them, and then met my boyfriend, who sold me into the Life. For Mary:

> I ran away from home. I met some guy by Church's Chicken. When he got out the car, he kept asking me if I wanted anything. I was like, "Shit. Some candy. I want some McDonald's." I wanted a bunch of stuff. It was all innocent stuff. He was like, "You don't want no liquor? You don't want nothing to smoke?" I had also told him I was older. That night, he asked me to go to work with him. It was downhill ever since.

Jayla said, “I met my boyfriend and he showed me stuff I had never had. It was easy to manipulate my mind from there.”

The Exiting Process

The purpose of this section was to understand all aspects of the exiting process from CSEC. Four questions, each with 1-3 follow up questions, were asked during the interview. These research questions produced 12 themes, which identified distinctive responses regarding the challenge of the exiting process. In analyzing the participants’ exit of commercial sexual exploitation, one can observe that exiting is not just a mere decision to leave. However, several variables, both external and internal, seem to have influenced the victim’s aptitude to exit and not reenter commercial sexual exploitation.

Naming one who exited. The first theme identified words to describe someone who was in the Life but not anymore. This theme is relevant, as 11 participants had described themselves as someone who has exited CSEC, and then followed with describing someone else who has exited the Life. Ann stated that someone who has exited the Life as *resilient*, while Hannah said, “miracles”, and Rhonda said, “Blessed”. Two of the participants used language slightly different than the prior positive adjectives used above. Mary, a mother of two, who works two jobs to stay out of the Life said someone who has exited the life successfully is “retired, because a lot of the girls I know who don’t do this life anymore still have the same mindset and still have pretty much all the other habits.”

Others depending on me. When asked about the participant’s experiences with exiting, including how often they attempted to exit, the dependency of others became the second theme in this category as 6 participants discussed barriers to their ability to exit. Donna noted that her inability to exit commercial sexual exploitation was mainly because she was helping her mother

with paying the medical bills due to her lupus condition. Donna stated, “my mom had lupus and I needed to hustle to get money for her treatment.” Two participants, Tina and Sophia, who noted that they were in a situation with others sharing the bills, and they were unable to exit because they needed the money to meet their various needs including housing and food.

Exiting not profitable. When asked about the participant’s experiences with exiting all the participants talked about how challenging it was to successfully exit and obtain legal employment due to their history of being in the Life, which became the third theme for this category. For Ann, she explained, “I was addicted to drugs and needed that fix. I was making like $500 to $1000 a night, and getting a job making minimum wage sounded crazy. How was I going to live?” Mary said, “I needed money and went to Atlanta and made like $2500 in two weeks. I can’t make that kind of money at a *real* job.” Sophia noted:

> I remember in the beginning when I wasn't doing drugs and was simply about money. It was all about the money, but then I developed habits, and then I needed money, and I'm sorry, but in my mind I can’t hold down a job. I couldn't completely exit because it just didn't seem profitable.

Fear keeps you in. When asked about the participant’s experiences with exiting all the participants mentioned fear as a barrier that kept them in the Life, which became the fourth theme in this category. Tina reflected, “I was afraid all the time for my life” and for Helen, “This was a life I knew – I didn’t know how to not be a ho. It was scary to imagine a square life.” Camille said when you have someone deciding your moves it’s fear that keeps you in.” Jayla said:

> I was 17 when I exited but had been trying for a long time to get out. I never wanted to start to begin with but once you’re in, you’re in. When you have someone stronger than you deciding all your moves it's fear that keeps you in. Every time I tried to leave there was someone that was stopping me. He would threaten and beat me so I couldn't leave.

Thinking about leaving. When asked about the participant's experiences with exiting 11 of the participants mentioned early desires to exit the Life, which became the fifth theme in the category. For Gabby, "I didn't think about leaving until I got arrested for the first time. I was so ashamed." But Mary noted, "I didn't think about leaving until after the first year." For Jayla:

> I first began to think about changing my lifestyle after different strange coincidences where men I worked with would attempt to contact me outside of work or I'd see them in places I would go to and feel like I'm being followed or feel like I was being paranoid.

Two of the participants, Cora and Rhonda, did not consider exiting the Life until they got pregnant with their first child, which was at age 17 for both of them. Both Cora and Rhonda were recruited into the Life at the very young age of 11 and 12, respectively.

The importance of family. When asked about the participant's experiences with exiting, 12 of the participants mentioned family in some form, as the primary motivator for their successful exit. The role of family emerged as the sixth theme with two separate forms of quality connections: emotional support and physical/tangible support. Nine of the participants discussed their ongoing connections with family while in the Life and feeling that their families still cared about them. This was incredibly significant in indicating the importance of emotional support via family connections throughout the immersion into the Life. Ann mentioned her grandmother as a significant person who encouraged her to successfully exit and supported her continued sobriety. Seven participants, who underwent the deliberate planning phase of the exiting process, reached out to family. Participants such as Patty and Ann observed that prior to exiting the lifestyle, they contacted members of their family on several occasions. Ann, on the other hand, contacted her grandmother who visited her several times during her stay in the substance abuse rehabilitation center. Ann said, "My grandmother, was a godsend. She called me and visited me during my stay. I wouldn't have made it without her."

For many of the survivors, the family connection provided physical or tangible support. Patty reported that she started deliberating on how to exit commercial sex work after meeting her brother following his release from prison and eventually exited after her brother rescued her from violent clients. "When my brother got out of prison, I immediately went to see him and told him what was going on, and I called him one night when I had a violent client. He came and helped me." For Jayla, "I was lucky enough to have a family that really cared about me. My brothers had been looking for me and well they beat the crap out of the man that brought me into this life and took me home." Donna had a younger sister for whom she became a role model, and realized she needed to get out of the Life so that her younger sister would not be vulnerable. Gabby stated that her father, after finding out about her involvement in CSE, became supportive, non-judgmental and encouraging which helped her become strong enough to successfully exit. Per Gabby, "My dad found out I was a prostitute, and he immediately gave me his unconditional love and support, which made all the difference in the world." Even though a larger number of minors, who are either coerced into commercial sexual exploitation by pimps and traffickers or immersed into it by friends, observed that it was a breakdown in the family system that led to their entry into the lifestyle, the family also plays a key role in the successful exit from commercial sexual exploitation in childhood.

Pending motherhood. When asked about the participant's experiences with exiting 6 of the participants—Helen, Tina, Rhonda, Patty, Jayla and Cora—successfully exited *the Life* due to pregnancy, and two of them—Cora and Rhonda—stated they had not seriously considered exiting prior to discovering they were pregnant. The seventh theme involved being in the Life and getting pregnant. Helen said, "I was going to be a mother. And I decided I was going to be a mother to my child unlike the mother I had. I was going to pour everything good into her." Tina

said “I was in denial until I saw the ultrasound; then it hit me. I realized then I needed to get out while I was still alive.” For Cora, “I made a stand to be a mom. My daughter’s dad disappeared after I told him I was keeping the baby, and I lost a lot of who I thought were friends but weren't.”

Wanting to be free. When asked about the participant’s experiences with exiting all the participants reported that the violence and trauma they endured impacted them greatly. The eighth theme involves wanting to be free of psychological and physical violence. For Tina, aggression from her male clients who tortured her and beat her led to her having a “mental breakdown.” Moreover, another participant, Camille, also reported that violence was one of the reasons for her desire to exit commercial sexual exploitation that resulted in her incarceration due to her association with violent individuals. Patty also noted torture and violence by her male clients as one of the reasons that led to her final exit of the commercial sexual exploitation industry. Ann also reported having witnessed violence against the victims of commercial sex exploitation by their pimps. Ann observed that the victims are violently abused by their pimps who torture them through *gorilla pimping* given that they as the victims, do not know where to go and there is nobody looking for them. As such, the victims often resort to doing whatever they are ordered to do. Owing to such violence and its effects, physically and psychologically, several of the victims of commercial sexual exploitation resorted to exiting commercial sex work as the injuries sustained from such violence and the accompanying trauma experienced firsthand or witnessed from their peers’ experiences resulted in the desire and resolution to totally exit the lifestyle. Participants such as Helen observed that it was due to the threats by her pimp that she started the deliberate planning of her exit. Helen noted that her pimp usually threatened to harm her and her family in case she attempted to exit or go against his orders, which initially kept her

in the Life but eventually the threats were too much and she opted to exit. All the participants described leaving as "the best feeling ever" and "freeing".

Sustaining exit. When asked about the participant's final experiences with exiting all the participants mentioned the difficulty of not re-entering the life due to poverty and homelessness, which became the ninth theme. For example, Mary observed that even though she had successfully exited the lifestyle, she reentered commercial sexual exploitation when she was immediately faced with the challenge of homelessness. For Sophia, "When I have been homeless, I have thought about going back. It would be so easy." Cora said, "Poverty is a huge factor, especially with a baby. When you don't have enough money, the idea of selling yourself is tempting." Mimi said, "I had an expensive drug habit, which I had to quit if I wanted to exit the Life. I did it on my own, which was so hard, but I did it 'cause I wanted out."

Professional systems not accessed. The tenth theme involves a lack of contact with professional systems. Eight participants disclosed that while they had singular contacts with law enforcement, they also disclosed they had zero engagement with professional systems such as therapy, social services, and educational counseling. Only Ann observed that the criminal justice system and the mandatory rehabilitation and counseling therapy services assisted her in exiting commercial sexual exploitation successfully. Ann stated that following her arrest for theft and a stay in juvenile hall, she began deliberating on how to change her life, as well as having the desire to successfully exit commercial sexual exploitation completely. This was after she had been incarcerated on many occasions, once for soliciting and several times for theft. After reentering commercial sex exploitation on numerous occasions following time in juvenile hall, she was offered an opportunity to stay in a substance abuse treatment center for a year. This helped her to be able to, as she explained, "feel safe, take a breath, and focus on me." The

experience in the substance abuse center was life changing as it allowed her to develop new, healthy friendships and focus on herself and healing with her grandmother. Per Ann, "After I got arrested and sent to juvenile hall, they offered me a stay in rehab for a year. I took it." Two participants, Cora and Jayla, stated that stricter legislation and more severe sentences meted out against their pimps helped support their choices to exit of commercial sexual exploitation. None of the survivors stated that another survivor aided them with their successful exit, and no one stated that community outreach programs or therapeutic services were involved with their exit from CSEC. All the participants were open, candid and forthcoming about their experiences with the Life and their exiting process**.**

Participants' Recommendations

The purpose of this section was intended to help professionals, family, and friends as well as law enforcement understand what would have been helpful during the time participants were in the Life and their exiting process. The fourth set of interview questions investigated participants' recommendations for professionals and family. Seven questions, each with two to three follow up questions, were asked during the interview. These research questions produced distinctive responses regarding the specific recommendations for professionals and family. The recommendations include: (a) *active listening*, (b) *encouragement*, (c) *non-judgment*, and (d) "*don't leave when we push you away*." Ten of the respondents replied with answers ranging from "Don't judge," "Listen." "Tell them things can change," "Don't give up," and "Be supportive and non-judgmental."

Active listening. Participants were asked for recommendations for professionals, family and friends and 10 responded with active listening or something similar. Active listening, as a concept that requires the listener to fully concentrate, understand, respond and then remember

what's being said, is vital for these amazing women who have endured such complex trauma. They stated an importance to feel *heard*, when telling their stories or sharing aspects of their past. Jayla said, "Just listen and be there; that makes all the difference in the world." Helen said, "When I speak to someone about me, about my life, I want them to hear me; I want to feel valuable." Camille said, "Some of the folks I have talked to over the years seem to be just *over it*, disconnected, I guess, with my story and experience. I hate that feeling."

Encouragement. When asked to elaborate on what they would have wanted to hear from professionals, family, and friends, 9 stated encouragement, as the action of giving someone love, support, or hope, which is vital for these women. When asked to elaborate, Ann said, "my grandma believed in me, and every time I saw or spoke to her, she told me she knew I could do it (get out of the life). That made a huge difference." Gabby said, "My dad. He took the time to find out what had happened to me, get educated, and supported me 100% from the moment I got out. I felt like I finally had someone on my side."

Non-judgment. When asked to elaborate on what they would have wanted to hear from professionals, family, and friends, 9 also stated "non-judgment." Judgment, in its simplest form, is deciding whether something or someone is *good* or *bad*. For survivors of CSE, it's essential for them to feel like they are good, and not treated *like garbage*. Gabby said, "I felt such shame and judgment from the cops when I got caught up in their sting. It was the worst feeling in the world to feel like garbage. My dad didn't judge me; he treated me like his treasured daughter, and that made all the difference. Mimi said, "You have to be accepting of people and meet them where they are. Be supportive and non-judgmental."

Don't leave when we push. Participants were asked what has helped with their recovery from being in the Life, and 12 responded with, "Don't leave when we push you away." Due to

the constant losses and trauma survivors of CSEC experience, it's not surprising that they would create walls and barriers around their emotions and feelings to avoid further pain. Sophia said, "Forget what you learned in a book. The game is always changing. As much as we push away, don't leave. We only push to avoid losing you later." Ann said, "I pushed away all of my family, my friends. I was too ashamed. It was only those few people like my grandma, who stood by my side through it all. I am only alive today because she refused to give up on me."

Anecdotal Findings

While the focus of the study was to understand factors that help with the exiting process, all the participants shared additional aspects of their personal stories, and several anecdotal findings emerged. These two anecdotal findings are significant as they were both freely shared by the participants while telling their stories, and were not prompted. The two anecdotal findings that emerged were feeling treated *like garbage* by the legal system the belief that the participant thought she was grown.

Treated like garbage by the legal system. An anecdotal theme to emerge included feelings related to interactions with law enforcement. Only 2 participants mentioned they had been in juvenile hall for solicitation, and both stated that the arrest and incarceration was incredibly damaging to them emotionally and left them with great feelings of shame. Gabby stated that upon arrest, due to the arresting officers not realizing she was a minor, treated her "like shit and garbage" until they realized she was a minor and then treated her a little better. The manner of the arrest left her feeling shame, embarrassment and "like garbage." Nine of the participants related that they had been arrested and placed into juvenile hall for other crimes such as theft, drugs, and violence. All the 9 participants relayed that the arresting officers treated them

"like garbage," which compounded how they already felt about themselves and their belief they would never exit CSE.

I thought I was grown. Another anecdotal theme that appeared based on how they were treated when they were recruited. All the participants except 2 stated that there was nothing that someone could have told them when they were in the Life to help them either avoid being recruited into the Life or help with exit. "No one could tell me nothing, I thought I was grown" (Mimi), or "I thought I knew it all" (Patty). Donna said, "I was grown. I was working the track, paying for my mom's medical bills, taking care of my little sister. It didn't matter I was 14. No one could tell me nothing."

While the impetus to exit CSE was, in most cases internally driven, for most participants, this inspiration occurred in the context of increasing awareness of external opportunities or alternatives supporting a growing belief that change could be possible. Once the young women developed an internally driven impetus to leave CSE, these same individuals or agencies provided accessible logistical and emotional resources. This pattern of findings raises an interesting point with regard to social services**.** Agencies that provide support for women and girls who are actively involved in the sex industry should not necessarily be distinct from agencies and services that support those who are exiting or have exited the sex industry. In fact, it appears from these narratives that continuous support both before and after the revelatory moment was critical for successfully exiting CSE and building a new life. This finding demonstrates the need for programs that work to foster individual motivation and empowerment and then support the self-directed change process, regardless of whether an individual's goals currently include leaving the sex industry. Unconditional support, regardless of an individual's current involvement in CSE, is critical to communicate non-judgment and empowerment.

Fostering motivation to leave CSE and then supporting action to leave CSE appear to be inter-locked, co-occurring processes, not two distinct phases.

The findings of this study indicate that healing from CSEC requires a delicate balance of building a new identity and support system, often within the context of the community where the exploitation took place. This challenge highlights the need for support networks that are embedded in the communities where CSEC is prevalent.

Many previous authors have articulated the daunting task of serving youth who are involved in CSEC, given the complex individual, interpersonal, and societal forces working to keep them entrenched in exploitation (Fong & Berger Cardoso, 2010; Kotrla, 2010; Shared Hope International, n.d.). This study's findings support this point, and raise the question of how social service providers might begin to provide the long-term, comprehensive, and multi-systemic services that appear to be necessary to effectively help sexually exploited youth. A notable finding in this study was that most participants were not in contact with a number of formal and informal resources at the time they were involved in CSE. Only 2 participants were followed by agencies such as CPS were receiving psychotherapy, attending school, or involved in the criminal justice system. These service contacts might have represented missed opportunities to engage young people and begin the process of fostering individual strength and self-esteem, as well as raising awareness of alternatives and resources that may be available to them. According to the exiting arcs described by participants in this study, this personal development and growing awareness might have been a prerequisite for successful movement away from CSE and towards building a new life. As had been suggested by many advocates (Estes & Weiner, 2002; Fong & Cardoso, 2010; Shared Hope International, 2009; U.S. Department of Justice, 2010), this theme

underscores the need for effective networking and inter-agency collaboration, as well as training on the dynamics of CSE for a broad spectrum of service providers.

Regarding differences in their exiting processes, variability in themes also fell along the lines of developmental needs of children as opposed to older minors. Those who had been exploited at younger ages were more likely to emphasize the need for holistic and positive services that build self-esteem and empowerment, and focus on broad identity development. One participant described the importance of working with the whole person and developing a multifaceted identity.

Summary of Findings

The participants in this study resided in the California Bay Area. Their ages range from 21 to 26. Years in the Life ranged from 1 year to over 8 years. The 13 participants' average age of entry into CSEC was 13 and the average age of successful exit was 17. All the participants identified as female, and when asked for their ethnicity/race 5 participants identified as African American, 1 identified as Hispanic, 2 identified as Caucasian and 4 identified as Mixed Race (Caucasian, African-American, Hispanic (1), African-American and Caucasian (2), and Pacific Islander and Caucasian (1) 1 one participant identified as Portuguese. When asked their racial/ethnic identity 7 participants identified as African American, 3 identified as Hispanic, 2 identified as Caucasian and one identified as Mixed Race (Caucasian, African-American, Hispanic). One participant identified as "American with ethnic parents" and one only identified as "mixed". Further, 7 participants identified as bisexual, 1 identified as queer, and 5 identified as straight. The researcher accepted the participants' self-identification of their ethnicity/race and sexual orientation without requesting clarification.

Emerging themes concerning their self-defined wellness include: naming of self outside the Life, connections with family, desire to break the cycle, and the term *survivor*. The summary of primary findings describing self-defined wellness (Table 4) displays the theme, a quote from one of the participants, and the number of participants who endorsed the theme.

Table 4. Summary of primary findings: Self-Defined Wellness

Theme	Theme Quote	Participants who Endorsed (out of 13)
Naming of "self" outside of the Life	"Strong. Everything I've been through has built me up and made me strong…when I have gone through money issues and sexist issues, violence, classicism, poverty, homelessness, addiction, you name it, I have been able to get to a place now where I like who I am and where I've gone". - Jayla	13
Connections with family	"My dad found out I was a prostitute, and he immediately gave me his unconditional love and support, which made all the difference in the world." - Gabby	8
Breaking "the cycle"	"I am an excellent mom. That's one thing I have a lot of pride in is that I am better than my parents. I love my kids and without love, trauma cycles through the family." - Heather	6
Embracing the term "*Survivor*"	"We are Survivors because a lot of people don't make it out. Some get dragged further down that black hole. Some kill themselves or murdered. It's very scary to think of how it could have ended. Yes because that's what you have to do to make it out." - Jayla	11

While describing the Life emerging themes include: sex for good, surviving the Game, pimp control, wanting to be loved/look good, contributing family factors, and the grooming process. The summary of primary findings describing the Life (Table 5) displays the theme, a quote from one of the participants, and the number of participants who endorsed the theme.

Table 5. Summary of primary findings: Describing the Life

Theme	Theme Quote	Participants who Endorsed (out of 13)
Sex for goods	"Exploitation, often glorified and normalized by rap music and famous personas" - Ashley	13
Surviving "the Game"	A life of survival or the game of who will live and who will die. It's a scary painful, lonely life". - Sophia	13
Pimp Control	"I had a man for two years and it was cruel. From the torture and beatings to pulling your hair and just trying to break you down mentally. And treat you like you ain't shit. You know, after a while you start looking at yourself different. You know you don't recognize yourself anymore."-Tina	10
Wanting to be loved	"Consciously or unconsciously, WILLING or NOT WILLING is still the life. Not having a option is the worst part. And in those situations, God have mercy because I've never came across that when I was. Just a lot of girls looking to look pretty, ride around in nice cars and have someone take care of them. And they will do whatever." - Jayla	13
Contributing Family Factors – Family Dysfunction	I'd been groomed for this my entire life. My parents were both addicts and my father is womanizer, and a lot of my role models of prostitutes and my mother was a dancer and god knows what else." - Ann	11
Contributing Family Factors – Lack of Supervision/Attention	"My dad worked 2-3 jobs after my mom left. He tried so hard, but he just wasn't around much 'cause he was working" - Gabby	10
Contributing Family Factors – Family Recruitment	"My first foster father raped me and sold me when I was eight" - Sophia	3

The grooming process	“At the time, I felt it was the best thing ever. Even in the hard times and I was at my lowest, I always believed I would come back and make the most money ever! I was in love with the thought of being this big boss and traveling and having nice purses and shoes and nice apartment with a driver and maybe a dog.” - Jayla	11

Emerging themes from the exiting process include: naming one who exited, others depending on me, exiting not profitable, fear keeps you in, thinking about leaving, the importance of family, pending motherhood, wanting to be free; sustaining exit, and professional systems not accessed. The summary of primary findings for the exiting process (Table 6) displays the theme, a quote from one of the participants, and the number of participants who endorsed the theme.

Table 6. Summary of primary findings: The Exiting Process

Theme	Theme Quote	Participants who Endorsed (out of 13)
Naming one who has exited	“Survivor, ‘cause we survived something so much worse than hell" - Sophia	11
Others depending on me	"My mom had lupus and I needed to hustle to get money for her treatment" - Donna	6
Exiting not profitable	I remember in the beginning when I wasn't doing drugs and it was simply about money. It was all about the money, but then I developed habits, and then I needed more money, and I can’t hold down a real job. I couldn't completely exit because it just didn't seem profitable.” - Sophia	13

Table 6. (Continued)

Summary of primary findings: The Exiting Process

Theme	Theme Quote	Participants who Endorsed (out of 13)
Fear keeps you in	“I was 17 when I exited but had been trying for a long time to get out. I never wanted to start to begin with but once you are in, you’re in. When you have someone stronger than you who decides all your moves, it's fear that keeps you in. Every time I tried to leave there was someone that was stopping me. He would threaten and beat me so I couldn't leave." -Camille	13
Thinking about leaving	“I first began to think about changing my lifestyle after different strange coincidences where men I worked with would attempt to contact me outside of work or I’d see them in places I would go to and feel like I’m being followed.” - Mary	11
The importance of family	“I was lucky enough to have a family that really cared about me. My brothers has been looking for me and they beat the crap out of the man that brought me into this life and took me home.” - Cora	7
Pending motherhood	“I made a stand to be a mom (my daughter’s dad disappeared after I told him I was keeping the baby) and I lost a lot of who I thought were friends but weren't. I picked up a job a Chili’s and worked there my whole pregnancy." - Jayla	6
Wanting to be free	"Every time I tried to leave there was someone that was stopping me. He would threaten and beat me so I couldn't leave. When my brothers came for me, it felt freeing to let that life go." - Camille	13
Sustaining exit	"When I have been homeless, I have thought about going back. It would be so easy." - Sophia	13
Professional systems not accessed	"I was never in the foster care system or got therapy when I was in the Life. - Cora	8

Recommendations for friends/family and/or professionals include active listening, encouragement, non-judgment, and don’t leave when we push. The summary of primary findings for participant recommendations (Table 7) displays the theme, a quote from one of the participants, and the number of participants who endorsed the theme.

Table 7. Participants Recommendations

Theme	Quote	Number of participants (out of 13)
Active-Listening	"Just listen and be there. That makes all the difference in the world" – Jayla	10
Encouragement	"My grandma believed in me and every time I saw or spoke to her, she told me she knew I could do it (get out of the life). That made a huge difference" – Ann	9
Non-Judgment	"You have to be accepting of people and meet them where they are. Be supportive and non-judgmental" – Mimi	9
"Don't leave when we push you away"	"Forget what you learned in a book. The game is always changing. As much as we push away, don't leave. We only push to avoid losing you later" - Sophia	12

Anecdotal findings (Table 8) include feeling treated like garbage by the legal system and they thought they were grown. The summary of anecdotal findings (Table 9) displays the theme, a quote from one of the participants, and the number of participants who endorsed the theme.

Table 8. Anecdotal Findings

Theme	Quote	Number of participants (out of 13)
Treated "like garbage" by the legal system	"When I was caught as part of a sting operation, the cops treated me like a was nothing. I was scum. I was thrown to the ground." - Gabby	9
"I thought I was grown"	"No one could tell me nothing, I thought I was grown" - Mimi	11

Exiting the Life is an extremely complex, multi-faceted process. All the participants successfully exited the Life, but many stated that if life's circumstances changed drastically, they could see themselves going back into the Life if necessary. Most of the participants appeared to be marginally stable with regard to employment and housing, and all stated they had a commitment to trying to stay out of the Life. They all expressed that they struggle to obtain gainful employment and housing, with a few of the participants stating they were homeless; one was living in her car and another was living in motels.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND MEANING-MAKING

We are survivors. Strong soldiers in a long hard war, but the outcome is that we are glad to survive and defeat what was designed to break us. It fits me because I could have let it take me down and lose myself. I survived something I didn't know how to prepare to survive. I took a chance believing that it was something to advance my level in the game (I wanted to sell drugs) and be more of a boss. But I survived because it was designed to break me and weaken my mind as a woman and what my chances at life could be –Jayla

The quote above by Jayla is indicative of the painful journey that survivors of CSEC must go through to successfully exit the Life. This study encompassed three broad intentions, namely: to describe the process of exiting and healing from the commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) from the perspectives of survivors; to inform policy and program development; and to suggest directions for future research related to this population. The following discussion is structured around these three intentions. I will first relate the integrated quantitative findings of the study to the existing CSEC literature. Next, I will discuss strengths and limitations of the study, and propose directions for future research on this population based on this study's outcomes. Finally, I will discuss applications to policy and program development.

The criteria for participation in this study required participants to have become Involved in and to have successfully exited the sex industry when they were under the age of 18, as the intention of the study was to examine the exiting experience of commercially sexually exploited children. In the data analysis process, two distinct subgroups emerged: Seven individuals who were young teens (under 15) for a substantial portion of their time in CSE, and only 1 individual became involved in CSEC at the age of 17. While not a purposeful intention of the study, the emergence of age-based subgroups in qualitative analyses provided interesting information on possible differential needs of younger minors versus older minors involved in CSE. The differences between these groups will be discussed in depth below.

Regarding basic descriptors of experience in the commercial sex industry, the sample from this study is consistent with a national sample as described by Estes and Weiner (2002), which found some CSEC were directly exploited by traffickers and some operated primarily independently, though most were controlled by a pimp or trafficker at some point during their tenure in CSE. While most were exploited locally, a few voluntarily disclosed they were trafficked to other nearby cities in regional trafficking networks, similar to Estes and Weiner's estimates. None of the participants were internationally trafficked, whereas Estes and Weiner estimated international trafficking to be about 10% of the national CSEC industry. Overall, the experiences of this sample appear to be remarkably representative of the experiences of the American CSEC population. In many studies on CSEC, generalizability is limited by the fact that samples were usually drawn from service-connected, treatment-seeking, or easily visible street-based subsets of the CSEC population. This sample differed from others in that it included individuals who were not connected with the social service system while they were involved in CSEC. This subset of the CSEC population is rarely featured in the extant literature on intervention and policy development, and, therefore, this study sheds valuable light on the needs of youth who might not have access to currently available resources.

While there is a significant body of literature on risk factors and sequela of CSEC involvement, the literature on evidence-based intervention services for CSEC is much smaller, and research on the individual internal process of exiting CSEC is nonexistent. Therefore, many themes that emerged across participants' narratives represent new salient findings that have not yet been explored in the scientific literature.

Self-Defined Wellness

All participants identified several personal qualities that they felt made it possible for

them to leave CSE, namely determination, a sense of self-efficacy, hopes for a better life, and resourcefulness. Participants' descriptions of their current lives inspire optimism for the possibility of sustained, healthy recovery for survivors of CSEC. Most participants described feeling good about themselves, being satisfied with their lives, and having positive and ambitious aspirations for the future. These assertions were not simplified or naive positive expressions; rather, most participants articulated the complexity and challenges of their current self-development processes. While many of them identified strongly in positive interpersonal terms, they also described challenges in their relationships because of their prior lives and identities in CSE. Participants articulated a challenging but healthy process of meaning-making and self-development. Even the minority of participants, who were not in a stable social or financial situation at the time of the research, articulated similar existential motivations.

These findings emulate resiliency and posttraumatic growth, which is indicative of the extreme trauma these women survived in their childhood. The impact that helping factors had on building resiliency, such as the ability to overcome and adapt amidst difficult circumstances that existed within participants' lives, facilitated their successful exit even amidst significant barriers. While barriers were specifically identified in Baker et al.'s (2010) exiting model and have been a clear focus of research in CSE exiting, the elements that provided help are not often emphasized. The women in this study spoke at length about the people, services, situations, and beliefs that helped facilitate their exit. They also discussed their identity at the time of the study in ways that indicate the absence—or mastery over—former barriers, and a nearly complete recovery from the difficulties they once experienced. This hopeful finding is important for women early in recovery and for professionals engaged in the complicated work of helping women exit the Life. This finding suggests that given the chance to build an alternate meaningful identity, these

resilient young women who are survivors of CSE, experienced posttraumatic growth and discovered how to lead stable, positive, and meaningful lives.

Describing the Life

The diversity of the sample about their exploitation experiences and access to services, the fact that themes emerged that was common to the entire sample is remarkable. It's important to note that only two questions were asked regarding the Life, and those were specific to age and with whom they were living upon entry. This was solely done to ensure no further emotional harm came to the participants by asking for information not pertinent to the study. All the participants opted to share more information about their time in the Life, their experiences, and the trauma they endured. All the participants shared that the experience of discussing their time in the Life was cathartic and healing, and that many of them had never discussed their experiences with anyone else before this study. Trauma-Informed Storytelling has been identified as a method for healing from past trauma. Telling another person what has happened in one's life can help one heal from the trauma as well as lay a foundation for new stories about what the future holds (Blanch, Filson, & Penny, 2012).

Universal themes in the categories of childhood experience and experience in CSEC were generally consistent with the existing literature on risk factors and sequela of CSEC involvement. Regarding exploiters, an interesting finding of this study was that while most participants reported having a pimp or exploiter at some point during their time in CSE, and many described experiences that differed from the typical portrayals of pimps in the CSEC literature (National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, 2002; "Why Her?," 2013). Some participants operated primarily independently but were involved transiently with pimps; others were in non-exploitative relationships that insidiously became exploitative over time; two individuals were

exploited partially by family members. The variability in experiences of participants suggests that the portrayal of exploitative relationships in the existing literature (e.g., *Romeo pimps* and *guerilla pimps*) may be oversimplified. However, it is interesting to note that of the participants who described classic coercive exploitative relationships characterized by intense emotional attachment, most were 13 years of age or younger at the time they were involved with these pimps. This finding might suggest that very young minors are more vulnerable than older minors to the types of pimps who employ psychological manipulation, coercion, and tyranny to keep their charges functionally enslaved. This pattern is consistent with frequent assertions in the CSEC advocacy literature (Lloyd, 2011; Shared Hope International, 2009; U.S. Department of Justice, 2010), as well as a small body of research (Martin, Hearst, & Widome, 2010; Miller et al., 2011; Raphael & Shapiro, 2002) , suggesting that minors are especially vulnerable to more severe forms of exploitation. This finding points to a need to educate parents, service providers who work with youth, and youths themselves, on the dynamics of manipulation and coercion, which often lead young girls into CSEC.

Many participants mentioned that part of what led them to the streets was seeking love and validation they had not received as children. They described what some authors have named the *continuum of abuse* (Estes & Weiner, 2001; United States & Office of Justice Programs, 2007) from childhood victimization to further victimization in the sex industry. For some, their histories of abuse led them to seek out fulfillment on the streets; for others, their histories made them vulnerable to entrapment by exploiters. As has been asserted by many advocates (Shared Hope International, 2012; United States Department of Justice, n.d.), this continuum of abuse suggests that CSEC awareness should be integrated into services for abused children, and that sexual exploitation should be considered another modality of abuse, as opposed to a separate

entity handled by the criminal justice system. The findings of this study from the lived experiences of participants support the need to treat children in the sex industry primarily as children, and not as sex workers. Their exploitation is more accurately framed in the context of an ongoing continuum of abuse, and services will likely be most effective when they comprehensively address multiple traumas outside of their experiences in the sex industry.

As is documented in other qualitative studies of CSEC survivors (Dalla, Baker, DeFrain, & Williamson, 2011a,b; Nixon, Tutty, Downe, Gorkoff, & Ursel, 2002; Raphael & Shapiro, 2002), the frequency of criminal victimization, including rape, assault, kidnapping, and robbery, was alarmingly high in this sample. Given that none of these experiences were asked about directly, the frequency could, in fact, be even greater than what was represented here. Despite ongoing and severe physical and psychological trauma, participants also articulated ambivalence about their involvement in the life, referencing the thrill of making money, feelings of power or empowerment, and the positive aspects of relationships with exploiters or beneficiaries. For many participants, alternative sources of positive emotion or self-esteem were not available, and their experience in CSE was their only lived experience of validation or excitement.

Regarding the transition into CSEC, participants painted a complex picture characterized by both choice and coercion. Underscoring this point, both themes of choosing voluntarily to enter CSEC and of being coerced into CSEC were endorsed by more than half of the sample, with many participants describing both. Some described entering the life by degrees, such as first choosing to gain money from informal consensual sexual acts, and then becoming entrapped by a pimp into formal exploitation. Others experienced an ambiguous slide into CSEC when a partner became exploitative and coercion was subtle and manipulative. Consistent with the majority of

sources from recent literature, these findings highlight the complexity of the concept of "choice" with regard to CSEC, framing choice in terms of constrained options and limited resources (Dank, 2011; Lloyd, 2011).

A further complicating factor was that entrance into CSEC was often not conceptually distinct from future relapses into CSEC or changes of roles, such as going from independent sex work to being *snatched up* by a pimp. While the existing literature tends to separate risk factors (Gibbs Van Brunschot & Brannigan, 2002; H. W. Wilson & Widom, 2010) from perpetuating factors (Goldenberg et al., 2015; Greene, Ennett, & Ringwalt, 1997), these appear to be complexly interrelated. Some patterns of risky behavior and vulnerability to manipulation by exploiters could be risk factors that preceded CSEC involvement, or might represent learned behaviors or traumatic responses resulting from the participant's first experience with CSEC. These overlapping precipitating and perpetuating factors make the dynamics of free choice and coercion even more complex.

Regarding childhood experiences before CSEC involvement, two universal themes emerged. First, these children experienced a lack of love or support from caregivers, whether in terms of lack of stable caregivers, overt abuse, or negative parental relationships, which is consistent with the literature on risk factors (Estes & Weiner, 2001a; Gibbs Van Brunschot & Brannigan, 2002; Nadon, Koverola, & Schludermann, 1998; Reid, 2011; Stoltz et al., 2007). This also mirrors service providers' descriptions of typical CSEC profiles (Brantley, 2009; Lloyd, 2011). Second, the presence of externalizing behaviors in childhood across the sample is also consistent with the psychological and advocacy literature (Schissel & Fedec, 1999; Shared Hope International, ECPAT-USA and the Protection Project at John's Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies, 2013; Twill, Green, & Traylor, 2010).

Regarding childhood experience, participants' narratives were characterized by pervasive trauma, instability, and negativity in childhood, lending further support to the established literature on childhood trauma as a risk factor for later CSEC involvement. In contrast to most the CSEC literature, which focuses on discrete traumatic experiences such as sexual abuse (Reid, 2011), participants in this study tended to focus on the impact of their traumatic experience rather than recounting specific traumatic events. They described experiencing lack of love, support, or stability from significant caregivers, and reported intense behavioral and emotional responses to such deprivation. Participants' focus on personally felt emotions and desires suggests that in exploring pathways into CSEC, it could be instructive to examine qualitative internal experiences, rather than quantifiable external experiences that have been the focus of most studies of risk factors for CSEC (Brawn & Roe-Sepowitz, 2008; Stoltz et al., 2007; H. W. Wilson & Widom, 2010). These findings also suggest that the construct of complex trauma, which focuses more on prolonged relational and attachment traumas as opposed to isolated traumatic experiences, is an appropriate framework for conceptualizing vulnerability to CSEC. This idea has been proposed in the advocacy literature (Clawson & Grace, 2007; Wiliamson, Dutch, & Clawson Caliber, 2010), but this study is among the first empirical investigations to support the framework of complex trauma in this population.

Many participants indicated that part of what led them to CSEC was exposure to the sex industry within their families or communities. Almost all participants came from communities in which commercial sexual exploitation was easily visible, and all the participants were directly introduced to CSEC by a female friend, boyfriend, or family member. Among those who were introduced by acquaintances, in most cases this introduction was framed in positive terms, such as suggesting an easy way to make money. This theme appears to be a central factor in the path

from early childhood abuse or deprivation into sexual exploitation; the continuum from early abuse or neglect to later CSEC involvement occurs in a context where CSEC is seen as a viable and even appealing option. This finding underscores the need for services to work with families and communities as well as directly with youth themselves. Many of the pursuits that led participants into CSEC (e.g., self-esteem, love, income) are basic needs that must be met by other means in order to provide compelling alternative options for these youth.

Within the theme of *the grooming process*, two subgroups emerged: individuals who became involved in CSEC when they were between 8 and 14 years old, and individuals who became involved in between ages 15 to age 17. While examining these subgroups was not a stated intention of this study, the emergence of two qualitatively distinct subgroups based on age provides an invaluable opportunity to examine the unique circumstances and needs of those who are exploited at younger ages. Notable differences between these groups are discussed below. Additionally, participants did not typically draw a distinction between their exploitation experiences as younger minors or older minors. However, the differences between the two groups have important implications for the development of policy and services specifically for exploited children. It should be noted at the outset that these two groups have quite small sample sizes of 7 and 6 participants, respectively, and thus, these subgroup differences are not conclusive.

Participants who entered CSEC at a younger age were more likely to have been directly and physically coerced into CSEC, rendering the question of ambiguous choice essentially irrelevant. Similarly, only this younger group was subjected to overt dehumanization and extreme abuse by their exploiters, and they were also more isolated from their communities or potential support systems. They were more likely to fall prey to Stockholm Syndrome dynamics

characterized by intense fear and love for the exploiter. These findings are consistent with suggestions by advocates that children are especially vulnerable to coercive, abusive dynamics (Lloyd, 2011; Shared Hope International, 2009; U.S. Department of Justice, 2010). On average, younger children, who have strong needs for protection and caring, and have less mature capacity for decision-making, are likely more vulnerable to the promises of protection, caring, or love that typically accompany such tyrannical and abusive behavior. Relatedly, only participants who were exploited at younger ages were coercively prevented from leaving CSEC by their exploiters. Constant surveillance by their pimps, as well as credible threats to their safety if they were to try to leave, made the idea of escape seem impossible. Given that many participants were exploited within their own communities and were aware of the far-reaching social networks of their pimps, safe escape was literally impossible for some participants, as they would easily have been identified and recaptured. This barrier emphasizes the need for secure safe houses to make escape feasible, as well as other services such as witness protection programs when survivors are called upon to identify or testify against their exploiters. Such services, while mandated by the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, are often unavailable for victims of domestic minor sex trafficking (Barnitz, 2001; Clawson & Grace, 2007; Shared Hope International, 2012).

Exiting Process

After the completion of the study, it became evident that all the participants went through the Stages of Change (Prochaska & Velicer, 1997). The participants' attempted to exit and the final successful exit of commercial sexual exploitation was clarified in the five key stages of this model. Viewing the participants through the lens of the Stages of Changes, coupled with Motivational Interviewing, was key to establishing rapport and identifying the key markers in the

Stages of Change. Motivational Interviewing is a method that works on facilitating and engaging intrinsic motivation within the client to change behavior (Miller & Rollnick, 2013).

Pre-contemplation, the initial stage, is regarded as the commencement of the journey, and has also been described as the complete immersion into the lifestyle. All the study participants interviewed went through this phase of CSE and were mostly immersed into the lifestyle by either their friends or family. The immersion does not leave room for the victims to consider exiting or even develop the consciousness to exit. Thus, a larger percentage of the participants observed that having entered the lifestyle did not make attempts at exiting, given the dangers to which they were exposed. For instance, the participants who worked for pimps noted that they were constantly under threat; according to Mary, her pimp did not only threaten her life but also threatened her family in case she attempted to leave. Moreover, the other notable reason why the participants were unable to develop awareness to exit was because they needed money to meet their basic needs such as food, shelter, or clothing. For instance, Donna noted that her inability to exit commercial sexual exploitation was mainly because she was helping her mother with paying the medical bills due to her lupus condition. Other participants, including Tina, made this observation. Tina noted she was in a situation with others sharing the bills, and her group was unable to exit because they needed the money to meet their various needs. With the above observation, it is easy to conclude that factors such as pimp control, financial challenges, and family friends are not only involved in the engagement and indoctrination into commercial sexual exploitation in this phase but also ensure that one is not able to exit.

The subsequent stage is contemplation, the visceral and conscious awareness phase. According to Williams, visceral awareness refers to the “gut” feeling that the victims of commercial sexual exploitation get about exiting because of becoming conscious about the

changes in things and environment. On the other hand, the conscious awareness refers to the augmentation of the visceral feeling of the desire to exit, and an important part of the awareness regards the verbalization of such feelings. In the study, the participants reported undergoing visceral awareness that led to the commencement of their deliberation on exiting commercial sex work. However, several divergent aspects led to the development of the visceral and conscious awareness amongst the participants. For instance, participants such as Diana became conscious about exiting commercial sexual exploitation upon being arrested because of violence and a result of her mother's death coupled with the need to be a role model for her sister. The other notable factor that led to the development of visceral and conscious awareness amongst the victims with regards to exiting commercial sex work was pregnancy. Thus, participants, including Tina, observed that it was upon becoming pregnant that they started deliberating on the need to exit and concentrate on mothering. Furthermore, the violence witnessed from the experiences of fellow victims and those experienced firsthand also acted as factors leading to the visceral awareness and conscious consideration of exiting amongst the victims including Tina, Cora, Patty and Donna.

The third phase of the model is preparation, which entails the evaluation of the informal and formal resources. The deliberate planning phase, therefore, entails the victim gathering information with the objective of finding out about the life outside commercial sexual exploitation. From the study, it can also be observed that several participants underwent the deliberate planning phase of the exiting process. That is, participants such as Patty and Ann observed that prior to exiting the lifestyle; they contacted members of their family on several occasions. Patty reported that she started deliberating on how to exit commercial sex work after meeting her brother following his release from prison and eventually exited after her brother

rescued her from violent clients. Ann, on the other hand, contacted her grandmother who visited her during her stay in the substance abuse rehabilitation center. Participants such as Helen observed that it was due to the threats by her pimp that she started the deliberate planning of her exit. Helen noted that her pimp usually threatened to harm her and her family in case she attempted to exit or go against his orders.

The fourth stage of the model is Action. According to Grant, Grabosky, and David (1999), the initial exit phase is both delicate and complex in nature given the observation that it entails the commencement of the victim utilizing informal support services including moving in with friends or family who are not *in the life*. Evidently, the work carried out in the initial phase of deliberate planning might be vital to the success of the victim during this phase of the exiting process, especially in instances where the needs of the victim turns out to be increasingly extensive, for instance, employment skills, housing, psychological health challenges and substance abuse. This phase additionally entails the testing of the internal motivation and desires of the women trying to exit commercial sexual exploitation. Moreover, the initial phase of exit also captures that realism of the "entry-exit-re-entry" phase of CSE, as well as the variability of exiting the commercial sex exploitation industry. In the study, many the participants reported undergoing the initial exit stage. For instance, Helen, Tina, Patty, and Mary observed that they experienced the initial exit phase when they exited commercial sexual exploitation because of certain changes in their environment including incarceration, and later reentered the lifestyle upon being released from juvenile hall.

The next phase might involve relapse, which tends to capture the exit process' reality. Holger-Ambrose, Langmade, Edinburgh and Saewyc (2013) observed that the reentry into commercial sex exploitation might either lead to the total re-immersion into the life, or it might

stimulate the sense of hopelessness along with being trapped and stuck. Thus, despite the consciousness of the requirement to change, the victim might lack the necessary initiative, confidence, essential resources, and coping abilities to enable her to partake in the deliberate planning. Thus, despite portraying the wish to exit commercial sexual exploitation, the victim's lack of action might make her or him a challenge to the support providers. Despite successful exit of the commercial sexual exploitation because of aspects such as incarceration several of the participants in the study observed that they later reentered the lifestyle. For instance, Mary observed that even though she had successfully exited the lifestyle, she reentered commercial sexual exploitation when she was immediately faced with the challenge of homelessness.

The last phase is maintenance, and it normally takes place following a sequence of entries and exits of commercial sexual exploitation. The challenges that the victim faces following the initial exit attempt are linked to several barriers. Thus, the definition of the certain parameters that delineate the final exit can be hard to describe. Thus, though the final phase is marked as the final exit within the model, the victim's reentry into commercial sexual exploitation is still feasible. All the participants in the study reported having been successful at exiting commercial sexual exploitation. The durations following their final exit and the reasons that led to the decision also tended to vary considerably. The participants' involvement in the study could be viewed as a form of Maintenance in the Stages of Change, as they continue to identify and distance themselves from the Life.

Six of the participants stated that solely becoming pregnant was enough to finally exit CSE. They described a process of realizing the negative consequences of their involvement in CSE, particularly related to the threat of violence or death. This was followed by initiating a process of developing a new identity, drawing on the internal resources mentioned above, as well

as on informal social support, and formal therapy and case management services. Regarding the process of leaving CSE, a pattern of themes that differed from most previous research was the emphasis on internal and personality factors. Participants' narratives emphasized positive descriptors of themselves, including determination, hopes and ambitions, strength, resourcefulness, insight, and faith. In many cases, participants described being out of touch with, or not believing in these aspects of themselves at the time when they were being exploited. They also described fluctuations in their own strength and positive sense of themselves, resulting in variability in the arc of their exiting process. This is consistent with the research on women who have experienced significant trauma (Linley & Joseph, 2004).

Also interesting was the interface between these variables and external resources such as significant others, agencies, and logistical matters. Specifically, most participants described revelatory experience or turning points such as pregnancy or incarceration, which allowed them to channel their internal resources, in turn driving them to access necessary external resources to begin the process of exiting. These external resources included family, social support, strong and consistent relationships, and access to supply of basic needs. Unsurprisingly, participants relied on support from others to make their exit from CSE possible, both in terms of social/emotional support, and in terms of logistical support around money, housing, or safety.

From a collectivist approach, it makes sense that most of these participants accessed supportive family and friends for help with the exiting process, especially when considering the added perspective of considering culture (Engelbrecht & Jobson, 2016). Also, in viewing the survivor's experience of exiting through a trauma lens, going home to friends and/or family makes the most sense from the perspective of racial identity, since all but two of the participants identified as something other than Caucasian. In fact, in a study conducted by Nadeem et al.

(2007), findings revealed that there was a significant cultural stigma attached to accessing mental health care amongst low income migrant and U.S. born Black and Latina women.

None of the participants mentioned traditional psychotherapy, case management or therapeutic services in their narratives of exiting. Additionally, many participants relied on logistical support from service organizations, particularly those who provided supportive housing, job training or placement, and education or skills training. Many participants agreed that the most effective social services are those that provide both stable, nonjudgmental care, and concrete logistical resources. When asked about factors that impeded their exiting process, many participants mentioned the lack of such resources as an obstacle, including lack of social support and inability to meet their *basic needs* or maintain safety. Considering Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs, which identifies food, water, warmth, and rest (physiological) and security and safety as *basic needs*. When assessing the participants' reasoning for staying in the Life, exchanging sex for food, shelter, clothing or protection (with a pimp), seems understandable. It is important to recognize that even when providers are offering stable housing and food, that the concept of safety is also addressed.

Many of the participants also described judgmental or pushy service providers as not only unhelpful, but hurtful to their exiting process, stating that they would rather have no help than have people with negative or judgmental attitudes help them. In contrast, many who had positive experiences with individual service providers and agencies credited these compassionate and understanding providers with helping them sustain a successful exit from CSEC.

Experiences of fear, isolation, depression, and entrapment played into the exiting process in complex ways. For many, realization of the potential consequences of their situation at the time of the study, particularly about immediate physical danger, was the factor that spearheaded

their exit. Many participants said some variant of "I realized I didn't want to die." However, these same dynamics of fear or entrapment, whether literal or perceived, were also factors that made it impossible for some children to successfully exit the sex industry. Similarly, some experienced growing disillusionment with the superficial glamor of the sex industry, or with their relationships with their exploiters. However, for some who had had few experiences of positive validation, success, or healthy relationships, these factors also had an ongoing draw that made exiting difficult. While increased self-esteem and sense of self-efficacy were major factors in the exiting process for almost all participants, many also mentioned that a lack of self-esteem or self-efficacy, particularly in the face of victimization or failure to follow through on goals or inspirations, kept them from initiating or persevering in their exiting process. Many participants described a fluctuation of these intrapsychic factors, in which the motivation to leave CSE waxed and waned according to current circumstances. This finding further underscores the need for consistency and ongoing support regardless of an individual's current involvement in CSE and is supported by Rafferty's (2013) research.

To complete the process of exiting CSE and begin to heal, participants described the need to build a new life, identity, and community. The participants offered different responses regarding thoughts of exit. Some had considered exiting the Life for years, and some didn't consider exiting until pregnancy. The depth of this process of transformation was underscored by many participants who described this as starting their whole lives over or reversing everything in their lives. This theme illustrates an important point, that exiting CSE is not a simple process of behavior change; rather, it is an intensive process that impacts the individual, her community, and all spheres of her life. Some participants described not knowing who they were once they left the life, and needing to rebuild a sense of self from the ground up. Others mentioned the need

to cut off contact with their entire community and build a new support system from scratch. When they wavered in the security of their new identities, or when they struggled to find support after separating from their previous social support systems, they found themselves vulnerable to relapse. Since many of these individuals were young minors at the time they became involved in CSEC, most of them had no experience with a mature positive identity or social network, meaning that many were attempting to build something they could name but could not necessarily envision.

This conundrum raises important questions for service providers regarding multi-level services that consider the individual in the context of her community. Many services focus on helping the individual heal from the trauma she experienced in the sex industry and on helping connect her with resources (Lebloch & King, 2006; Saewyc & Edinburgh, 2010; Thomson, Hirshberg, Corbett, Valila, & Howley, 2011; Twill et al., 2010). While these services are crucial, they do not necessarily address the question of community building.

The findings of this study indicate that recovery from CSEC requires a delicate balance of building a new identity and support system, often within the context of the community where the exploitation took place. This challenge highlights the need for support networks that are embedded in the communities where CSEC is prevalent.

A notable finding in this study was that most participants were not in contact with many formal and informal resources at the time they were involved in CSE. Only 2 participants were followed by agencies such as child protective services (CPS), were receiving psychotherapy, attending school, or involved in the criminal justice system. By examining the Alameda County District Attorney's *SafetyNet*, research by the Alameda County District Attorney's Office (www.heatwatch.org) suggested that collection and maintenance of data on commercially

sexually exploited children (CSEC) and interagency data sharing is essential to addressing the problem of child sex trafficking. SafetyNet identified 482 CSEC from 2011-2014 and determined that only 10% had zero formal systems involvement, 40% had social services involvement, and 63% had probation involvement. Of the 482 identified CSEC, only 320 (67%) had any known education data. It is important to note, that youth identified as CSEC by SafetyNet, were identified as CSEC in some form (medical, education, and/or law enforcement). Due to the very low number in this study who had any kind of systems involvement, it is safe to assume that the number of youth who are CSEC is much, much higher who have not been identified.

There are many CSE youth who are not in contact with professionals who need help with successful exit and/or are using other resources besides professionals. These service contacts may represent missed opportunities to engage young people and begin the process of fostering individual strength and self-esteem, as well as raising awareness of alternatives and resources that could be available to them. According to the exiting arcs described by participants in this study, this personal development and growing awareness could be a prerequisite for successful movement away from CSE and towards building a new life. As has been suggested by many advocates (Estes & Weiner, 2002; Fong & Cardoso, 2010; Shared Hope International, 2009; U.S. Department of Justice, 2010), this theme underscores the need for effective networking and inter-agency collaboration, as well as training on the dynamics of CSE for a broad spectrum of service providers.

Regarding differences in their exiting processes, variability in themes also fell along the lines of developmental needs of children as opposed to older minors. Those who had been exploited at younger ages were more likely to emphasize the need for holistic and positive

services that build self-esteem and empowerment, and focus on broad identity development.

Limitations and Delimitations

This study had a multitude of strengths that distinguish it among the body of research on commercially sexually exploited youth. First, this is one of a few known inquiries to date to empirically explore the process of exiting and healing from CSEC directly from the perspective of survivors. The exploratory nature of the study, and the lack of imposed theory or structure on the data, ensured that the results of this study represent the organic narratives of the participants. Thematic Analysis is explicitly intended to describe the lived experience of participants within their cultural contexts, while reducing the effects of individual bias and groupthink on the interpretation of participants' narratives. Additionally, the depth and complexity of themes yielded from thematic analysis, revealed a nuanced and detailed representation of the emergent thematic patterns in participants' narratives. Thus, the findings of this study are assumed to represent the experience of participants with rigor and fidelity (Hill, 2012). In addition, the inclusion of basic quantitative data assists in drawing parallels between participants' self-described experiences and their interface with services identified in the existing literature. Overall, this methodology's combination of hermeneutic focus on participant narratives with rigorous structured methods lends itself well to "consequential validity," or the applicability of findings to social change or political activism (Hill, 2012).

The recruitment and composition of the sample was another notable strength of this study as compared to other studies on services or recovery among CSEC survivors. While most studies have examined specific programs and, therefore, had an inherent bias towards the approaches of these programs, I used a purposive sampling approach including recruiting participants only from the community. The resulting sample was like previously described samples of CSEC in

Alameda County and in other urban areas nationwide in terms of demographics and exploitation experience. In contrast to most samples, however, the participants in this study had a broad variety of experiences regarding the reasoning behind their exiting processes. This diversity of experiences enhances the assumed validity of this study's findings regarding generalized factors that support exiting and recovery from CSEC, as opposed to confirming the practices of a specific organization or approach to intervention.

The roots of this inquiry in community-based research, in conjunction with the extensive measures implemented to counteract biases and expectations, strengthen its trustworthiness and its applicability to advocacy in the field of services for CSEC survivors. First, in conducting these interviews, I was open with participants about the fact that I was involved in CSEC-related residential care, and that the purpose of the study was to use survivors' expertise to inform this work. Several participants communicated that my role made them more likely to choose to participate, and also made them more detailed or outspoken in their interviews. The inclusion of these participants enhanced the richness of the data and helped elucidate thematic connections between the lived experiences of participants.

While the sample composition in this study had several strengths, it was also the source of the study's notable limitations. The experiences of participants with regard to commercial sexual exploitation in childhood were quite heterogeneous, ranging from participants who were forcibly exploited as young children to ones who began being exploited while in their 17th year. While this led to interesting and unexpected findings related to older and younger-onset subgroups, it was not the intention of the study to capture such a variety of experiences, and this heterogeneity likely limited the number of universal themes that could be gleaned from the sample.

Further, it is likely that the narratives of individuals who chose to volunteer to participate in this study are not necessarily representative of the experience of CSEC survivors, in general. The sampling methods used, while cast wider than in most studies, would be more likely to reach individuals who have a network of friends who are also CSEC survivors, and/or who are motivated and able to share their stories at length with a stranger. Survivors who remain isolated, are not connected to services, or have psychological or interpersonal struggles that limit their ability to share their stories are not represented in this sample. It is possible that some young women might have exited CSEC in entirely different ways than the sample represented in this study, and these individuals might have been less likely to volunteer to share their experiences.

Another limitation of this study is the significance of the lack of social services and/or probation systems involvement. In this study, only one participant had a significant length of time (3+ months) in the foster care system. Consequently, she was the participant who appeared to struggle the most with current functioning, homelessness, and stability. While the statistics estimate that 41-98% (www.kids-alliance.org) of all CSEC are or have been in the foster care system, this study had much lower prior involvement. One potential reason for this anomaly could be that youth, who are recruited while in the foster care or probation system, have a much more challenging time with a successful exit prior to the age of 18.

Despite the small size of the sample in the present study, it appeared to be reflective of the broader population of urban CSEC, both in term of demographics and exploitation experience. Demographically, the participants closely resembled other samples previously collected in the East San Francisco Bay Area by agencies serving sexually exploited youth (Brantley, 2009; WestCoast Children's Clinic, 2012). Like these much larger samples, the 13 individuals in this study included predominantly African American and multiracial individuals,

one of whom identified as Black and White, one who identified as Mexican and White, and 2 who self-identified as multiracial, with an underrepresentation of Whites and Asians relative to the regional population. Unlike MISSSEY Inc.'s sample of youth served from 2006-2008, the majority identified as bisexual, with a minority identifying as heterosexual. Like MISSSEY's and WestCoast's samples, most participants described being raised in part by their family of origin, but most had also run away and one had spent time in foster care. The composition of this sample was also grossly consistent with demographic estimates in other urban areas in the United States, with an overrepresentation of youth of color who come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds (Estes & Weiner, 2001a; Gragg, Petta, Bernstein, & Eisen, 2007; Shared Hope International, 2009). Since only female-identified youth were recruited for this study for the purposes of sample homogeneity, gender distribution could not be compared to other samples. While the small sample sizes employed in qualitative studies are not intended to be truly randomized from the population from which they are drawn (Mertens, 2010), the demographic consistency between this study's sample and previous estimates suggests that this sample meets basic premises for transferability to the local population of sexually exploited youth.

The findings of this study are applicable, specifically to improving services for individuals who were already involved in the commercial sex industry; they do not speak directly to the question of fighting CSEC at its roots.

Delimitations could have resulted from decisions employed to ensure the efficient completion of this study in a timely manner. First, the researcher opted to only include females to add to the current body of research regarding CSEC. It is vitally important to note that males, as well as youth who are transgender and gender fluid, are also CSEC. However, such vulnerable populations may be more challenging to access or recruit. The study stayed focused solely on the

California Northern Bay Area, to be able to compare results with known data from the area. The participants were limited to ages 21-26, as an attempt to ensure accuracy with memory recollection because of close proximity to experience of CSEC. Had time not been of the essence, further steps could have been involved to permit participants who were older and could ensure efficient recollection.

Implications for Future Research and Practice

When considering implications for practice, this study uniquely positioned participants as experts. Regarding services, all participants emphasized the need for providers to be patient and empower youth to make self-directed change. This pattern of self-initiated change in the context of external support has not been well documented in the literature. It is, however, resonant with the recommendations of service providers and advocacy organizations, which suggest that services for CSEC youth must be long-term, consistent, meet basic needs, and be understanding of behavioral issues in this population (Barnitz, 2001; Clawson & Grace, 2007; Fong & Berger Cardoso, 2010; Lebloch & King, 2006; Lloyd, 2011), with unconditional support and sensitivity to the dynamics of relapse (Kalergis, 2009; Lloyd, 2011; Shared Hope International, 2012)**.** While a young woman's developmental needs are unlikely to vary substantially between ages 17 and 18, her access to resources within the social services system changes radically on her 18th birthday. The relative dearth of comprehensive and developmentally oriented services for legal adults is particularly problematic in the case of individuals who did not have a chance to undergo typical developmental tasks during their childhood and adolescence. As many sexually exploited youth are forced to behave as adults prematurely, they may reach adulthood without meeting adaptive developmental milestones. In short, children and adults who are exploited are, in many cases, the same individuals at two different points in time. Participants' narratives suggested that

similar services could be appropriate for CSE survivors of all ages. For example, vocational or monetary support services, which are typically offered primarily for adults, may be appropriate for some minors. Similarly, services typically offered for children, such as family therapy or enriching activities, may be just as beneficial for young adults. However, it is important to note that only two participants mentioned support services (therapeutic/vocational/monetary) as a recommendation, thus was not included as an emerging theme.

From the perspective of the researcher, some published survivor narratives have presented the complex combination of extreme experiences (e.g. Lloyd, 2011), research and policy tend to avoid addressing this ambivalence, as it may appear to support the ideas that CSEC are choosing their lifestyle or do not require help. However, a subtler understanding of the dynamics that keep a child entrenched in CSE is necessary to fully comprehend their experience and provide effective help. Regarding people's *choice* to enter or leave the CSEC industry, the motivations to stay are complex, and usually fall somewhere between free choice and total coercion. Service providers need to consider what needs are being fulfilled by each young woman's involvement in the sex industry, such as a need for self-esteem or external validation. This study joins a small body of research (Goldblatt, 2014 & Lloyd, 2014) that supports the need for services to provide positive social experiences, build alternative skills, and build self-esteem as critical components of helping survivors develop a new identity outside of the sex industry.

An additional finding from the participants with implications for services emerged from the group who were exploited at younger ages. They were more likely to mention family support as important in their exiting process in the form of being cared for by an adult, consistent with their developmental needs. In contrast, participants whose exploitation occurred mostly as older minors were more likely to emphasize the need for logistical support such as income and

housing. They also stressed the importance of service providers being non-judgmental, but put less emphasis on services for encouraging change. Instead, they placed more responsibility on the individual to access services and take responsibility to change her life. Taken together, these findings suggest that younger survivors have a need for more caring and support from providers who take on a parental role, meeting developmental needs that may have been thwarted by their experiences in CSEC. These emergent differences between groups should not be interpreted as a strict age cut-off point between younger minors and older minors. Rather, they emphasize the additional needs of individuals who are exploited at a younger age as compared to those exploited when a little older. These findings certainly have important implications for services for current minors who have been sexually exploited, which are largely consistent with existing recommendations from advocates (e.g., Lloyd, 2011; Shared Hope International, 2009). However, increasing such services for younger minors is only part of the solution; many of the individuals who were exploited at very young ages (as young as 8 in this sample) did not begin their exiting processes until close to their 18th birthdays. These findings highlight the importance of considering the effects of complex developmental trauma, and accurately identifying individuals who require the comprehensive and holistic services needed to effectively address chronic and severe traumatization. These findings also suggest that young victims of commercial sexual exploitation are especially vulnerable to this kind of extreme victimization and are likely to require intensive and comprehensive intervention, regardless of their age at the time when they access therapeutic services.

To build a credible evidence base for *best practices* for intervention with sexually exploited youth, ongoing research on this topic is sorely needed. Advocates have long asserted that such an evidence base is critical to support funding and public awareness of the resource-

intensive comprehensive services that are needed to effectively serve this population (Barnitz, 2001; Estes & Weiner, 2001a; Kotrla, 2010; Williamson & Prior, 2009). The most important factors for resource providers include the vital connection to family. Providers would be well suited to provide psycho-education to families of girls caught up in the Life, establishing ways families can leave messages for girls at community locations and the girls can do the same for loved ones, and greater education for communities and families preparing to receive their daughters post exit from the Life.

Lending support to the need for resource intensive clinical services, this study found that specialized services for CSEC must be comprehensive and consistent over time, involve family in some form, involve strong interpersonal relationships, be closely connected with other community resources, and be developmentally appropriate in support of fostering growth of identity and community. Such therapeutic services require a great deal of financial and personal resource investment. Given the intensive needs described by the participants in this study, it is not surprising that resources for CSEC in almost all American communities fall far short of the scope of the problem (e.g., Estes & Weiner, 2002; U.S. Department of Justice, 2010).

To effectively replicate and expand upon these findings, several approaches could be appropriate. First, further open-ended qualitative inquiries would be informative, to build upon the initial base of participant perspectives established by this study. Such replicative studies could utilize samples from different areas of the country, using different recruitment methods, or with more stringent selection criteria that effectively define a homogenous sample. Second, follow-up quantitative research with larger sample sizes will be necessary to propel advocacy efforts. Existing programs for CSEC survivors could contribute greatly to this endeavor by tracking their successes and failures, and publishing their outcomes or making their data publicly

available. However, the results of this study suggest that programmatically focused inquiries are necessary but not sufficient to document the needs of this population. Aside from formal service provision, other emergent themes included intrapersonal factors such as motivation and self-efficacy, interpersonal patterns including coercion and positive social support, and the ascribed meaning of the experience in terms of identity and community development To address these multiple factors from an integrative approach using larger samples, it will be necessary to develop structured methods or measures to document such a variety of variables reliably. As no such measure yet exists, future research should first focus on further qualitative inquiries from survivor experts and comprehensive outcome data from existing programs, as steps toward developing and validating tools for larger-scale research.

While the impetus to exit CSE was in most cases internally driven, for most participants, this inspiration occurred in the context of increasing awareness of external opportunities or alternatives, supporting a growing belief that change could be possible. Once the young girls developed an internally driven impetus to leave CSE, these same individuals or agencies provided accessible logistical and emotional resources. This pattern of findings raises an interesting point regarding social services: agencies that provide support for women and girls who are actively involved in the sex industry should not necessarily be distinct from agencies and services that support those who are exiting or have exited the sex industry. In fact, it appears from these narratives that continuous support both before and after the revelatory moment was critical for successfully exiting CSE and building a new life. This finding demonstrates the need for programs that work to foster individual motivation and empowerment and then support the self-directed change process, regardless of whether an individual's goals currently include leaving the sex industry. Unconditional support, regardless of an individual's current

involvement in CSE, is critical to communicate non-judgment and empowerment. Fostering motivation to leave CSE and then supporting action to leave CSE appear to be inter-locked, co-occurring processes, not two distinct phases. This follows distinct humanistic principles by using unconditional positive regard and being client centered (Horny, 1990).

Many previous authors have articulated the daunting task of serving youth who are involved in CSEC, given the complex individual, interpersonal, and societal forces working to keep them entrenched in exploitation (Fong & Cardoso, 2010; Kotrla, 2010; National Institute of Justice, 2007; Shared Hope International, 2009; U.S. Department of Justice, 2010). This study's findings support this point, and raise the question of how social service providers might begin to provide the long-term, comprehensive, and multi-systemic services that appear to be necessary to effectively help sexually exploited youth.

In addition to further general research on effective services for CSEC survivors, several specific questions were posed by this study that are not yet addressed in the existing literature. First, concerning the interface of internal motivation with accessibility of services, this study raised questions about how and when services are helpful, not simply whether they are helpful for this population. Future research could examine multiple axes of services and personal motivation/engagement in services, or could examine the experience of individuals longitudinally from when they are first connected to services until they stably leave the sex industry. Secondly, results of this study regarding incarceration and the justice system were mixed. Only 2 participants described the experience of being incarcerated as a motivator that was instrumental in their deciding to leave CSE, framing it as a factor that helped motivate them to exit. However, participants also generally rated incarceration as "bad or hurtful," and described the experience of being in jail as distinctly negative. This raises important questions regarding

the role of incarceration in intervening with CSEC. Is incarceration a perpetuation of societal victim blaming, or is it an important *wake up call* without which the motivation to exit CSE might not arise? In the absence of alternative secure facilities such as safe houses, the debate over whether incarceration is a valid form of intervention is ongoing and inconclusive (Halter, 2010; Mitchell et al., 2010). This study reflected the complicated nature of this debate. Finally, this study raised interesting questions about the validity of the distinction between younger children and older minors in studying CSE. On one hand, participants in this study drew no distinctions between their childhood and a teen exploitation, tending to see all of it as fundamentally exploitive and negative. On the other hand, notable differences were found between the subgroup of participants who were involved in CSEC at a younger age as compared to those who became involved when they were nearly adults, suggesting that the exploitation of children could be conceptually different on average from the exploitation of older minors. The younger minors discussed coercion and control as early recruitment tactics, and a lengthier time in the Life compared to the older minor's. This question warrants further research into the perspectives of survivors and providers on the issue of childhood distinctions in CSE.

Recommendations for Future Action

While this study's main intention was to explore the process of exiting and recovery and to make recommendations for interventions, participants' narratives addressed issues related to many other aspects of the social service system and the community in general. In the following section, I extrapolate from participants' narratives to make recommendations for addressing the issue of commercial sexual exploitation at several levels: prevention, identification, intervention, maintenance, and advocacy. I will then disclose and discuss my intentions for utilizing this project as a catalyst for advocacy efforts.

Prevention

Many participants in this study emphasized the connection between their experiences of abuse, neglect, or instability in childhood and their eventual paths into sexual exploitation. Factors that led to their initial involvement in CSEC included a lack of love or self-esteem, as well as a lack of material resources when they found themselves without support from family or from the social service system. These findings support the assertion that CSEC prevention must begin at the level of services for girls who are living in poverty or are abused and neglected. The findings of this study do not pinpoint a particular profile of a girl who is at high risk for CSEC; rather, it appears that many of America's most underserved girls may be at risk, regardless of their particular experiences of trauma. Most participants in this study reported other externalizing behavioral issues prior to their involvement in CSEC; these behaviors could be seen as early warning signs of vulnerability to exploitation. Positive or therapeutic responses to such behavior, as opposed to disciplinary intervention, could serve to communicate value and self-efficacy to young girls, possibly reducing their future vulnerability. Additionally, many participants were exposed to the sex industry in their families or communities, and thus, saw CSEC as a viable option for pursuing both material needs (e.g., money) and non-material, experienced needs (e.g., self-esteem). This finding suggests that there may be a dearth of alternative avenues towards meeting such needs in communities where sexual exploitation is prominent. Free, accessible, and culturally appropriate activities or vocational opportunities could help to fill this void in underserved communities. Based on this research, providers must be capable of working with complex trauma and provide therapeutic services from the perspective of trauma-informed care (Hummer, Dollard, Robst, & Armstrong, 2010).

Many participants articulated a lack of love from caregivers in their childhoods, which

included both biological family members as well as caregivers in the foster care or group-home system. This finding suggests that interventions in the caregiving system could be an important component of CSEC prevention. Some parents may benefit from having access to resources to support them in developing effective parenting skills, such as therapeutic services for parents or families, educational interventions to encourage positive parenting practices, or financial and housing support to reduce the severity of stressors on families. Child protective services might require more resources to effectively intervene to protect children in cases where abuse is severe or intractable to intervention. Additionally, foster parents and group home staff members often lack necessary support, training, or screening to ensure that children are provided with their basic interpersonal needs and not subjected to further abuse or deprivation within the system. Finally, some participants who were abused or neglected by their caregivers could find support from alternative caregiver figures through other avenues such as church, temple or synagogue; further resources for youth services in general could help to provide holistic support for youth from vulnerable communities. Overall, the results of this study suggest that social service entities such as schools, child protective services, or the juvenile courts, are not currently adequately able to meet the needs of disadvantaged young girls. Investing in improving these systems might be the first step towards combating vulnerability to CSEC. The information disclosed by the participants regarding their contributing family factors matches the available literature on the subject, specifically results from research conducted by Estes and Weiner (2002), Shared Hope International ((2009) and Raphael and Shapiro (2002).

Identification

Only a few participants in this study were connected with governmental and community organizations at the time they were involved in commercial sexual exploitation. Despite this,

service providers did not identify them as youth who were exploited, and they did not receive specialized CSEC services. Notably, no participants were referred to specialized CSEC services through the child protective services (CPS) system, through their schools, or through their therapists or case managers. This finding suggests that greater collaboration is necessary between these different social service entities to effectively identify and refer youth who need specialized care. It is also notable that several participants remained largely unconnected with any services during their exploitation, were never identified by CPS, and did not receive services until they actively sought them out as soon as they became adults. This theme, while atypical, indicates that the scope of efforts to identify abused and exploited children must be expanded. Another recommendation would be to avoid re-traumatizing youth who have been identified as CSEC with the retelling of their stories. Once a youth has been identified as CSEC by one of various systems, it is common for the various systems to not communicate. For example, after CPS has identified a youth as CSEC, if that youth is then picked up by law enforcement, the youth must retell their stories. If their health care provider, per Senate Bill (SB) 795, identifies a youth as CSEC they are referred to CPS, where they again have to tell their story. A central repository would be most beneficial to capture the information a single time, and eliminate the need to re-traumatize these youth.

Intervention

Effective services for sexually exploited girls and women need to provide stable, long-term, and easily accessible care, which is available to each survivor regardless of her current involvement in CSE or her current motivation to leave CSE. Participants emphasized the complexity of the revelatory process that leads to the decision to leave CSE, and the need for reliable emotional and logistical resources before, during, and after this decision point. Relatedly,

consistency in programming and staffing at agencies that serve vulnerable youth is critical. Staff workers that were consistently available, positive, encouraging, nonjudgmental, and empowering helped participants most. This finding suggests that organizations need to support staff members sufficiently to encourage tenure in their positions and decrease burnout; in turn, of course, this change would require additional funding for such agencies to adequately support their staff and keep caseloads to a manageable level. A key result of this study is that without such qualities in staff members, services become not only inefficient but also essentially ineffective. Relationships with strong, caring, trusted staff members were critical for most participants' exiting processes. Research conducted by Thomson et al. (2011) supports this finding through their research of the Germaine-Lawrence CSEC Residential Treatment Program in Massachusetts. Motivational interviewing, as an evidence-based practice was designed to help people identify their readiness, willingness, and ability to change. For the service system to make use of change talk is an excellent resource for a potential unified approach for providers serving CSEC (Center for Evidence-Based Practices, 2017).

The complexity of participants' paths out of CSE underscores the point that services must be available to survivors at all points in their exiting process. This theme suggests that there should be continuity between services for girls/women who are in the Life, who are exiting the Life, or who have already exited the Life. Services must provide a supportive context for individuals to choose to exit CSE, and then provide an equally supportive environment for them to act upon this motivation and minimize barriers to success. Given that relapse is expected in the exiting process, the consistent availability of resources regardless of current CSE status is critical. Similarly, CSEC services must not be bound by the requirement that those exiting demonstrate efficacy based on outcomes of successful exit, particularly, not on short time scales.

In examining program efficacy, we must look at long-term results, which may span childhood and adulthood services. Since this is a group that warrants more innovative access to care and specialized training, providers might utilize models like the Patient-Centered Medical Home (PCMH) model (www.acponline.org). The objective of the PCMH model is to have a centralized setting that facilitates partnerships between individual patients, and their personal physicians, and when appropriate, the patient's family. Care is facilitated by registries, information technology, health information exchange and other means to assure that patients get the indicated care when and where they need and want it in a culturally and linguistically appropriate manner. This could greatly benefit the recovery of this population since they might need access to care and specialized training beyond standard work hours. Regarding specific services that should be provided for sexually exploited youth, participants emphasized the need for programs to provide basic needs with minimal hassle. These interventions could include comprehensive residential programs, or close collaboration with other agencies that provide basic needs such as housing and shelter. They also might involve specialized collaboration with law enforcement to ensure a victim's safety from her exploiters. Many participants emphasized the need for holistic, developmentally appropriate services that provide opportunities for young people to discover talents or interests, build a positive sense of self, form healthy relationships, and acquire necessary knowledge and skills to succeed in the mainstream workforce.

Maintenance

Maintaining a successful exit from the sex industry is rarely discussed in either the academic or professional/policy literature. Research conducted by Preble, Praetorius, and Cimino (2016) speaks directly to the absence of knowledge regarding maintaining a successful exit for victims of commercial sexual exploitation. However, participants in this study made clear that

the risk of relapse is ongoing, even years after a successful exit. Many participants emphasized the importance of responsibility and commitment outside of themselves in helping them resist temptation to return to the sex industry, such as having children or clients for whom they must set an example. Almost all participants continued to rely on therapeutic or community services to maintain the motivation and belief in self that was necessary to maintain a successful exit. This finding underscores the need for free and easily accessible therapeutic services, including for adults who are not currently involved in specialized or intensive services. This finding is supported by research conducted by Preble, Praetorius and Cimino (2016), as well as Nichols (2016) and Hickle and Sepowitz (2014).

Advocacy

Finally, many participants emphasized the need to spread awareness regarding the realities and complexities of CSEC/CSE. This finding lends further support to the idea that advocacy should be a central component of services for sexually exploited youth. Developing one's own voice, expressing it and having it validated, and finding meaning in making a difference for others, are all proactive and empowering aspects of healing from a dehumanizing and marginalized existence (Herman, 2015; Lloyd, 2011). The effort to improve services for sexually exploited youth and fight the CSEC epidemic must include coordinated efforts by survivors and allies alike, with a strong focus on survivor expertise and empowerment.

With this in mind, it is my intention to utilize the results of this research to promote the development of services for sexually exploited youth. While most findings of this study support existing recommendations in the policy and advocacy literature, a few findings are novel. First, the interface between individual motivation to exit CSE and the availability of services indicates that service providers should not try to convince an individual to leave CSE. Rather, they should

provide opportunities and communicate love and approval, thus fostering the revelatory experience, and consequent motivation to make a change. Second, the existing literature does not examine the differential needs of individuals who became involved in CSEC at younger ages. The results of this study highlight the need for holistic and positive programming for younger children, as well as the necessity of ensuring literal safety from exploiters. Third, while the existing policy literature typically considers exploitation of children and adults as separate issues (Smith & Vardaman, 2010) this study suggests that services for survivors of all ages should be integrated. Appropriate interventions should be determined more by the needs of the individual survivor, and not by her age or other demographics. Further, this study has provided the necessary components needed to inform my future work with CSE children in residential programming. First and foremost, a family component is essential, including *family-finding* for children with little or no family connections. Psycho-education for the family regarding CSEC and complex trauma is also essential. Empowering a child who is entrenched in CSE must have a multi-disciplinary approach including humanistic principles with strength-based attributes.

Contributions of the Study

While the purpose of this study was to solely examine the exiting process, many additional components arose from the interviews. It's important to recognize the incredible strength it took for these amazing women to share their most personal stories. A safe space was created and they felt that they had stepped into a space free of judgment. All the women thanked the researcher to allow them to share their story, their way, in their own words. Ann said, "I haven't spoken of the Life since I left. It's bringing up so many feelings for me, most of which is immense joy and happiness that I am alive and got out". Most representative, Gabby said, "I have always been too ashamed to discuss my past, thank you so much for doing this study and

listening to my story. I hope it helps".

It is vital to understand the incredible importance of family connections as they resonated throughout. While family was defined in many ways from a parent, to a grandparent, to an aunt or uncle, to an unborn child, family was the single most prevalent theme throughout every interview. While much of the existing literature espouses various models, including survivor-led programming and traditional therapy, none of the participants mentioned any programing or therapeutic modality that assisted with their successful exit. This finding leads one to believe that, at the most primal, basic level, family connections are the most powerful and impactful, and create the biggest motivators for change.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer



Are you a survivor of "the life / the game" and got out before you were 18?

Who should participate in this research study?
Are you female?

Are you between the ages of 21-26?

Do you live in San Francisco or the greater Bay Area?

Are you comfortable reading, speaking, and writing English?

Did you exit / leave the life before you turned 18?

Have you been out of the life for at least two years?

Do you consider yourself to be functioning well despite your experience?

Are you willing to participate in a 60-90 tape-recorded interview to share your story to others?

Are you willing to share your story to help others?

"The life / the game": have you been forced to trade sex for goods

Participation is voluntary and confidential. There is a $50 gift card for your time and transportation. This research study is being led by Annie Corbett, M.B.A. and is a partial degree requirement in psychology at Saybrook University. It is supervised by Theopia Jackson, PhD (XXXXXXXXXXXXX). If interested, please contact Annie at:

XXXXXXXXX
or
XXX-XXX-XXXX

Annie Corbett (XXX) XXX-XXXX
Annie Corbett (XXX) XXX-XXXX
Annie Corbett (XXX) XXX-XXXX
Annie Corbett (XXX) XXX-XXXX
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Annie Corbett (XXX) XXX-XXXX
Annie Corbett (XXX) XXX-XXXX
Annie Corbett (XXX) XXX-XXXX

Appendix B: Site Permission Letter

Dear _____,

My name is Annie Corbett and I am a doctoral student at Saybrook University. As part of the degree requirement, I am expected to complete a research study. The title of my study is "From victim to survivor: what are the contributing factors that assist with exiting from commercial sexual exploitation in childhood" and the purpose is to learn more about the exiting process of survivors of commercial sexual exploitation in childhood.

This research study is under the supervision of:

Dr. Theopia Jackson, PhD
XXXXX
XXXXX

I am seeking permission to post a recruitment flyer in the public bulletin board near your establishment. It is understood that participation is completely voluntary and confidential.

Thank you for supporting my work,

(Signature)

I give permission for the posting of the recruitment flyer and understand that I will not know who participants are nor have access to the information collected.

_____

Name: _____ Date: _____

Contact Information:

_____

Name of the Establishment: _____

Saybrook University
4751 14th street.9th floor
Oakland, CA 94612
(888) 308-0032

Appendix C: Recruitment Letter for Colleagues

Dear _____,

As part of my doctoral degree requirement at Saybrook University, I am expected to complete a research study. The title of my study is "From victim to survivor: what are the contributing factors that assist with exiting from commercial sexual exploitation in childhood" and the purpose is to learn more about the exiting process of survivors of commercial sexual exploitation in childhood. The research study is under the supervision of:

Dr. Theopia Jackson, PhD
XXXXX
XXXXXXXXX

I am asking for your support in recruiting potential research participants for my study. I would appreciate your assistance in making this recruitment flyer available to anyone you feel may be interested in sharing their experience with others for the purposes of research. Your support is entirely voluntary.

I thank you for your time and your consideration.

Sincerely,

Annie Corbett

Appendix D: **Referral List**

East Bay:

Westcoast Children's Clinic www.westcoastcc.org
East Oakland, Fruitvale 3301 E 12th St
Oakland, CA 94601 Phone number (510) 269-9030

West Coast Children's Clinic www.westcoastcc.org
545 Ashbury Avenue
El Cerrito, CA 94530 Phone number (510) 527-7249

MISSSEY (www.misssey.org)
436 14th St #150
Oakland, CA 94612 Phone number: (510) 251-2070

San Francisco:

Huckleberry Counseling Programs www.huckleberryyouth.org
1292 Page St
San Francisco, CA 94117 Phone number: (415)621-2929

South Bay:

Community Solutions www.communitysolutions.org
Phone Number: 408-683-4118

Appendix E: Interview Protocol

Opening Script:

Thank you for participating in this research study and being willing to share your story. The interview will take 60-90 minutes. I am going to ask you a few background questions first. There are no right or wrong answers. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Background Questions

1. How old are you currently?
2. What is your ethnicity or race?
3. What is your gender?
4. What is your sexual orientation?
5. What is your racial or ethnic identity?

Semi-Structured Interview

Script:

Thank you for your participation so far. We have now finished the first section, which were the background questions. The next and final section contains nine questions. I am really interested in hearing your story. The most important thing is that you speak your truth. There may be times that I ask you to give more details in your answer that may relate to your thoughts or feelings or just to get a little bit more information. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers, and of course you may stop or pause at any time. Do you have any questions before we start?

1. To get started, I wanted to get a sense of who you are now. How would you describe yourself?
    a. Please describe how you are functioning well now.
    b. What and/or who has helped you?
2. Many describe the idea of children being forced to have sex for goods like money, clothes, food, etc. as being in 'the life'. What does this phrase mean to you?
    a. How long were you in the life? From what age to what age?
3. Can you tell me about your experiences with exiting?

   a. When did you first begin to think about it and why? How old were you?
   b. How many times did you try to exit?
   c. If it was more than one time, what stopped you from being able to exit the first time?

4. Can you tell me about the final time your exited? What was your experience?

   a. What made the difference?
   b. How old were you?
   c. What do you remember about the experience? Any thoughts or feelings?

5. What, if any, resources were available to you when you were trying to exit?
   a. What was helpful?
   b. What was not?

6. When you look back on that time in your life, what, if anything, would you have wanted that could have helped you with exiting?
   a. Is there something that those around you could have done that what have been helpful? If so, who and what?
   b. Is there something that professionals could have done that would have been helpful? If so, who and what?

7. It is believed that many young people who are in 'the life' are also in the foster care at the same time. Were you in the foster care system when you were in 'the life'?

   a. If so, were you in a relative's home, a foster home, or a group home?
   b. What was it like being in foster care and being in 'the life'?

8. Some people would say that you are a 'survivor'. What do you think about that?
   a. How does this fit you or not?

9. What has helped in your recovery from being in 'the life'?

   a. What does healing or recovery mean to you? What does it look like?
   b. What has helped you in your recovery?
   c. What was not helpful?

10. If you could offer advice to young people who might be at risk for being in 'the life', what would you say?
   a. What would you say to those young people who are in 'the life' now?
   b. What would you say to those who are trying to help young people in 'the life'?

11. What would you say to those trying to help young people get out of 'the life'? What recommendations?
    a. To family, friends, or others?
    b. To helping professionals like teachers, law enforcement, social workers, mental health therapists, etc.?

12. Is there anything else you want to share with me about your experiences of exiting 'the life' of having been forced to trade sex for goods as a child?

Closing Script:

Thank you for your time and for sharing your experiences with me. May I send you a copy of your interview transcription so that you can review it, to make any changes, or additions? I will send you a self-addressed envelope (snail mail) or via email so that you may return it back to me within one week after this interview. I ask that you please mail or email it back to me within one week after you receive it from me; I will give you a reminder phone call or email.

You will also receive your $50 compensation at the same time either through the mail or electronically. This is to thank you for your time and commitment to this project.

I am also providing you with several local support resources in the community. Do you have any questions for me before we conclude today? Again, I thank you for sharing your story and talking about how you got out of the Life. We will be in contact shortly.

Appendix F: Transcript Verification

Dear _____,

Thank you again for sharing your story with me and participating in my research study titled: *From victim to survivor: What are the contributing factors that assist with exiting from commercial sexual exploitation in childhood?*

Enclosed is the transcription of your interview. Please review and let me know of any changes within two weeks of getting this either by email or mail; there is a stamped self-addressed envelope.

Also enclosed is a $50.00 gift card as a small token of my appreciation for sharing your story and time with me so that others might learn from your experiences and for any transportation costs.

_____ No corrections and/or additions made

_____ Corrections and/or additions made

Again, thanks so much for your time!

Sincerely,

Annie Corbet