

# The Sexual Exploitation of Girls in Gangs

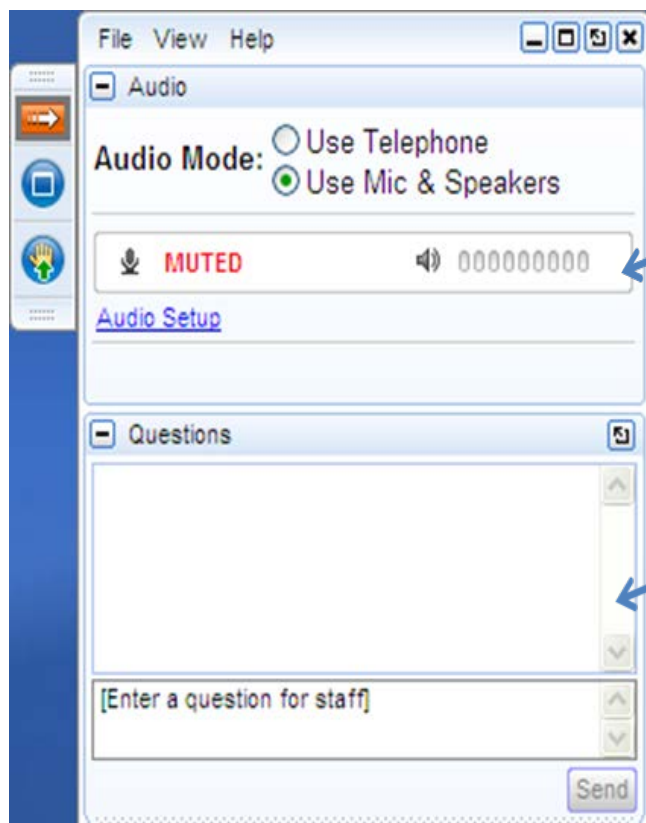
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- MECP offers assistance to local, state and tribal law enforcement, nonprofit organizations, and other juvenile justice practitioners to:
  - strengthen their responses
  - increase the use of evidence-based practices
  - identify and address operational and programmatic needs
- Coordinated by Fox Valley Technical College
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# Gangs Vary Greatly in the U.S.

- Geographic Region
- Ethnic/Racial Make-up
- Types of Activities
- Organizational Structure
- Historical Perspectives
- Social Interaction vis-à-vis gender & ethnicity
- Size
- Heritage
- Urban vs. Rural
- Relationship with Community
- Reasons for Being

# What is a Gang?

## No Universally Accepted Definition

- 3 or more members, generally aged 12–24.
- Members share an identity
  - Typically linked to name / symbols.
- Members view themselves as a gang
  - recognized by others as a gang.
- Permanence and degree of organization.
- Involved in elevated level of criminal activity

*\* National Gang Center*

# A Gang by Any Other Name is a Gang

- Gang
- Posse
- Clique
- “Those guys / girls”
- Crew
- Set
- Cliqua

# What is a Gang Member?

## No Universally Accepted Definition

Anyone perceived to be a willing participant acting in concert with a gang's delinquent or criminal behavior, or a self-acknowledged member of a gang.



# Gang Prevalence in the U.S.

- 29,400 gangs                      756,000 members

National Youth Gang Survey (NYGCS) estimates based on law enforcement reports, in 2010—throughout 3,500 jurisdictions across the United States.

- 30,313 gangs                      1,140,344 members

National Gang Intelligence Center (Fed. agencies) estimates for 2011.

# Female Gang Members

- Law Enforcement:
  - 6% (NYGC Survey 2000)
    - (If 40% in 2010 are under 18 years, girls = 18,144)
- Researchers:
  - 33% Fagan (1989)
  - 20%-46% Esbensen and Huizinga (1993)
  - 24% NLSY\* (1997)

*\*National Longitudinal Survey of Youth*

# Why Do We Care About Gangs?

- Gangs scare People
  - Disproportionate share of violent crime
- Gang affiliation is correlated to social ills
- Perception of gangs affects public policies
- Perception determines resource allocation

# How Do WE Know What We Know?

## Basis of Our Knowledge

- Law Enforcement Agency Reports
- Surveys of “at-risk” youth
- Field Studies
- Practitioners’ anecdotal experiences

# Role of Girls in Gangs

## Then:

- Adjunct / auxiliary to males
- Not involved in fighting
- “Sex object” for show & use
- Holder / courier of contraband
- Alibi

## Now:

- Involved in serious crime
- In charge of criminal activities
- “Sex object” for show & use
- Procuring other girls

# Why Girls Join Gangs

Many of the same reasons boys do:

- Protection
- Power
- Fleeing abuse in the home
- Respect / Affirmation
- Follow in sibling's footsteps
- Economic pressure / Access to material goods
- Fun & excitement

# Why Girls Join Gangs

## Differences from Boys:

- Emotional need – More likely than boys to feel that the gang is substitute family for me\*
- Loneliness in school & isolation from family
- Low self esteem
- Fleeing sexual violence / abuse in the home\*

# Risk Factors for Girls

## Joining a Gang

- Physical, sexual, emotional abuse
- Runaway
- Drug abuse
- Lack of healthy adult relationships
- Distressed family life
- Poor peer relationships
- Dangerous neighborhoods
- Unsafe schools
- Low self-esteem

## Sexual Exploitation

- Physical, sexual, emotional abuse
- Runaway
- Drug abuse
- Lack of healthy adult relationships
- Fear, distrust in “the system”
- Health Problems
- Street Life
- LGBT youth



# Liabilities for Girls in Gangs

- Serious Delinquency
  - Gang Fighting & Drive-by Shooting, Robbery
  - Drug Use & Sales
  - Weapon Carrying
- Sexual Victimization
- Physical Assault

Non-gang member girls around gangs:

- Also prone to Drug Use, Crime & High-risk Sexual Behavior

# How Girls Join Gangs\*

- Crime participation
- Beat-in
- Sexed-in
- Getting tattooed
- Just being accepted as “one of us”

\*There is also “leaving the gang”

# Girls, Gangs & Sexual Exploitation

Three Groups of sexually exploited gang girls

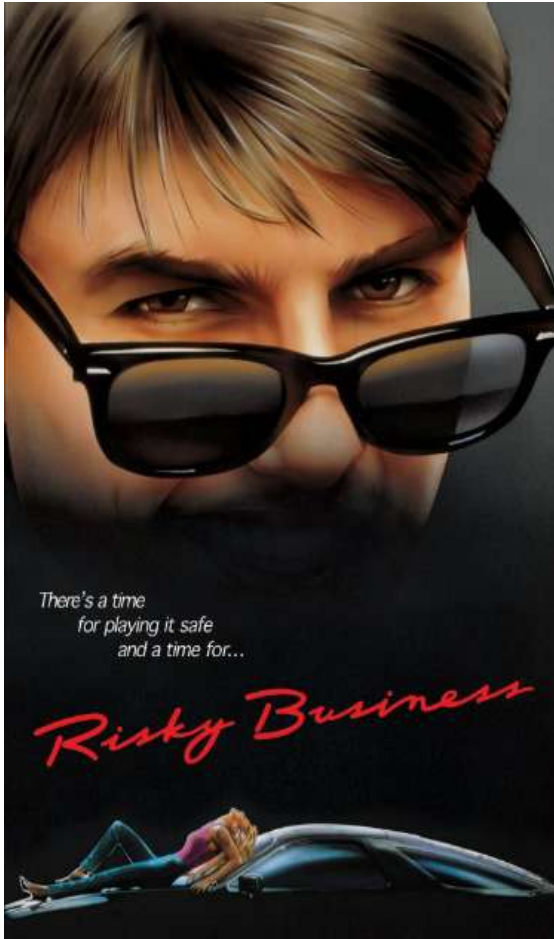
1. The girls in the prostitution stable
2. The female gang member
3. The “squares”
  - Other girls who associate with the gang members, e.g., sister, cousin, girlfriend, gang groupie . . .

# The Girls in the Gang Stable

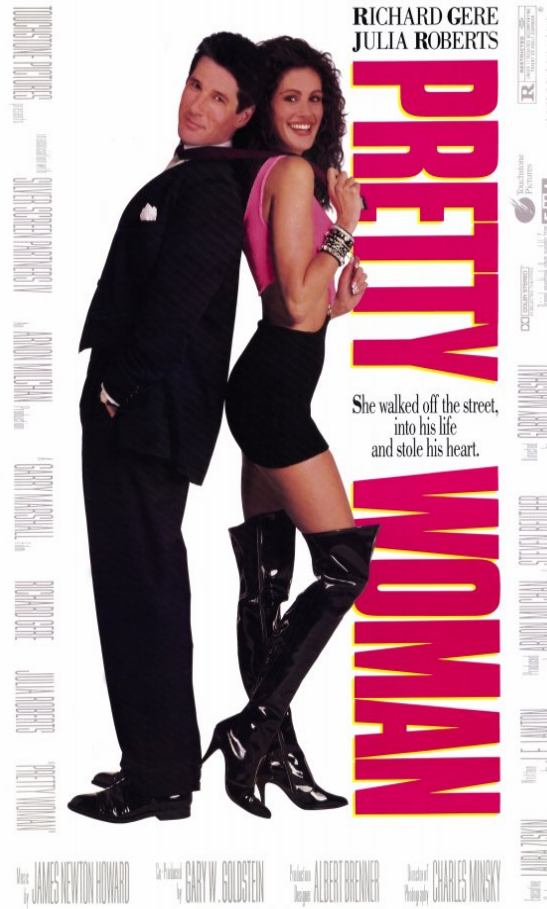
Who are they?

- Many are missing, abducted, runaway or thrown-away children
- Significant number not in those categories
  - Middle through High School girls
  - Seduced into “the life” on a part-time basis
  - Miss a few classes but return to school
  - Stay out at night, but return home
  - Weekend on the blade – home for school, etc.

# Promoting the Glamorous Delusion



1983



1990



2012

# Sexualized Role of Girls in Gangs

- Gangs aggressively promote the “player” life-style
  - Girls are marketed as a glamorous aspect of it.
  - Supported by the influence of the entertainment industry in our society
    - Movies, TV, music videos, music lyrics
  - Powerful imagery is projected in person as well
  - Female Gang members recruit girls for “the life”

# Sexualized Role of Girls in Gangs

## Watch gangsta/pimp rap videos

I know this [REDACTED], she a A.K.A., went to Memphis state  
She dropped out her Junior Year then she got a escalate  
I'm like hey, go head do yo thing, you shouldn't be ashamed  
If that [REDACTED] don't pay yo bills then that [REDACTED] shouldn't complain  
Just the same, I should be yo man, I'll encourage you  
Make that money bring it back and watch how much I cherish you  
You so cute, look at you, other hoes ain't got a clue  
Can't nobody hit the stage and do that [REDACTED] the way you do  
Must admit you game tight, you stay on top of yo [REDACTED]  
But you got to know the difference between a baller and a trick  
See a trick gon' pay for [REDACTED], while a baller make it rain  
Real niggas [REDACTED] for free so this [REDACTED] not the same

From "Make It Work" by Yo Gotti

# The Gang Pimping Reality

- Old style – Beholden to just one pimp
  - Girls don't talk to other pimps
- Gang Style – Beholden to the whole gang
  - Sometimes even gang pimps from other gangs
- Highest financial reward / Lowest risk



# Sexual Exploitation – Methods

- Smooth / Finesse pimping
- Gorilla /Guerrilla pimping
- Recruitment through Parties
  - Hook with drugs
- Online
- Gang enterprise
  - Forced Prostitution

# The Female Gang Member

- Physical and/or sexual abuse before
- Sexual initiation (by choice / by force)
- 25% of female gang members perform sexual services for other gang members or to general public

# The Female Gang Member

## The Paradox

- Joins for power (instill fear in others)
- Joins for family support
- Protection from sexual predation
- Gains respect via male oriented activity
- New dangers to fear for herself
- Attacked from within & outside
- Perpetrates sexual predation
- Devalued for drinking, sex & violence

# The “Squares”

- Groupies & Girlfriends
- Kidnapped

# What Happens to Girls Who Have Been Sexually Exploited by a Gang?

## Devastation

- Emotional
- Health
- Social
- Family
- Financial

# Challenges to Overcome

- Ingrained gang stereotypes
- Lack of evidence-based programmatic resources for females (especially gang members)
- Lack of Beds – Residential aftercare
- Societal acceptance of sexual exploitation
- Little investigative & prosecutorial expertise in gang-related Sexual exploitation
- Lack appropriately skilled agency staff

# Potential Solutions

## Gender Informed Prevention Efforts

- Gender Specific Programming
- Preventing Sexual Abuse
- Improving Relationships in Families & Peer Groups
- Let them talk – in comfort & safety
- Help Avoid Abusive Boyfriends
- Improve Skills to avoid early sexual activity & parenthood

# Potential Solutions

## Reduce Risk of Joining a Gang

- Improving Quality of Public Education
- Helping them stay in school
  - Make school safe
  - Make neighborhood safe
- Gender informed intervention efforts
- Help Avoid Substance Abuse
- More research re gangs & sexual victimization





# Resources

- OJJDP Training and Technical Assistance programs (coordinated by Fox Valley Technical College)
  - <https://www.thecjportal.org/Pages/Default.aspx>
- National Gang Center
  - <http://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/>
- 2010 National Gang Youth Survey
  - <http://www.ojjdp.gov/pubs/237542.pdf>

# Q & A