



VERY YOUNG GIRLS

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In New York City, the average age of entry into the commercial sex industry is 13 years old

Running Time: 84 minutes

World Premiere in the Real to Reel Section
at the 2007 Toronto International Film Festival

www.VYGthemovie.com

In this Press Kit you will find:

- Synopsis
- Director's Statement
- Biographies
- Film Festivals & Reviews
- About GEMS
- Crew & Credits
- Screening Info

“Lucky ones get a chance at a normal life”

Synopsis

Very Young Girls is an expose of human trafficking that follows thirteen and fourteen year old American girls as they are seduced, abused, and sold on New York’s streets by pimps, and treated as adult criminals by police. The film follows the barely-adolescent girls in real time, using vérité and intimate interviews with them as they are first lured on to the streets and the dire events which follow. The film also uses startling footage shot by the brazen pimps themselves giving a rare glimpse into how the cycle of street life begins for many women.

The film identifies hope for these girls in the organization GEMS (Girls Education and Mentoring Services), a recovery center founded and run by Rachel Lloyd, herself a survivor of sexual exploitation. She and her staff are heroic and relentless in their mission to help girls sent by the court or found on the street. Given a chance to piece their lives back together, some will succeed, but many will remain suspended on the edge of two different worlds consistently battling the force that will suck them back into the underground. Very Young Girls’ unprecedented access to girls and pimps will change the way law enforcement, the media, and society as a whole look at sexual exploitation, street prostitution and human trafficking that is happening right in our own backyard.



Director's Statement

I first met Rachel Lloyd in 2005, while researching episodes for a series about young people in war zones. I had made a vérité-and-interview show about young people on the West Bank for MTV, and another like that on young people in Iraq, which led to the idea of doing a entire hosted series about children in war zones.

We shot the pilot for the series in Colombia around the country's long-running civil war, with help from Nina Alvarez, who would also do great work on Very Young Girls. To fill out a series, we were thinking about an episode about children caught up in international sex trafficking, maybe in Cambodia or the Ukraine. While researching, my then AP, now co-director Priya Swaminathan discovered that children were caught up in sex trafficking right here in New York City and that we as a society were looking the other way.

The individual who made us realize this episode would be a feature film is Rachel Lloyd. To me, it was overwhelming to meet someone so clearly destined to be a great, charismatic national leader on an important but yet little known issue so early in her career. She is ferociously smart, relentlessly driven, with a classic story; a victim turned hero. She was one hundred percent right about an issue that we all ignored and mustn't any more.

But above all, Rachel is a healer, and she brings out the amazing and immense potential of the girls in her care. She helps them through empathy and therapy, as she had helped herself, come to a place where they could talk about what had happened to them in the bracingly brave, honest, articulate, insightful way they do in the film. I had interviewed young people who had survived trauma in war zones around the world and I had never heard anyone with such powerful voices and stories as these young women of New York City. With these incredible young women, a filmmaker needed to do little more than turn on the camera and listen, listen, listen until one understood.

I modeled my working relationship with Rachel on how I had observed, as a young assistant, Errol Morris work with physicist Stephen Hawking during the making of A Brief History of Time. Brief History and Very Young Girls would both be half a profile of a great innovator with an amazing human story, and half an explanation of that leader's very difficult and complex and counterintuitive insights. So, like Stephen, Rachel would be a key creative collaborator in all phases of our project, from pre-production to score. I did not worry about empowering Rachel, she had the intelligence and wisdom to step into our medium armed with great authority and to make the choices that would lead to a powerful, honest, unsparing film.

I stand in awe of the bravery in coming forward, the intelligence, honesty, strength, resilience, idealism, responsibility, and activism of the young women who are in our film. If these young women are the future, we are in good hands. Our goal is nothing less than to change the master narrative about prostitution in our society. Film and entertainment generally has done a great deal to enforce our false mythologies about this issue, so it seems right to present Rachel's point of view that we hope will bring new light and a fresh perspective to an age old issue.

Biographies

Co Executive Producer



Rachel Lloyd is the founder and Executive Director of Girls Educational and Mentoring Services (GEMS), the only non-profit in New York state serving domestically trafficked youth and commercially sexually exploited girls and young women. Under Ms. Lloyd's leadership, GEMS annually serves 200 girls through its direct services and 1,000 youth through education and outreach. Ms. Lloyd is a nationally recognized advocate and expert on the issue of commercial sexual exploitation of children, actively involved in the effort to pass legislation to protect this population in addition to speaking at events and conferences across the nation. Ms. Lloyd has been honored with the Reebok Human Rights Award and the Frederick Douglas Award from the North Star Fund, among others. Ms. Lloyd received her Bachelors in Psychology from Marymount Manhattan College and her Masters in Applied Urban Anthropology from the City College of New York.

Producer and Director



David Schisgall has been producing and directing long-form nonfiction for the past fifteen years. David began his career working for documentarian Errol Morris, assisting on *A Brief History of Time* (1991), *Fast Cheap and Out of Control* (1997), and *Mr. Death* (1999), and producing Errol's television series for Bravo, *First Person* (2000). In addition to producing and directing *Very Young Girls*, a documentary about sexually exploited girls in New York City, for Showtime, Schisgall is also produced this year *Operation Filmmaker*, for ITVS and BBC's *Storyville*. *Operation Filmmaker* follows an Iraqi film student as he is brought to the west by Liev Shreiber. Both films had their world premiere at the 2007 Toronto International Film Festival.

In October 2005, David was honored with the Edward R. Murrow award for Best News Documentary of 2004. He received the award for his program on young Americans and Iraqis at war, *True Life: I'm in Iraq*, which aired on MTV and around the world. It was the first time in its fifty-year history that the award was given to a network other than HBO, CNN, PBS, or the original three broadcast networks. The film was also chosen as one of the best television documentaries of the year by the Museum of Film and Television.

The Iraq work followed another hour for MTV, *True Life: I Live in the Terror Zone*, about young Israelis and Palestinians on the West Bank. The program was honored by Senator Edward Kennedy at the Khalil Gibran Spirit of Humanity Award, given by the Arab-American Institute; and was the only non-Israeli film about the Israel/Palestine conflict shown at Israel's national festival, the Jerusalem Film Festival.

In 2006, David developed the radio show *This American Life* into a television series for Showtime. He also created and directed a pilot for MTV about young people in war zones for MTV. David lives in New York City with his wife Evgenia Peretz, and their four-year-old son Elias and infant daughter Daphne.

Co-Director and Producer

After graduating from Columbia University in 2003, **Priya Swaminathan** (producer/co-director) began developing and associate producing projects with David Schisgall that took her from mental hospitals in America to the tsunami ravaged Sri Lankan coastline to the homes of former child soldiers in Colombia. She currently lives in Los Angeles and works as the Director of Development at Spike Jonze, Jeff Tremaine, and Johnny Knoxville's production company.

Co-Director and Producer

Nina Alvarez (producer/co-director) worked with David and Priya as producer on Crisis, our series for MTV about young people in war zones. In 2005, Nina was awarded the Johns Hopkins University/Gates Foundation International Reporting Fellowship, during which she shot in Nigeria for a documentary about women's lack of access to safe births. Nina won Emmy and Imagen awards during fifteen years of producing news and documentaries for such outlets as ABC News', Nightline, NBC News, Univision, and National Public Radio during which time she reported from Iraq, Palestine, Cuba, Colombia, El Salvador, and Africa. She directed and shot Head to Head, a five part documentary series about competition in the US, for the Discovery Channel.



Girls Educational and Mentoring Services (GEMS)

Girls Educational & Mentoring Services (GEMS) is the only organization in New York State specifically designed to serve girls and young women who have experienced commercial sexual exploitation and domestic trafficking. GEMS was founded in 1999 by Rachel Lloyd, a young woman who had been sexually exploited as a teenager.

GEMS mission is to empower young women, ages 12-21, who have experienced sexual exploitation and domestic trafficking to exit the commercial sex industry and develop to their full potential. GEMS is committed to ending commercial sexual exploitation and domestic trafficking of children by changing individual lives, transforming public perception, and revolutionizing the systems and policies that impact sexually exploited youth.

Last year alone GEMS provided counseling, job training, access to health care and crisis housing to more than 250 young women; provided outreach to more than 1,500 youth; and trained 1,000 youth service workers. Aside from these services GEMS also provides a continuum of services/programs including:

- Youth-led facility outreach
- Street Outreach
- Court Advocacy and
- Alternatives to Incarceration Program
- Case Management
- Education, Recreational and Therapeutic Groups
- Youth Employment and Leadership Training
- Transitional & Crisis Housing
- Referral Services

GEMS' ten years of direct service experience with trafficked and commercially sexually exploited girls and young women have resulted in an unparalleled knowledge base. Drawing upon this extensive expertise, GEMS provides trainings, presentations and consulting to community groups and youth-serving organizations and institutions. These educational programs and materials increase awareness within the general public and develop the capacity of youth-serving professionals to directly address issue of commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking.

GEMS' holistic approach to programming addresses the girls' complex needs throughout their transition and development. GEMS believes that all young women have great beauty and worth, and the potential for future success. The voices and experiences of youth survivors are integral to the development and implementation of all GEMS' programming.

Film Festivals and Reviews

Toronto International Film Festival

Toronto, Canada
September 6 – 15, 2007
World Premiere

True/False Film Festival

Columbia, Missouri
February 28 – March 2, 2008
U.S. Premiere

Miami International Film Festival

Miami, Florida
February 29 – March 9, 2008

Independent Film Festival Boston

Boston, Massachusetts
April 23 – 29, 2008

Indie Spirit Film Festival

Colorado Springs, Colorado
April 25 – 27, 2008

Jackson Hole Film Festival

Jackson Hole, Wyoming
June 5 – 9, 2008

Edinburgh International Film Festival

Edinburgh, Scotland
June 18 – 29, 2008

Jerusalem Film Festival

Jerusalem
July 10 – 19, 2008

VERY YOUNG GIRLS

Press praise from the
2007 Toronto International Film Festival



“Bold and brave, a deeply felt exposé of prostitution among the barely adolescent in urban America. A substantial work of muckraking.”

-- Boston Phoenix

“As sincere as it is heartbreaking ...indicts not only the direct exploiters but also a society that jails 15-year-old girls for prostitution.”

-- Vanity Fair

“Immediately gripping ... continually unsettling”

-- Indiewire

“Searing”

-- Philadelphia Daily News

“Devastating”

-- New York Press

Very Young Girls Film Review

By K H Brown - Posted on 23 June 2008

Venue: [Cameo Cinema, Edinburgh](#)

Running time: 83mins

Production: David Schisgall, Nina Alvarez (co-directors)



Even before the introductory statement qualifies the *Very Young Girls* title by indicating that the average age of entry to prostitution is 13 years old, directors David Schisgall and Nina Alvarez challenge the viewer: try saying you're going to see "*Very Young Girls*" or searching for information on the film on the web and it's hard not to feel like a pervert.

Yet, perhaps this is intentional on the part of the filmmakers, in that also they want to lure certain kinds of men into realising what their attitudes and behaviour actually mean for those who are exploited by the sex industry.

These men are the johns and the pimps, revealing footage of both of whom are included in the documentary in the form of some truly horrifying home video footage shot by two pimps in the hope of landing themselves a reality TV series, and of a mixed group of men whom we see going through the first stage of a re-education course; if the footage of the latter is dispiriting in that the men are presented as being there primarily because it is a way of getting their criminal record cleared, that of the former at least landed those responsible ten-year federal prison stretches for the crime of transporting minors across state lines.

The filmmakers main focus, however, is on the girls and those trying to help them, most notably Rachel Lloyd and her organisation GEMS (Girls Educational and Mentoring Services), which provides support to underage girls in the New York sex industry.

The girls, disproportionately African-American, tell the same stories time and again to the camera and the GEMS staff, some of whom are themselves ex-prostitutes with personal experience of "the life": in vulnerable situations they are approached by pimps, older and apparently disproportionately African-American, who work to reduce them to a state essentially equivalent to slavery.

The pimps begin by isolating their victims from their family and others so as better to induce a state of emotional dependency, before convincing them to prostitute themselves as a demonstration of their love. Once this happens, she becomes another commodity in the pimp's stable, with verbal and physical violence being used to keep her in line, turning tricks and bringing in the money.

Perhaps the most horrifying aspect of the film, however, is what it reveals about US culture and society more broadly. At one point, we see a distraught mother trying to get the police to rescue her daughter from her captors, only to be told that they cannot intervene: the law, it seems, does not care or is ineffectual. At another, we see Lloyd receiving a well-deserved humanitarian reward for her work.

Unfortunately, the amount of publicity this reward gained for GEMS was undoubtedly minuscule compared to that received by the Three 6 Mafia for their song "It's Hard Out Here for a Pimp," which had won an Academy Award a few days earlier. More generally, it's this whole glorification of the pimp and the objectification of women across the board, from blaxploitation and Iceberg Slim influenced gangster rap to the Playboy T-shirt ironically worn by one of the girls, that GEMS are fighting against. Hopefully theirs will not prove a losing battle...

Very Young Girls screens as part of the Edinburgh International Film Festival at [The Filmhouse](#) on 26 June, 8pm

The New York Times

Very Young Girls (2007)

NYT Critics' Pick This movie has been designated a Critic's Pick by the film reviewers of The Times.

Children Without Childhoods

By JEANNETTE CATSOULIS
Published: July 4, 2008

Notwithstanding the coyly suggestive title, [“Very Young Girls”](#) is very far from exploitative. Adopting a confessional, direct-to-camera interview style for most of its running time, this unvarnished vérité documentary about teenage prostitutes in New York City resolutely resists the urge to dramatize. The heartbreaking stories are drama enough.

There’s forthright Shaneiqua, picked up as a 12-year-old by a man who provided a “honeymoon period” of kindness and affection before turning her out to earn; and Martha, who makes excuses for her pimp’s brutal behavior (“I’m his investment”) while wondering why her parents don’t come to save her.



Trying to do just that is the support organization GEMS (Girls Educational and Mentoring Services), founded and run by Rachel Lloyd, a former victim of sexual exploitation. Part den mother, part therapist, Ms. Lloyd is a heroic counterpoint to the movie’s token pimps, Anthony and Chris Griffith, whose repulsive home videos — shot to kick-start a reality-television career and subsequently used to convict them — suggest only that reasoning and pimping may be mutually exclusive activities.

Ignoring underlying issues of upbringing, class or race (only one of the film’s victims is white), “Very Young Girls” is still an effective scratch on the surface of a serious social problem. However hard it is out there for a pimp, it’s not nearly hard enough.

VERY YOUNG GIRLS

Opens on Friday in Manhattan.

Produced and directed by David Schisgall; edited by Jane Jo; music by [Nathan Larson](#); released by Swinging T Productions. At the IFC Center, 323 Avenue of the Americas at Third Street, Greenwich Village. Running time: 1 hour 23 minutes. This film is not rated.

Crew & Credits

Producer and Director:	David Schisgall
Co-Directors and Producers:	Nina Alvarez and Priya Swaminathan
Executive Producers:	John Moser, Diana Barret and Jack Lechner
Co-Executive Producer:	Rachel Lloyd
Editor:	Jane Jo
Associate Producer:	Josh Freed
Music by:	Nathan Larson
Performed by:	Nathan Larson and Julia Kent
Recorded at:	The Metal Garage, Brooklyn NY
Assistant Editor:	Joe Pacheco
Production Manager:	Jill Gordon
Voiceover:	Laura Guzman
Production Assistants:	Dave Cowen and Stuart Schisgall
Makeup:	Tanya Rae
Online Editor:	Scott Doniger
Assistant Online Editor:	Dustin TK
Post House:	Full Circle Post
Sound Mixer:	Anthony Erice
Sound Editor:	Jeremy Fleishman
Mixed at:	Tonic Digital Audio
Additional Post Production Support:	Stavros Stavropolous
Additional Camera:	Trish Dalton
Selected Footage provided by:	Polaris Project - Copyright by Polaris Project Used by Kind Permission of Polaris Project, a Washington, DC based nonprofit organization combating human trafficking and modern-day slavery. www.polarisproject.org
Additional footage courtesy of:	Rainlake Media



The Producers Wish to Thank

The Staff and Girls of GEMS, the Girls Educational and
Mentoring Services
Katherine Mullen
Brooklyn Legal Aid Society Juvenile Rights Division
Juvenile Justice Coalition
Judge Ellen Spodek
Judge Jane Pearl
David Bookstaver
Long Island Jewish Medical Center
Dan Cogan
Ev Labouisse
Anne Peretz
Evgenia Peretz
Ben Cassorla
Maria Lemus
Adam Alvarez

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Specifications

Original Title:	Very Young Girls
Original Language:	English
Country of Origin:	USA
Completion Date:	8/2007
Running Time:	84 minutes
Prior Screenings:	Toronto International Film Festival: 9/11/2007, 9/13/2007 Original production format: miniDV
Aspect ration:	4:3
Available projection formats:	HDCAM / DOLBY E / 4:3 Digibeta / DOLBY 5.1 / 4:3
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