

RubMaps
*Facilitating Sexual Exploitation in Chicago and
Beyond*

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CAASE

Introduction

Traffickers throughout the world are holding victims in establishments posing as legitimate massage therapy businesses. These trafficking fronts enable men to purchase sex from women, girls, and transgender individuals, who are often held in poor living conditions and against their will. It is estimated that on any given day, between 16,000 and 24,000 women and children are involved in prostitution-related activities in the Chicago metropolitan area, with at least 170 being prostituted in fake massage establishments¹. While there are many organizations dedicated to ending human trafficking throughout the country and world, few focus their activist efforts on addressing the exploitation and trafficking that occurs behind the closed doors of illegitimate massage businesses. This may be due to a lack of understanding of how prostitution works under the guise of massage therapy. As a result, there has been little research done to date on trafficking occurring in these venues. This lack of information creates a problem for those attempting to combat sex trafficking in fake massage establishments; if one does not fully understand the problem, how can they prevent it from occurring in the future or intervene? Fake massage establishments are particularly challenging to identify since their essence is one of discretion and invisibility. Yet with new Internet innovations, researchers and advocates for a world free from human trafficking may begin to better understand johns (men who purchase sex) and their habits related to this underground world and thus stop this harm from occurring.

The best resource for uncovering contemporary information on prostitution disguised as massage therapy is the website Rubmaps.com. While there are a number of blogs and forums dedicated to identifying fake massage establishments where sex is being sold (i.e. EroticMP.com, USASexGuide.com, and Backpages.com), Rubmaps.com appears to be the most thorough and frequently updated website for this specific genre of exploitation (as of April 2013). Rubmaps.com is a website utilized by individuals seeking sexual services disguised as massage. It offers a variety of features to assist johns in taking advantage of these undercover brothels. An interesting facet of Rubmaps.com is that it allows an outsider who does not subscribe to the website to view communication between website subscribers, which allows interested sex trade

¹ Know the facts: Human trafficking. In (2009). Chicago, IL: Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation.

consumers to gain information on this illegal activity without actively participating in conversations themselves.

A note on language

Sex trafficking is defined as “the recruitment and transportation of persons within or across boundaries by force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of exploiting them economically.”² A powerful tool in combating sexual exploitation is to be purposeful with the language we use when we talk about the issue. Therefore, this paper will utilize vocabulary that holds appropriate connotations. For example, the phrase “massage parlor” will never be used. This is a derogatory term, a euphemism for a brothel, and creates a negative connotation for legitimate massage therapy. Language regarding businesses that focus on health and wellbeing will include “massage establishment,” “spa,” or “practice.” Those illegitimate establishments may be referred to as “trafficking operation” “sex trafficking posing as massage,” “fake massage establishment,” or other similar phrases.

The Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation explicitly refrains from utilizing terms that normalize prostitution or imply the harm someone must endure for survival is a type of work. Therefore this paper will use terms like “prostituted woman,” “victim,” or “survivor,” in place of more commonly accepted terms like “prostitute,” “sex worker,” “masseur,” or “hooker”. Additionally, terms like “buyer” or “customer” will be avoided when referring to the purchaser of sex since these words indicate a valid business transaction is taking place. Instead, the more generic slang term “john” will be utilized.

Additionally, this piece contains quotations with explicit content, including descriptions of sexual violence, which could be a trigger for some readers.

Functions of Rubmaps.com

Rubmaps.com serves a number of purposes for its users. Its primary function is to link johns with brothels disguised as massage establishments. Users identify an establishment as a venue that sells sex and offer identifying information on that establishment. Rubmaps.com

² Know the facts: Human trafficking. In (2009). Chicago, IL: Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation.

identifies those places that are legitimate with a red “NON-EROTIC” stamping. This allows johns to quickly by-pass the establishments that only offer healing massage. General information, including address, a Google map of the location, distance from one’s current location, phone number, hours of operation, forms of payment accepted, and “masseuse style” (i.e., race) are noted in this initial part of the review. Without a membership, a visitor to Rubmaps.com may access an establishment’s certain desirable features (such as the hours of operation) and how many stars reviewers rate the brothel. The establishments that do offer sexual services are then reviewed on an intricate level to help men better determine if the particular brothel is “right” for them.³ While this is the most prominent aspect of the website, other applications are more discreet. Users of Rubmaps.com also interact and create a community of sex buyers. Not only does Rubmaps.com link individuals to brothels, but it also offers support, advice, and justification for each other’s activities purchasing sex.

Johns “training” other johns

Johns who frequent Rubmaps.com refer to their persistent “hunt” for sex services as a “hobby” and to their of choice activity as “mongering.” Most men who visit Rubmaps.com appear to be new to the hobby, as they are seeking out locations that sell sex in fake massage establishments for the first time. Concurrently, a smaller number of experienced “mongers” frequent the pages of Rubmaps.com, collecting information and offering insight with those new to the community. Johns often appear proud of their patronage of the sex trade and boast about their past experiences, seemingly hoping to be perceived as the “best” hobbyist. As a result, Rubmaps.com has developed into a training ground of sorts for new community members. Lara Janson describes similar behavior in her research on the USA Sex Guide, stating that forums are “a training ground with sets of rules that are actively taught and reinforced.”⁴ She states “...men on the Illinois boards of the USA Sex Guide communicate with one another about these topics by requesting advice, asking questions, discussing problems and complaints, responding to posts by other users, and giving recommendations.”⁵

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⁴ Janson, L. (2013). Our great hobby: An analysis of online networks for buyers of sex in Illinois. In Chicago, IL: Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation

⁵ Ibid.

The head of the website, Mongo, leads this front.⁶ Mongo (which one may assume is a take on the word “monger,” which, defined by Merriam-Webster, is a broker, dealer, or a person who attempts to stir up or spread something that is usually petty or discreditable⁷) is actively a part of many aspects of Rubmaps.com, but his most visible presence may be seen through the blog function. This blog seems to serve as a way for the site master to stay in touch with his most active community members. He also uses the blog as a way to offer advice to johns through his articles on topics such as “How To Write A Good Rubmaps Review” or “Does Mongering Help or Hurt A Marriage.” This webmaster boasts an almost unreasonable amount of experience with fake massage establishments, discussing his world travels to pursue the “hobby.”

Those johns who are more experienced also have a plethora of opportunities to share insight with others on the site. Some johns will look for answers to their questions on soliciting sex in the “Forum” section of Rubmap.com. There are four generalized forums; the most popular, titled Rubmaps Café, has almost 300 different topics boards posted. These boards cover a wide variety of topics, although most encourage users to share personal stories, tips, or to exchange opinions on women.⁸ Forum topic questions range in type and include:

Ever tried learning Asian language to communicate?

Have anyone ever fallen in love with a provider and couldn't have them?

How often do you visit your favorite AMP [Asian Massage Parlor]?

*Hi All, I seem to be addicted to AMP's [Asian Massage Parlors]especially full service ones. I do love the adventure but I spend way too much money a month on it and it is causing me financial destruction. I make about \$4,500 a month and I spent about \$1,200 on basically asian [sic] wh*res. I hate myself for it. But i cannot stop. I tried going to a Pro therapist but he does not understand my temptation. The main problem is that I love it so much. It is like paradise. But I go too often and it is getting worse. I have a real*

⁶ Appendix 1

⁷ monger. 2013. In *Merriam-Webster.com*. Retrieved March 8, 2013, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/monger>

⁸ Appendix 1

addiction and it is completely screwing up my life and it is sad. very sad. Please help me. Please give me advice.

Johns utilize regional message threads to communicate with others in their area in order to help them identify best rated fake massage establishments. A forum post in the Regional Chicago board titled “Chicago Discussion Thread” attempts to provide instructions for those local to the area:

Homework.

There are alot more AMP [Asian Massage Parlors] in the area than are listed on RM [Rubmaps.com]. I'd like everyone to pick one place this week to do a simple 'drive by'. You know the words to Alices Restaurant; 'walk right in, recite a few bars, and walk out'. So, go to a new place, check out the faces, get a business card and just say "I'll be back." Then add the listing to RM and give a simple review just based on how the place appears and what the girl/girls look like. Thats it. But if you're inclined [sic], TOFTT [Take One For The Team]

Novice johns will often share issues and/or empathize with the question seeker, while the more experienced patrons offer their “expert” opinions:

Hi, J___ here, been around for quite a while. Based in the SF Area...

I don't negotiate too often, and if a girl talks of \$ too much, it really is the end of the session...

That's been my philosophy and I look forward to participating on this [New Member's Welcome] board.

While advice is often requested and received by those new to the hobby, some Johns simply critique their peers' posts on fake massage establishments:

User A posted this brief review about a fake massage establishment in Chicago, IL:

MT performed with jeans and shirt. Lame. demanded \$40 tip afterwards.

User B critiqued the review the same afternoon:

You may be frustrated but yours is a bad review. What was the MT name? Do you maybe give the wrong vibe?

When a review is created on Rubmaps.com, other users have the opportunity to mark this post as one of a few preexisting categories which include: “informative”, “interesting”, “hilarious”, “not good”, or “fake” and leave commentary.⁹ For example:

Posts marked as “hilarious”:

*She is small. Very petite. Table shower was alright. I got on the massage table and she worked it, but i think maybe since she is so small she was unable to summon enough strength to work my back and shoulders. I probably could've used a vibrator that was stronger than her. Thinking back maybe I should have been weary of her handjob skills too, but actually it turned out okay. She jerked it and talked to me, her english is decent. Worked the balls, worked the shaft. I guess you dont really want a body builder to accidentally snap off your d*ck. Her strongest HJ is probably the most sensual. She was probably sweating. I busted open and she hung out for a while. Good experience.*

A post marked as “fake”:

she was cutious [sic] about why other girls give full service. I replied, "MONEY", FS is \$ 100 more.She thinks maybe next time she will give me more, lol.

A post marked as “informative”:

went in and was given sherry, sherry is nice looking with a nice build got a TS and then a 30 minue [sic] massage,very nice and warm massage.could do the walk on back as no pole to hold on for her.but she was good not as good as C___ but better then M__on the

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*flip she rubbed my body up and down and played with junior as he was at a attention and she said he looks great and such a beautiful c*ck and said what would i like and told her BJ and she went to work on junior as a played with her ass and kitty and rubbed her nice firm breast with nice size nipples.*

These reviewer comments serve to train johns to write “good” reviews that are most helpful to others utilizing the website. They also appear to serve as a policing mechanism so that users are not inclined to share false experiences.¹⁰

Detachment

Sometimes these comments and critiques are used to encourage johns to dehumanize the prostituted individuals and exhibit detached emotional feelings from women in general. When this occurs they continue to seek conformity to a virile image, one that uses the services of prostituted individuals because he is aroused by exploitation or has uncontrollable sexual urges. Johns who show compassion are berated.

Original post 2/7/13:

Man M___ look so pissed of, all I did was remove the towel, that’s all... On the flip, I was a bit hard but she gave me a deathly Asian glare and my member went down faster than the Titanic. Still, I would come back to her to see if there are opportunities even though she got pissed at me getting a stiffie [sic].

Response post 2/7/13:

*Don’t even feel bad. The nerve of these people to shoot you a look. They know why you are there and their business model and behavior is predicted on the implication of ‘something more.’ Whatever I’m sure ‘M___’ has guzzled plenty of c*m for cash in her day. She can go to hell. Never Repeat!*

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Payment and Tipping

Rubmaps.com users recognize that their interactions with fake massage venues are all interconnected; the prices will increase for everyone if some are willing to pay a significant amount more for sexual services. They encourage other johns to pay the lowest amount possible, discouraging over-tipping. Users on the USA Sex Guide and Rubmaps.com have warned other users against “rewarding women for ‘bad service’ by tipping them...” as it will create “‘golden pussy syndrome’ that will lead prostituted women to think they do not have to obey the desires of johns.”¹¹ More experienced Johns strategize with newer ones on how much they should be paying, setting limits and establishing a set of unwritten “hobbyist rules” via the review comments section.

Here a commenter states that the amount the reviewer tipped was too much:

*Okay, \$80 for a HJ? I understand the longer length of session but she charged you extra to play with her t*ts? I'm sorry, but you overpaid by \$20. Normal rate for HJ is \$40 but if the MT is above-average I will give her another 20 for a total of \$60. But NEVER would I pay \$80 for a mere HJ. That's my opinion*

Justification

An important feature of Rubmaps.com is the sense of justification it offers to Johns to continue participating in illicit behaviors. One way this manifests is by users encouraging fellow johns to purchase sex, persuading them to join the “mongering” community. Some johns will attempt to persuade apprehensive users to continue “their hobby.”

A user created a forum announcing his leave from “the hobby” for fear of contracting STDs. The following is another user’s response:

¹¹ Janson, L. (2013). Our great hobby: An analysis of online networks for buyers of sex in Illinois. In Chicago, IL: Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation

*S___, do not worry. The chances of contracting any wierd [sic] bugs from getting sucked off are practically zero. The girl doing the sucking is at risk though. Just remember to piss and wash your d*ck afterward and you'll be ok.*

Some johns seem to look for approval from their peers. Janson cites “one self-proclaimed novice posting on the Rockford forum thanks the ‘regulars’ in the forum for their assistance and states, ‘[T]his site is a fantastic resource for those new to the hobby.’”¹² While certain posts are sincerely seeking advice and guidance, others have an undertone of approval-seeking behavior or even complain of the hierarchy the johns seem to have established. Janson notes “the power dynamics between regular and senior members on the forums [of the USA Sex Guide] sometimes create tensions between users.”¹³

An interesting aspect of Rubmaps.com that increases the reach of its impact is that one does not need to be a registered member to view this encouragement and support; any individual that visits Rubmaps.com may view the question and answer portion of the forum. Data from the Rubmaps.com website shows that significantly more people are looking than posting.¹⁴

Brotherhood

Perhaps one of the most desirable features of Rubmaps.com, for its users, is the idea that it creates a type of community for johns. Janson states, “By creating a brotherhood of men who normalize buying sex, the [USA Sex Guide] forums seem to reinforce men’s justifications for purchasing sex.”¹⁵ Johns speak to each other as if they are friends, often times using semi-affectionate names for one another, like “brother,” “man,” or “friend.” They not only feel comfortable seeking advice and reassurance from each other, but Rubmaps.com allows a venue for all participants to feel part of a community. The regional forums are not only utilized as a training ground for johns, but are also an excellent example of this brotherhood.¹⁶ A hobbyist

¹² Janson, L. (2013). Our great hobby: An analysis of online networks for buyers of sex in Illinois. In Chicago, IL: Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Appendix 1

¹⁵ Janson, L. (2013). Our great hobby: An analysis of online networks for buyers of sex in Illinois. In Chicago, IL: Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation

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might discover that there are people in his very geographical area who share his similar interests through engaging with Rubmaps.com. He might also discover there are similar reasons that others pay for sex, including openly discussing loneliness and how being with women in fake massage establishments fills this void:

Going through a rough divorce and needed some companionship.

If you're in a divorce I wouldn't use CC [credit card]. Just my 2 cents. Hang in there. – User A

I agree with [User A] on this! I went thru [sic] that a few years back, I spent way too much!! Had a great time though but totally regret it. Smoked a ton of weed and went amping [Asian Massage Parlors]! – User B

I got to touch her ass and feel up her stomach during the massage. I just want to touch a human being. It was a pretty good experience.

Attitudes About Patronage

Attitudes toward women

Many johns' boards (ex: UsaSexGuide) are riddled with derogatory commentary and depictions of violence against women. Studies such as *Our Great Hobby: An analysis of Online Networks for Buyers of Sex in Illinois* strongly demonstrate the misogyny of users.¹⁷ Though some Rubmaps.com users write derogatory reviews, others appear to display different attitudes toward the women that they are exploiting. These varying attitudes about patronage can be summarized into three different categories.¹⁸

The first is the individual who may be seen on Rubmaps.com believes he is doing the prostituted woman a favor; he sees himself as an authority figure helping her business venture.

¹⁷ Janson, L. (2013). *Our great hobby: An analysis of online networks for buyers of sex in Illinois*. In Chicago, IL: Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation.

¹⁸ These categories are generalizations made based on observations of Rubmaps.com between August 2012- April 2013. Users might not display all or any of the qualities described in this section, although many users do exhibit one of these styles of Rubmaps.com patronage.

He views the exploitation as a simple business transaction and shares notes on the website about what the individual may improve upon next time. This type of john will suggest that his monetary tip was based on the quality of service provided. Janson's work on the USA Sex Guide shows that this ideology on tipping is not uncommon.¹⁹ This type of john, however, will generally describe the woman he solicits somewhat respectfully, offering what he might believe to be constructive criticism. This john only refers to noticeable patterns of trafficking as something that may require improvement or are a positive attribute of the business; for example, he might note that the women don't speak English but comment that it might improve their "business" if the women could communicate with the customers a bit better. He views the women he solicits in the way another person might view their waiter or waitress; as a person that is simply providing a service.

I went here looking for an old friend that worked there. Upon entering I was met by a couple of young ladies. One asks if I wanted a massage. I responded "yes" and ask if my friend was working. I was told "she no longer works here"... I explained that I wanted a hard massage, but I am not sure she understood as her English was almost non-existent... Hopefully her attitude improves with time on the job because she is an attractive girl with a body built for comfort.

I was real happy with the work. Great work from this Chinese cutie.

Why would you leave a \$30 tip [if the service was poor]? Would you tip a waitress if she told you to go to the kitchen and bring your own meal to the table?

Its nice that they are open late prob. cuz [sic] they sleep there.

The second attitude that may be displayed is by the individual who feels he develops "relationships" with the prostituted women. Janson discovered that, for johns, an ideal experience with a prostituted individual is one that "provides an illusion of intimacy and

¹⁹ Janson, L. (2013). Our great hobby: An analysis of online networks for buyers of sex in Illinois. In Chicago, IL: Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation

authenticity in their sexual encounters.”²⁰ This second type of john tends to take this desire for intimacy a step further to become emotionally attached for either a brief or extended period of time. Whether this supposed relationship forms over the course of one isolated interaction or repeated solicitations, certain men feel a connection to the women that they exploit. They become protective of the women, encouraging other men to be “respectful.” These individuals often write about fantasies of dating or sexually satisfying the women they exploit in their reviews. This type of john usually tips the women a larger amount than others on the site. They are generally forgiving of circumstances where the women do not wish to participate in sexual activities, suggesting that the woman probably needs to get to know him better, as if it in a dating relationship. Frequently in these circumstances, other johns ridicule this john for “holding out.” Janson explains this occurrence on the USA Sex Guide, “...other johns... warn one another not to get so caught up in the fantasy and illusion of authenticity that they forget that prostituted women are ‘faking it’ and are actually trying to look for ‘suckers’ who will overpay.”²¹ This individual will sometimes refer to instances of trafficking, but often in the context of rescuing the victim and taking her away from the negative scenario. Janson saw similar behavior on the USA Sex Guide; one john stated “...the scene was not of a John picking up a pro but rather just civilians helping another.”²² While a john with this mentality might recognize that the woman they are soliciting is in a less-than-ideal position, they often appear naïve and unaware that the situation they are describing might refer to circumstances of trafficking or forced prostitution. This john views the women he solicits in the way another person might view a friend or dating partner.

She was hot and made me feel desirable.

I'm in the process of starting [a relationship with an Asian masseuse girl] up. She says she only does hj [hand job], though I wouldn't care if she did do more [with other guys]. She just broke up with an abusive boyfriend, so there's a high probability I'm just the rebound guy.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

I have asked my FS [Full Sexual Service] masseuse to go on a date with me and she has agreed but we have not been to set up a day. I am married and cannot do anything during the evening hours. So, I see her at the shop and have a great sex with her. I pay her the normal tip for FS service but I like how she treats me. My HJ [Hand Job] masseuse has refused to go out with me because she is Thai and conservative. So for dates and FS action, I concentrate on my young Chinese gal. I know that she probably is after my money, but I don't mind spending money on her.

In response to users arguing over a tip:

[User A], it's about more than the service, it's the provider. Treat the provider like a person. Give and take. So get off your 20, 40, 60, 100 shit. He went down her pants, which is more than you ever do. – User B

A third type of john on Rubmaps.com views prostituted women as objects for personal use. He feels entitled and angry when he does not receive sexual services, or when he receives sexual services that are sub-par in his opinion. He describes women in a way that makes them appear to be a commodity, rather than an individual voluntarily offering a service like the view the first type of john tends to hold. While men on Rubmaps.com very infrequently describe violence perpetrated against women in these fake massage establishments, when it does happen it is usually the men in this category that would identify the violent acts. A user will refer to qualities that might describe trafficking in an annoyed way; he might write about how he is frustrated that he has to travel around to find his “favorite” girl or that the individuals do not speak English. This john is quite unsympathetic to these particular circumstances. This third type of john holds high expectations for the women he exploits. He views the women he solicits in the way another person might view a car or another item of value. When he is impressed he will “respect” the woman as he might respect a nice car. If he dislikes the individual then he treats her like an unwanted object and theoretically tosses her to the side.

*AMPs [Asian Massage Parlors] nowadays are so suspicious it's ridiculous. However, the masseuse I got, I think her name was C____? Freaking hella [sic] cute Korean, so imagine my frustration not being able to rip the sh*t outta her.*

She left a towel over my nether regions the entire time. (I don't get it, Im in pretty good shape, friendly, smiley and outspoken when talked to, but for whatever reason she didn't seem in the mood to be there.)

The end finally came and I asked "anything else?". She said "no". Then I chuckled and said "ok maybe next time..."

She leaves, I change, she walks back in in the middle of me changing and on my way out asks for more tip.

I wanted to slap the hoe, but instead I gave her the 3 singles I had in my wallet.

Acknowledgement of trafficking by Johns

Some johns who use Rubmaps.com develop certain theories as to why women might be in establishments posing as massage businesses. Sometimes these theories are a defense mechanisms to help them ignore the likelihood that many of these women are victims of trafficking. Johns suggest the idea that prostituted women make a great deal of money, and continue to participate in the sex trade due to a passion for sex. Others spout the theory that the women that speak exclusively in a foreign tongue probably know English but are playing out a fantasy sex role for the john. Some johns go so far as to comment that it is convenient for them that women may live on the "massage" premises. Even though this is a very probable sign of trafficking, johns do not identify it as such. Comments that denote trafficking to the trained eye are stated very matter-of-factly by johns and do not really provide much insight into whether or not the johns recognize the trafficking.

Attitudes toward law enforcement

One might wonder how candid the johns are being on Rubmaps.com. It is possible that they withhold information or descriptions for fear of punishment from law enforcement. In fact, discussions regarding law enforcement are not uncommon on Rubmaps.com. Individuals refer to

the police as LE (law enforcement) and discuss how to avoid getting caught. They request that other johns avoid posting identifying information on the site in order to prevent law enforcement from shutting places down. In fact, entire forum rooms have been dedicated to “Avoiding the LE” and “Writing accurate reviews: Bad Idea?” An experienced john posted in response to a reviewer offering up a lot of information:

b___, are you a dick or just stupid. "saw some forum buzz". this place has not been reviewed since Nov. W ___ is a nice lady that does not advertise and is very low key but yet you blab about a HJ [Hand Job]. I may not have many reviews here but I do on other boards. I meet with other mongers in person and have a great time sharing info. If you want to share use the pm [Personal Message] option. W__ was NOT very happy to see your review. YES she and other massage girls do read the boards.

Another review simply states:

I'll keep the review clean (you know LE) but extra tip was worth it. Table shower first, then massage. Money up front. I left happy thus mission accomplished.

Despite acknowledgement that they are breaking the law, there is little admittance of guilt. Most of the men appear justified in their behavior and view the police as more of a nuisance than anything else

Conclusions and Recommendations

Though Rubmaps.com is used by johns to facilitate their exploitation, it can also serve as an excellent resource for those seeking to end sexual harm. If used appropriately by activists and law enforcement, the information provided in this online community may be used to eliminate the real life community of johns, pimps, and traffickers it supports and help connect victims to resources. Until it becomes unsafe for sexual exploiters to continue their patronage of fake massage establishments, activists can use the very tools used in exploitation to target the demand side of the sex trade.

For more information about how to take action against fake message establishments, please visit:
www.not-in-our-name.org.

Appendix

1. Website Format
2. A History of Prostitution and Massage

1. Website Format

In many ways Rubmaps.com operates in a way that is similar to other search engines, such as Yelp.com; it allows for varying levels of specificity when seeking out the desired service, provides feedback and tips about locations, and offers conversation forums for users. The following sub-sections describe each of the five tabs on an ever-present menu bar at the top of the webpage.

2.1 “*Massage parlor*” review

The “massage parlor” review is the most pervasive feature of Rubmaps.com as this is the backbone of the site. One does not have to be a member of the site (i.e., pay a fee and create an account) to view certain aspects of reviews. Each review serves a number of functions. The first is to identify an establishment as a venue that sells sex and offer identifying information on that establishment. Users are responsible for uploading new places in their local area; and virtual tokens (denoting status on the website) are received for uploading new locations. A drawback of this reward system is that certain users wrongly upload venues as a way to gain more tokens. Rubmaps.com identifies those places that are legitimate massage establishments with a red “NON-EROTIC” stamping. This allows johns to quickly by-pass the establishments that only offer healing massage. General information, including address, a Google map of the location, distance from one’s current location, phone number, hours of operation, forms of payment accepted, and “masseuse style” (ie, race) are noted in this initial part of the review. Without a membership, a visitor to Rubmaps.com may access an establishment’s certain desirable features (such as hours of operation, type of payment accepted, hourly rate, “masseuse style”, address and location) and how many stars reviewers rate the brothel.

The second function of the review is to rate those establishments that do offer sexual services on an intricate level. These ratings are broken down into several categories and one must create an account to view this portion of the review. The first of these sections is the “MP Review” where the Rubmaps.com user will share general information, including date and time of visit, house fee, parlor type, and privacy level of the store-front. Here, a user can share whether or not they recommend the location with a green check or a red X.

Next, the user has the opportunity to rate the “provider” of the sexual service. This portion is significantly more detailed than that of describing the establishment in which the sexual services take place. The john will post the providers name and certain identifying details so that other “hobbyists” might find the prostituted person if her name has been changed. These identifiers include eye color, hair color, age, height, breast size, implants, tattoos, etc. The user is asked to share a rating of 1-5 stars and denote recommendation via another green check or red X. Next a user is asked to share details on the “Services” offered. They may mark categories with a green check, red X, or blue question mark to indicate if the following occurred: fondling, oral sex, hand job, sex, anal sex, tipping issues, etc. In this portion johns will post if an extra tip was given to the provider and share a 1-5 star rating for the massage and the sexual services provided.

In a review, johns are also asked to offer “Massage Parlor Details”. This is the most involved and detailed part of a review. The johns will post stories of their experiences in the brothel and many clearly put a concerted amount of effort into this part of their post, some stories being paragraphs long. An example of this is as follows:

Been here four times. 2 with M___, and last two by default somehow to E___.

Recommend M___ over E___.

This was the second time i went to visit T pro Massage. E___was 2nd choice both times as M___ was supposedly in China?? E___was ok, she warmed up to me a little more as I reminded [sic] her that I saw her before. I went for the TS [table shower]on their scummy table, but she kept it fun and clean all part well. we went back to the room and she started 1/2hr massage. Massage was OK at best, since i've been before she knew I was game because I remeber [sic] her not budging on anything else but HJ [Hand Job] last time. On the flip I tried Negoitation [sic] for FS [Full Sex] but would not go there, tried BS excuse that I was to big...LOL. I was hesitant to yeild [sic] to her price demands for a covered BJ [Blow Job] and wanted her to get naked as well. She would only do a covered BJ with top off for 100. I said 60 for that and wouldn't budge for HJ at that price. So I stupidly [sic] agreed to that, as she left to do something while I was grabbing my \$\$ i just laid the hundo [sic] out. When she came back in she seemed surprised that I did, i don't know why i did either, guess I was thinking with my other head. I think i was trying to price herself out of the game but I force her hand I guess, the BJ sucked to say

the least, Not sure if she only had one speed and she def wasn't enjoying it so i didn't pop before the condom broke be cause she was really working Jr. after that she worked him manually [sic] again at the same one speed in the hurry up and pop already attitude. SO I concentrated and popped so good on this one I think I got some in here mouth while she was standing up over the table. She was mortified and was kind enough to not over react to much in the room but left quickly after and heard here hawking up some nasty ass lugsy [sic] like that was going to help get rid of the juice. I was laughing my as off because I felt it def wasn't worth the \$100 but for that to happen made it worth it. Long and short, E___ should only do a average HJ, don't try for more, she doesn't want to do it so it not worth it in my opinion. I'm going to either go back to M___ or try someone else here.

The end of a review allows other users to mark the post as informative, interesting, hilarious, not good, or fake and leave commentary. This appears to serve as a policing mechanism so that users are not inclined to share false experiences.

Generally, establishments that offer no sexual services receive 1-2 stars, places that offer “sub-par” sexual services receive 3 stars, and establishments that are viewed positively by johns receive 4-5 stars. Only those establishments that have yet to be reviewed will have 0 stars.

2.2 Search options

The left sidebar of Rubmaps.com is dedicated to specifying popular and/or “nearby” cities for fake massage establishments. It also lists US States and cities so that one may manually look for locations. A search bar consistently settled above the menu bar at the top of the website allows one to search for a specific store-front’s name, particular town, or zip code. An advanced search option tab is also available in the menu bar. This feature is meant to be used by the experienced john. One may search for a fake massage establishment based on any of the criteria listed in the reviews. For example, one may search for venues based on payment methods, “masseuse” ethnicity, or even the woman’s method of pubic hair grooming.

2.3 Rubmaps.com Slang

Another important menu tab links one to “Rubmaps Slang.” This page lists, alphabetically, the johns’ terminology with corresponding definitions. These definitions vary from commonly used

abbreviations (ex: BTW- by the way), to jargon-like words and phrases (ex: AAMP- Asian Apartment Massage Parlor). This slang ventures to be as specific as to describe certain neighborhoods (ex: monty- streetwalker stroll: Monterey/1st St San Jose CA). An interesting aspects to Rubmaps.com, is that when this jargon is used elsewhere on the site, one may hover their mouse over the phrase or abbreviation to view the definition immediately. The webmaster appears to update this section as needed or requested.

2.4 Blogs

The Rubmaps.com Blog is updated once every 3-4 weeks by the site master, Mongo. Mongo consistently refers to himself in the third person and is actively involved in many areas of the site. His presence is most strongly felt in the blog section, however, as he writes each “personally.” Topics vary in seriousness and in relation to solicitation of sex; they seem to serve more as a way for the site master to stay in touch with his most active community members. Recent topics for blog posts include: “How to Write A Good RubMaps Review”, “Best Place to Monger Outside the US”, and “Massage Tips 101: How much do I tip the ladies?”. Here Mongo gives his “expert” opinion on these topics and viewers weigh in. Other posts appear more innocent in nature. A post titled “Happy New Years to ALL!!!” states:

Just wanted to thank everyone of you for helping to make this board a better place. Hope everyone is enjoying time with their friends, significant others and family! What are your New Year Resolutions? Quit smoking? Lose weight? Pay off your mortgage? Would love to hear them. As for Mongo...my New Years Resolution is to turn RubMaps into the BEST site for YOU the users in 2013.

On this specific post, users then comment on how Mongo may improve the site, where he might find advertisers, and what their New Years resolutions are. One john discusses his plan for weight loss while another resolves to visit and use Rubmaps.com “on a weekly basis.” Comments on the blog posts are consistently courteous to the webmaster and other users, although frequently disrespectful towards women, law enforcement, and those men that do not “monger.”

2.5 Forums

One may participate in one of four generalized forums, or post to Regional Boards. The general forums include “Rubmaps Café: Place to chat about anything AMP [Asian Massage Parlor] related”, “Massage Parlor Tips for Newbies: Mongering help from experienced hobbyists”, “New Members Welcome: New mongers introduce themselves” or “Ask Mongo”. The Rubmaps Café is the most popular forum where almost 300 different topic boards have been posted. These topics range greatly, although most encourage users to share personal stories, tips, or to exchange opinions on women.

Johns utilize regional message threads to communicate with others in their area in order to help them identify best rated fake massage establishments. A forum post in the Regional Chicago board titled “Chicago Discussion Thread” attempts to provide instructions for those local to the area:

Homework.

There are alot more AMP [Asian Massage Parlors] in the area than are listed on RM [Rubmaps.com]. I'd like everyone to pick one place this week to do a simple 'drive by'. You know the words to Alices Restaurant; 'walk right in, recite a few bars, and walk out'. So, go to a new place, check out the faces, get a business card and just say "I'll be back." Then add the listing to RM and give a simple review just based on how the place appears and what the girl/girls look like. Thats it. But if you're inclinded, TOFTT [Take One For The Team].

A notable feature of the forums is that a visitor may see how many replies are made to a topic post *and* how many views the post has received. This is crucial as it shows that this website is receiving many more silent views than active posting community members. For example, the forum post in Rubmaps Café titled “Has Anyone Date Masseuse?” has 35 replies but 1,672 views. This is significant as it shows how exponentially more individuals are utilizing the services of Rubmaps.com than may be estimated by an initial overview of the site’s membership.

2.7 “My profile”

Each individual that signs up for an account with Rubmaps.com receives a profile to track their activities on the website. The user may change their avatar (the default image is a bowl of steamed noodles) and most choose to use cartoon characters or pornographic images of Asian women. An individual can use their own profile to send messages to others, invite friends to the site via email, track their favorite brothels and track tokens (status) received by the site. One may view the people that have visited their profile, even seeing the date and time of such a visit. Other users can see the reviews and blog posts by each Rubmaps.com subscriber by simply viewing their profile. While some users have no noted site activity, others are active daily.

2. The history of massage and prostitution as taken from *The History of Massage: An Illustrated Survey From Around the World*

The practice of massage therapy is one steeped in rich history. Massage is known to have occurred in all eras, on all continents, by most societies. In its earliest form, shamans, individuals who combined magic with limited knowledge of medicine to produce healing methods, practiced massage.²³ Midwives of native civilizations also used massage techniques. Religious beliefs of the ancient world fostered the idea that massage rid individuals of inner demons causing ailments. Healing of the individual, rather than removing a third party inhabitant, became the focus of massage over time. As medical theory advanced, the benefits of massage were proven through developing scientific discovery. Hippocrates acknowledged the advantages of massage during Greece's medical revolution around 400 B.C. The massage methods he endorsed were used for athletes, the ailing, and pre and post-natal women. At this time, sexual activity was mutually exclusive of massage.

Identified exclusively as a healing practice for centuries, the link to prostitution began to be seen during the Roman Empire. At this time, the connotation of massage began to branch from respected to lewd. Bathhouses, originally intended to be a holistic therapeutic experience, were extremely common during the high years in Rome. Massage was commonplace in this arena and performed by slaves. As time passed, however, bathing became a widespread social institution and "eventually deteriorated into 'a cult of sensuality,'" ²⁴ The Roman Era (27 BC – 610 AD) emphasized indulgence, sensual and otherwise, and bathhouses did not have to stretch too far to establish an erotic nuance; generally a sybaritic overtone was already set and physical contact was standard. Therefore, pampering in a sexual nature in bathhouses was not unheard of. Over time, bathhouses, the sole distributor of massage, were synonymous with prostitution. By the Augustun Era (1700-1745), most bathhouses had cells attached where attendants would work privately (provide sexual services) on both male and female clientele under the guise of massage therapy. Eventually these types of bathhouses spread to every city in Western Europe. Some

²³ Calvert, R. N. (2002). *The history of massage: An illustrated survey from around the world*. Rochester, VT: Healing Arts Press.

²⁴ Ibid.

historians will go so far as to claim that every public bathhouse in the middle ages offered prostitution, some as its primary service.

Bathhouses around the world began to affiliate with sexual services as well. The Yoshiwara (red light district) in Japan hosted bathhouses that locals deemed low-class brothels. In the late 19th and early 20th century, bathing institutions in the US also degenerated under the influence of corrupt public officials and took to offering prostitution.

Narrowing in on the United States, bathhouses in American cities, also known as sanitariums, were originally establishments of high esteem. Employment required high credentials; massage, gymnastics, movement therapy, and relaxation were emphasized.²⁵ As the wealth gap continued to increase in the early 1900s, public bathhouses were opened for those that could not afford membership to the more elite establishments. These city baths were often large, overcrowded, and employed high numbers of poor European immigrants for low wages. It was in these public facilities that prostitution under the guise of massage therapy began to be seen; those employed sought more money or were forced to engage in sex acts for pay.²⁶

Simultaneously, wars were occurring overseas. American soldiers began to experience prostitution under the guise of massage therapy at brothels set up next to military bases in countries all over the world. Along with many other cultural experiences, men brought the practice of prostitution in these fake establishments back with them to the United States.²⁷

Eventually, cities in the US started pushing the regulation of prostitution and bathhouses. Those running the illegal prostitution trade under the front of bathhouses realized they needed to find another cover if they wished to keep their business alive. As a result, businesses claiming to exclusively offer massage separated from bathhouses; they ran side by side with legitimate institutions that offered therapeutic, healing massage. This front allowed for the continuation of the illegal practice of prostitution. In the last century, other countries have taken action to prevent prostitution in the massage therapy industry. Paris, for example, has strict advertisement and business regulations that are supervised by professional associations and government officials. Yet the US has taken few effective measures to prevent prostitution in the fake massage field.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.