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Abstract

In Los Angeles many Latino immigrants earn income through street vending, as do some of their teenagers and younger children. Members of their community and external authorities view these economic activities as deviant, low status, and illegal, and young people who engage in them are sometimes chased by the police and teased by their peers. Why do they consent to do this work, and how do they respond to the threats and taunts? Based on participant observation and in-depth interviews with street vending children and teens, the authors argue that an intersectionalities perspective can help explain both *why* the youth engage in this work and *how* they construct narratives of intersectional dignities to counter experiences of shame, stigma, and humiliation with street vending. Intersectional dignities refers to moral constructions based on inversions of widely held negative stereotypes of racial ethnic minorities, the poor, immigrants, and in this case, children and girls who earn money in the streets. By analyzing how they counter stigma, one learns something about the structure of the broader society and the processes through which disparaged street vendor youth build affirming identities.

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informal economy, intersectionalities, low-wage labor, street vending, children and work, Latino immigrant youth

Like people from school, they'd say, "Oh, look at the hot dog girl," and I'm like you know what? *Mejor callate porque* [You better be quiet because] at least . . . I get whatever I want, and I get more money than you.

Nadya (age thirteen)

Latino immigrants are reviving urban public life in many American cities, and in Los Angeles, street vendors are at the forefront of this trend. The cultural geographer Lorena Muñoz (2008) has observed how these vendors utilize nostalgia for familiar foods and memory of place to construct new "urban cultural landscapes," and Mike Davis (2000, 65) has noted the ways in which these street vendors are transforming "dead urban spaces into convivial social places," blending traditions from the *mestizaje* of the Spanish plaza and the Meso-American *mercado*. Muñoz estimates that there are 10,000 Latino immigrant street vendors working in L.A. daily.

Linger in the public parks and street corners near bus stops, schools, and factories, and you begin to notice that children and youth are not only customers, but they are also vendors. On the streets of East Los Angeles, little girls as young as age ten shout out in high-pitched, sing-songy voices, "*churros, raspados, tamales,*" and their older siblings are making change, taking orders, and serving food. By day, it is not uncommon to see thirteen- and fourteen-year-old girls and boys working alone, perhaps pushing a shopping cart full of cups of sliced fruit, *elotes* (steamed corn on the cob), and *churros* (a type of fried doughnut).

Most of the scholarly literature on informal sector street vending in the United States has not examined the role of children and teens (Duneier 1999; Morales 2009; Kettles 2007). In their studies of Central American and Mexican immigrant street vendors in L.A., Muñoz (2008) and Hamilton and Chinchilla (2001) do observe that many street vendor mothers bring their young children with them, blending reproductive, domestic care work with productive, wage-earning work. Yet the role of children and teens as active economic contributors and participants in street vending in the United States remains unacknowledged. In this article, we highlight their agency, voices, and perspectives by drawing from audiotaped interviews.

While the children and teens actively contribute their labor and earnings to their families, they suffer humiliation and stigma because of the low status, racialization, and illegality of street vending. In response, they devise new narratives of intersectional dignity. We argue that an intersectionalities perspective—one that takes into account intersecting inequalities of race, class, gender, and immigration—explains *why* these kids participate in family income earning. Moreover, examining the moral constructions of self-worth that the street vendor youth narrate illuminates how they creatively invert widely held negative stereotypes of racial-ethnic minorities, the poor, immigrants, and working children and girls. We refer to this process as the construction of intersectional dignities. These are affirming, restored identities that challenge dominant ideas of what it means to be a Latino/a, poor, foreign-born, youthful street vendor in a major U.S. city.

The Informal Economy and Street Vending

Observers once believed that street vending—and all forms of informal, unregulated, income-generating activity—would fade away with modernization, but today street vending and informal economic activity are generally recognized as constitutive elements of advanced global capitalism (Castells and Portes 1989; see also Alderslade, Talmage, and Freeman 2006; Cross and Morales 2007). In fact, cosmopolitan urbanites and “foodies” are now tracking down the best “authentic” immigrant street food in New York City and Los Angeles (Zukin 2010), and both cities have now celebrated the “Vendy Awards” for the tastiest street food. Formal and informal sectors of the economy are linked (Sassen-Koob 1989) and include industrial informality such as home-based piecework or assembly (Beneria and Roldan 1987; Fernandez-Kelly and Garcia 1990) and informal vending, which traditionally provides the basic consumption needs of the working poor (Cross 1998). This article is aligned with a newer body of scholarship that shines attention on the role of human agency in the informal economy. This “actor oriented perspective,” as Zolniski (2006) has noted, acknowledges historical and macro-structural forces, but focuses analysis on human agency, culture, and social interaction in street vending in contemporary U.S. cities (Dohan 2003; Duneier 1999; Muñoz 2008; Zolniski 2006). This article adds a focus on children and intersectionality.

Street vending is negatively viewed in many parts of the world (Jansen and Peppard 2003), and in Los Angeles, it is also illegal. Enforcement, however, remains selective, and there have been several organizing and advocacy projects for street vendors.¹ Most street vending remains illegal in Los Angeles.

Moreover, in the United States, where laws against child labor were enacted during the Progressive Era, dominant social norms hold that children should not be working to support themselves and their families and these norms are enforced through law. Discussions of child labor are usually confined to the context of poor, “third world,” developing nations.²

Intersecting Inequalities and Immigrant Children and Youth

Intersectionalities perspective developed to explain the social locations, oppressions, and limited life opportunities of women of color in U.S. society (Glenn 1985; Collins 1991), but it has also proven useful in analyses of racialized first- and second-generation immigrant children and adolescents (Espiritu 2001; Smith 2006). Childhood is a social construction, and what is deemed appropriate activity for children varies across time and space (Aries 1962) and is situated within relations of race, nation, migration, and gender (Thorne et al. 2003). In her ground-breaking book, *Pricing the Priceless Child*, the sociologist Viviana Zelizer (1985) called attention to the historical shift from the preindustrial, agrarian societies, where children are appreciated for their economic utility, to industrial societies where children are seen as emotionally priceless, sentimentalized, innocent, and worthy of parental protection and support. These dual spheres are not absolute (Zelizer 2002, 2005), and what is deemed permissible and forbidden forms of children’s work varies with social relations and context. Some jobs are seen as acceptable and desirable for children and teens in particular contexts (e.g., household chores, babysitting, etc.) (McKechnie and Hobbs, 1999). Still, it is now normative to think that children and teens require parental protection and economic support and that if they work, it is for their own pocket money or savings.

Not everyone can uphold these modern childhood expectations. In his book, *At Home in the Street*, Tobias Hecht (1998) distinguishes between two ways of experiencing childhood in Northeast Brazil—nurtured childhoods (a stage of protected freedom and play) and nurturing childhoods, whereby poor children are “expected from an early age to contribute to the production and income of the household” (Hecht 1998, 81). Nurturing childhoods are common in developing nations like Brazil and Mexico, but they are anomalies in postindustrial societies like the United States, where children are defined as “emotionally priceless” (Zelizer 1995). Our study shows that these two types of childhoods also coexist in global, postindustrial, immigrant cities of the global north.

Intersectionalities underscore that poverty often works in tandem with racial and gender hierarchies, and in this article, we call attention also to intersecting inequalities of immigration and age. Non-white children from working-class families are more likely to work and contribute to the family economy, and Latino immigrant children routinely do all kinds of work for their parents that is nonremunerated but that is nonetheless critical for the adult parents and for family livelihood and settlement in the United States. Mexican and Central American immigrant children in L.A., for example, take active roles translating written documents at home and often serving as on-the-spot interpreters for their monolingual parents with schools and medical and financial institutions (Valenzuela 1999; Orellana 2001, 2009). They teach their parents how to interface with the school system, public transportation, medical clinics, and landlords, and this has important economic ramifications.

Segmented assimilation theory has focused our attention on intergenerational acculturation patterns among immigrant parents and their children, but this body of scholarship has not emphasized the important role that children play in immigrant families' labor incorporation and settlement (Portes and Zhou 1993; Smith 2006; Portes and Rumbaut 2001, 2006). The pattern of children contributing to the family economy and incorporation is found among many immigrant groups, as studies of Asian American immigrant children have underlined the important role children play in economic survival and mobility through family ethnic enterprise. In a study of children of entrepreneurial Korean and Chinese immigrants who operate restaurants and dry cleaners, Lisa Park (2005) finds role reversals, with the children experiencing both the "premature adulthood" of taking on many responsibilities at a young age and the "prolonged childhood" with the growing children unable to cut free from the family business. Their labor is instrumental to family economic survival and upward mobility. Similarly, in a study of Chinese immigrant children who work in their parents' take-way Chinese restaurants in London, Miri Song (1999, 81) finds that the children's "labor is not discretionary but required for family survival." These children, it is important to underline, work in family-owned shops and restaurants, affording a degree of status and shelter. The Mexican and Central American immigrant children discussed here are also making critical economic contributions to their family, but there is a difference: They are engaged in criminalized, stigmatized, and "racialized" informal sector work that occurs on public streets and parks and that is typically performed by first-generation undocumented immigrants (Dohan 2003). How does this affect them? Another body of scholarship on work, shame, and stigma provides insight into the processes they encounter.

The Stigma of Low-Status Work

Long ago, Erving Goffman (1963) wrote about stigma as a reputation that is socially devalued as a tainted, “spoiled identity.” Since then, sociologists have examined how workers respond when they are socially discredited because of their occupations. In *The Hidden Injuries of Class*, Sennett and Cobb (1972) introduced the term “injured dignity” to refer to the social humiliations suffered by white male workers. In a study of inner-city black and Latino youth working at fast food outlets, Newman (1999, 86) suggests that “stigma clings to fast food jobs” and that this is also exacerbated by the low status of the workers who do these jobs, typically racial minorities teens, some of whom are immigrants with less than perfect English. The teens defend themselves from assaults on their dignity, Newman argues, by seeking moral value in the work and by constructing themselves as self-disciplined, responsible, and mature. They break the stigma and establish their respectability by appealing to “timeless American values” that value hard work and by distinguishing themselves from beggars, drug dealers, and “fast-talkers” (Newman 1998, 98). In *The Dignity of Working Men*, Michele Lamont (2000) shows how working-class men create a particular morality to defend their self-worth, drawing boundaries between themselves and others. This type of identity formation common among people with disparaged selves including battered women (Dunn 2005) and survivors of HIV/AIDS (Sandstrom 1998). Similar moral constructions based on honest work are espoused by black homeless street vendors in Duneier’s (1999) *Sidewalk*, the homeless recyclers in Gowan’s (2009) study, and the homeless in Snow, Baker, and Anderson’s (1986) study.

How do Latino street vendor kids confront the stigma of doing low-status, highly visible work? We argue that they rely on new moral constructions based on inversions of widely held negative stereotypes of racial ethnic minorities, the poor, immigrant foreigners, and girls and children who work in the street. Intersecting systems of inequality are pivotal here. Racialized identities come into play, as the children and teens associate whiteness with laziness and the privileges enjoyed by bosses, high-status professionals, and spoiled children. By contrast, they associate “Mexicanness” and immigrant social locations with hard work. Their subject positions and lived experiences allow them to flip-flop the familiar, dominant images of “lazy Mexicans” and “meritorious white professionals.” They also counter the images of gender, foreignness, and illegality that also circulate freely, and the girls in particular find that street vending affords them new public spaces of sociability, allowing them

to escape gendered confinement in the home. As we will see, these new opportunities are counterbalanced by gender obligations.

Description of Research

This study is based on nine months of ethnographic field observations at a street vending site in East Los Angeles and twenty in-depth interviews with Latina/o adolescents who sell merchandise on the streets or parks of Los Angeles with their parents. The first author, Emir Estrada, accompanied families to street vending sites such as parks, freeway entrance spots, and busy streets with abundant pedestrians. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained and their protocols were followed.³

Once parents and children agreed to participate in this study, Estrada spent time with each family at their stand. She purchased and ate the food near the stand, and she spent many hours chatting and interacting with them and observing street vending families and customers. Note-taking was limited to key terms to jog the author's memory as suggested by Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995). Detailed notes were recorded on a digital recorder on the drive back home. These notes were later transcribed.

We designed a semi-structured interview guide that asked primarily open-ended questions about the street vending experiences of these adolescents (e.g., duties, earnings, household responsibilities, relations with parents and siblings, and education/work balance). All interviews were conducted by Estrada, and respondents were encouraged to speak in the language they felt most comfortable, a practice advised by researchers working in bilingual communities (Zinn 2001). Throughout the interview, some respondents switched easily from Spanish to English. Interviews typically lasted between thirty minutes to an hour and a half. Each research participant filled out a brief "face sheet," which collected data on age, family, place of birth, length of residency in the United States, grades, and extracurricular activities. We also asked questions about their parents' work history in the United States. The majority of the children were not well informed on this topic. Some children cited street vending as their parents' only job in the United States while others said their parents had worked as domestic workers, in sewing factories, or as cooks in lunch trucks or restaurants.

All of the interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim in the language(s) in which the interviewee spoke. After reading the transcripts and coding the data for themes and analysis, we selected particularly representative quotes as evidence for this article. If they spoke in Spanish, we have

chosen to represent their words as they spoke them verbatim, providing our own translation in brackets. The extended case method directed engagement with existing scholarship (Burawoy 1998), and grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin 1994) offered guidelines for coding and organizing the data.

Nearly all of the participants were approached on the street while they were street vending. This was an intimidating process for all involved, for the young street vendors, their parents, and the researcher. Adolescent street vendors were initially fearful of the researcher because street vending is illegal. The researcher explained that she was not connected to local authorities and handed them the bilingual consent form that explained the purpose of the research and their rights. She encouraged them to talk to their parents about the study. During follow-up visits, a few parents accompanied their children and said “no” to the study. Others kept asking the researcher to come back week after week but never confirmed an interview appointment.

Apparently, some people suspected that this research was a cover for a police or health department operation. Some parents insisted that their children did not help them at all and others stated they did not have any children. One family was approached while their ten-year-old daughter helped them with a cash transaction. The child wore a red apron in which she kept loose change and dollar bills from the day’s earnings. The family agreed to an interview for the next day, but they failed to return. Fears were often assuaged when the researcher purchased and ate their goods in front of them. During one interview, the respondent’s mother expressed how nervous she and her daughter had felt when the researcher first asked for an interview. They said they agreed to participate because a health inspector or police officer would never buy fruit from them. In this context, grounded theory’s idealized procedure of theoretical sampling was simply not possible.

Trust and rapport were enhanced because the primary researcher is Mexican and speaks Spanish without an accent (important for the parents, who were all Spanish monolinguals). She sometimes brought her own two-year-old daughter, and bringing children to the field has proven beneficial in other studies of vulnerable populations (Kaplan 1996). Many parents also softened when they learned that the researcher had attended school up to *la preparatoria* (high school) in a small rural town in the state of Zacatecas, Mexico.

Adolescent street vendors work long hours on weekends and some work after school during the week. The majority of the interviews (twelve) took place during work hours, in public spaces while the kids sold goods, or while their parents momentarily relieved them. Five interviews took place at the respondents’ homes and three interviews took place inside Estrada’s car during the day (in close proximity to their parents who were street vending).

Participants were not paid for the study, but the researcher did buy products—mostly food—from nearly all of them.

We did not restrict our sample to a particular ethnic group. Sixteen respondents had parents from Mexico, three from Guatemala, and one had parents from Honduras and Mexico. Thirteen out of the twenty interviewees were born in the United States. Girls are overrepresented among the interviewees—sixteen of the twenty are girls—but this seems to reflect what we saw in the field: girls are disproportionately represented among these young street vendors. Out of the twenty children interviewed, seventeen had brothers and sisters living at home who did not street vend with the family and more boys than girls were able to “slack off” street vending duties (Estrada and Hondagneu-Sotelo forthcoming). We interviewed only those children who worked as street vendors, but one of our respondents reported that her brother ran away from home because he refused to continue street vending with his family. We were unable to interview him, but future research should examine entire street vending families, including the members who do not actively help. Two of the interviewees were ten and twelve, and the eldest was twenty-one years old (we included her because she had been street vending since age eight and because it was so difficult to recruit research participants). All respondents, except one, were currently enrolled in school or community college, and three of them attended private Catholic school. Most of the interviewees (sixteen of the twenty) lived in two-parent households. None were married, but two of the girls had babies (Monica, age eighteen, and Katia, age twenty-one).

We attempted to gather data on street vendors’ income, but this was difficult as earnings vary with hours, seasons, and products. Some kids reported handing over to parents approximately \$150 to \$240 per day. Others reported making \$200 to \$700 per week. Half of the children and adolescents in this study live with parents who depend on street vending as their only source of income. The other half have at least one parent who also works full-time in the formal sector of the economy, either as an employee or running a small business. Twelve youth did not receive any direct payment for their work and eight of them reported getting \$5 to \$30 for each day they worked.

The East L.A. Scene

A popular corner on Cesar Chavez Boulevard in East Los Angeles is a fairly unremarkable commercial corner, not unlike the scene in many American working-class neighborhoods. A bus stop, a low-cost supermarket, a 99 cents store, clothing shops, a bank, and burger joint fill the storefronts and account for most of the foot traffic. By day, teens and mothers pushing strollers stop

to chat, but big groups of people do not congregate. Yet every Friday, Saturday, and Sunday evening, a one-block stretch just off the boulevard is transformed into a lively destination spot for Latino immigrant families. Customers stroll up and down the sidewalks, choosing from a smorgasbord of seafood cocktail, Salvadoran *pupusas*, Mexican tacos, *tamales*, and beverages like fruit-flavored water in the summer and thick, hot, corn-based *atole* and *champurrado* in the winter. The smell of beef and pork frying in vats wafts through the air. Vendors advertise their food by shouting “*tacos, tamales*,” while other vendors selling Avon cosmetics, pirated CDs and DVDs, and inexpensive shoes are quieter. The food vendors sell from parked trucks and vans, and they also set up elaborate displays of brightly colored salsas on folding tables. It’s hard to walk down the wide sidewalks because they are so packed with merchandise and customers chewing their food, most of them standing and holding paper plates, but a few sitting on stools; one vendor has even set up a make-shift dining area with plastic crates as chairs. This was one of the sites where the children and teens work and where we spent most of our time in the field, but they also sold their wares below scorching sun in public parks and in less vendor-congested areas near schools and bus stops.

Why Do They Consent?

Why do these children and teens consent to spend all summer and most of the school year pushing a cart with cut-up fruit through blazing city streets and parks? After all, many of their friends are at home lounging, and the dominant social view is that it is the responsibility of parents to work, support, protect, and care for their children (Zelizer 1985). Even in poor Latino immigrant neighborhoods, this is the idealized expectation and lived reality. The street vendor kids report that most of their neighborhood and school friends do not work, so they experience themselves to be somewhat anomalous in their social circles. We found that the street vendor adolescents explain their consent and willingness to work two ways, in moral terms and economic terms. First, we look at the economic.

The youth acknowledge the financial limitations of their families. This involves cognitive recognition of the financial and social difficulties facing their parents as well as empathy for their parents’ plight. Ideals of family reciprocity and collectivity prevail. Most of the children and youth report that they do not receive a wage or even a monetary allowance. They engage in family street vending for both individual consumer items and family economic well-being.

The street vendor kids recognize that their parents cannot bring in enough income alone and that they, as children, must contribute too. In contrast to the egocentrism and consumer longings expressed by many American children (Pugh 2009), the street vendor children express empathy for the precarious financial position of their parents. Some of them noted that their parents' earnings were limited because they lacked legal authorization to work. Others talked about their parents being laid off from jobs or being too ill to work alone. In these remarks, they show that they are fully cognizant of societal discrimination and their parents' limited opportunities, and hence the youth position themselves as indispensable contributors to the family economy

My parents don't have papers, and now like, the bosses can't hire people without papers, or else they go to jail too. (Monica, eighteen)

Well, it's less work for them, 'cause if I weren't there, then my mom would have to be serving, and she would have to be charging, and she would have to be washing her hands soooo many times because she grabs the money. . . . They [my parents] need me to help. If it is not me, then it's no one. (Gloria, fourteen)

Pues, mi mama no puede hacer todo ella y pos, esta mala y le tengo que ayudar. [Well, my mother cannot do it all alone, and well, she is not well, so I must help her.] (Edgar, thirteen)

These adolescents express a moral obligation to contribute to the family economy. Consider the example of Mariana, age sixteen, who sells fruit on the streets of Los Angeles with her fourteen-year-old sister, Amanda. Typically, the girls are out on the streets every Saturday and Sunday from 8 a.m. until 5 p.m., selling cut-up fruit. During the summer, the girls work at least five days a week, including weekends. On weekdays when school is in session, the girls attend school and then come home to do household chores, do homework, and look after their younger siblings. Their mother is out selling fruit on the streets Monday through Friday, while their father operates a small store that sells disposable diapers, soap, and shampoo. Mariana says that she does the street vending on weekends because she believes in reciprocity. From her view, the parents are working hard during weekdays to help their children, so the children should try to do their part. As she put it, "*Los ayudamos aunque sea a descansar un dia . . . pues, ellos ya trabajaron mucho para nosotros,*

y ahora nos toca a nosotros. [We help them, even if it's just allowing them a day to rest . . . they've already worked so much for us, and now it's our turn.]" Gratitude for parents' hard work and support was a familiar theme.

Norma, age eighteen, and her thirteen-year-old brother sold *barbacoa* tacos with their family on weekends. She related how her mother had been laid off from her job as a garment worker, so she was keenly aware that family economic well-being depended on their collective street vending work. She recalled that she and her brother had initially been reluctant to get involved in the street vending, but she said they felt a duty to help their parents, and they quickly learned to see the family financial benefits. "*Entonces dijimos aunque no queramos, tenemos que ayudarles. . . . Ahorita lo veo, y gracias a dios nuestro negocio es que estamos sobreviviendo.* [So we said, even if we don't want to do it, we have to help them. . . . Now I see that thank God, we are surviving due to this business.]"

"I Don't Ask for More": Remuneration

Money is clearly part of the picture. The kids get involved in street vending because they know it is instrumental for family economic survival and for standards of living that included, for some of them, Catholic school tuition and cell phones. We were surprised, however, that few of the street vendor kids reported receiving a wage or even a regular allowance from their parents. They typically hand all the money off to their mother or their father. Why do they do this? The notion of a child's or teen's allowance is not a peculiarly American one. In Mexico, many children receive a *domingo*, a cash allowance that is paid on Sundays. Less than half of the interviewees (eight out of twenty) said they receive cash regularly from their parents as part of their compensation for vending. And when they did, the amount for a day's work varied between \$5 and \$30. With this cash they report buying their necessities, items like shoes and school supplies, but also some nice extras that children and teens desire in a consumer-driven society, things like video games and brand name jeans.

As we saw previously, the street vendor kids recognize that family economic survival and well-being depends on their contributions. But they also said they do street vending because their parents will buy them anything they want. "I think I earn what they buy me," said fourteen-year-old Susana. When we asked Susana if her parents ever paid her in cash, or gave her a *domingo*, she said no, and she explained it this way:

No, I'm not that kind of person, 'cause I don't ask them, like, "Oh I helped you, so are you gonna pay me or something?" . . . If we work

here on Fridays, we'll go to the mall the next day, and I'll be like "Okay, can you buy me this?"

Mariana responded that her parents occasionally gave her cash, but she said they almost always bought her the things she needed:

Pero si nosotros le pedimos algo, si nos compra. En veces dicen que no lo merecemos y en veces si. Si nos compran cosas. [But if we ask for something, they buy it for us. Sometimes they say we don't deserve it, sometimes, yes. Yes, they buy us things.]

Gloria, age fourteen, received \$10 to \$15 for selling tacos with her family, and she admitted that she had initially wanted more money, but empathy for her parents' financial situation caused her to diminish her cash expectations:

I wanted more, but then I started seeing that . . . we make like around \$200 a day, like \$240, around there, and if I take, like most of the money, then my parents are not going to have that much. And with that money, they pay the cell phone bill. And like, one of the phones is mine.

Adriana, age thirteen, expressed a similar sentiment:

Para mi esta bien eso lo que me dan. Yo no les pido mas. Porque yo a veces tambien me pongo a pensar, no, pos, ellos me dan de comer. Me dan para mi ropa. No les pido mas. [For me, whatever they give me is fine. I don't ask for more. Because sometimes I think, "No, well, they give me food. They give me clothes." I don't ask for more.]

Other teens also explained how their street vending work allowed them to get particular consumer items—Nike Jordans or particular kind of brand name jeans. But these were blended in with necessities, like food. As thirteen-year-old Nadya explained, "If I want some new clothes, I have to earn it, like I have to work. I have to help my mom. . . . Whatever we want my mom buys it for us, like the *comida* [food], all the clothes, the shoes, so like that's how it works."

Economic incentives blended together with the kids' moral obligations to help support their families. The obligations went two ways. Some of the kids reasoned that their participation in family street vending meant that their parents would be obligated to purchase big ticket items for them. Samuel, age twelve, said he got a Playstation video game. Martha, age seventeen, spoke

with some bravado about expecting a pick-up truck of her own, but she also recognized that her family needed her help:

My mom even tells me if we don't really work, then we don't have everything we want. And it's kinda true because we are a big family. I mean, like, if my dad was working on a simple job and it's like we're getting 700 bucks, come on!

In the next phrase, barely skipping a beat, she hastened to add what she was now expecting her father to provide for her:

He [father] needs to get my truck. And that is why I don't mind working because I know that in a sense, I get anything I want. Anything I ask for—if I do ask for it—I could get it.

Similarly, even a child as young as ten-year-old Juan, a boy who sold homemade jewelry with his father and sister on the weekends, said he was working due to both moral imperatives to help provide needed care for the family and in anticipation of the goodies that he was now expecting:

I like helping my family and all, and because I want them to do me a birthday party that is coming up. That's why I'm trying to earn money, to do it myself. And to help my grandma because she has cancer and she is almost going to die.

Already at age ten, he was learning that some of his earnings should cover family and household necessities. "Sometimes I waste it [money] in games," he admitted. "Sometimes I help my mom buy stuff, like to wash our clothes, and to buy food." The theme of "wasting money" came up as a negative value. Kids admitted to doing it, but they already believed they should be budgeting and saving the money they did get and earmarking it for important items. Esmeralda, age fourteen, admitted to having given in to temptation and blowing cash as soon as she got it. But she also added that she now tried to save it and help her mother buy fruit for their street vending business when needed.

Counter-Narratives of Intersectional Dignities

Family financial need and family poverty due to immigrant status, racialization, and gendered hierarchies explains *why* these children and teens work as

street vendors. But how do they cope with the responses of others who may tease them or disparage them for working as street vendors? Looking at counter-narratives that the children and youth construct can tell us something about the broader intersecting systems of inequality and the controlling images that circulate in society.

Public humiliations and ridicule from neighborhood and school friends fueled shame. Amanda, age fourteen, who sold fruit with her mother, said, "People use to look at me like, 'Oh, she's selling fruit,' like my friends and everything." And Mariana, her sixteen-year-old sister, admitted "*Si, me daba verguenza . . . porque era un trabajo vergonzoso. Pensaba que se miraba mal.* [Yes, I felt ashamed . . . because it was a shameful job. I thought it looked bad.]" Other kids were brutalized with physical violence. Edgar, now thirteen, had started selling *tejuino* (a corn-based beverage) with his mother in downtown Los Angeles when he was eleven. Kids at his Catholic school had mercilessly teased him as *el tejuinero* (the *tejuino* boy) and had beaten him so severely that his mother, who feared for his safety, had sent him to recuperate with relatives in Mexico.

The shame and stigma derived from various sources. First, as we have already seen, street vending is illegal in Los Angeles. The street vendor youth are thus criminalized by selling otherwise lawful items (fruit, beverages, peanuts, etc.), and many had experienced running and hiding from the police or city authorities. These were humiliating, demeaning and frightening experiences.

When the cop stops us we can't sell that day because they already stopped us. We have to be hiding behind the bushes. Sometimes we even feel like criminals because we have to hide behind the bushes and you know how cars pass a lot here. They're just looking at us all like weird like running and hiding and looking and ducking from the cops. (Veronica, eighteen)

No mas vimos la troca y nos tiro todo y pos, ya nos tuvimos que ir a vender a otro lado. [We just saw the truck, and they (police) threw out everything we had, and well, we just had to go sell at another spot.] (Samuel, twelve)

Second, street vendor kids feel shame because street vending is not seen as a "normal" job. They negatively compared their jobs and their parents' street vending jobs with formal sector jobs that their friends' parents might hold (e.g., janitors, truck drivers, factory workers, hotel maids). Street vending also

occurs in a site—public streets and intersections—that is associated with crime, begging, dirtiness, and deviance.

Finally, by selling in public venues to earn cash, the adolescents violated dominant cultural values that children should not be working. The kids know that minors are not supposed to be working. Katia said she had imagined customers thinking, “‘Where is your mom? You poor kid.’ I guess people think like that.”

Research on workers doing stigmatized work has shown how workers engage in various techniques to counter oppression (Sennett and Cobb 1972; Newman 1999; Duneier 1999; Lamont 2000; Gowan 2009). In the following, we show how the kids engaged narratives of restored dignity, and we call attention to the ways in which intersecting systems of inequalities shaped these narratives. The youth actively resisted the application of dominant controlling images of gender, Mexicanness, foreignness, and illegality. Instead, they adopted new affirming narratives of intersectional dignities.

Not Gangsters, and Not Fresitas

The street vendor youth contrasted themselves to negative images of Latino youth that circulate in both the *barrio* and in the dominant society. These controlling images are of racialized and gendered parasitic Latino youth. Latino boys are portrayed as violent, delinquent gangsters, and Latina girls as either prematurely pregnant or as spoiled princesses. The street vendors contrasted themselves to these negative images of idle, nonworking Latino youth.

Accordingly, street vendor kids described their peers who did not work as lazy and spoiled. Nadya said her friends who do not work are “*fresitas*”—literally little strawberries, but colloquially, in Mexico, the term means spoiled, precious girls. When asked what her friends do, Chayo, age fourteen, who sold homemade jewelry with her father and little brother, said “Nothing. They have their parents, but their parents work for them. Like they get money either way. They don’t have to do anything.” Her ten-year-old brother disparagingly claimed his friends were always “outside eating chips and they are all fat. . . . They just like, always play around and eat junk food all the time.” And Edgar disdainfully said of his Catholic school peers, “They don’t even work. They are lazy.”

Not working was associated with slothfulness, junk food, and being fat.

Familiar and widely circulating racializations of Mexicans as lazy, illegal, and illegitimate were challenged by narratives that allowed the street vendor kids to position themselves as more authentically Mexican or Latino than their nonworking peers. Some of the kids suggested that youth who do not work

are not only spoiled, but they act as though they were white. The thinking here is that Latinos work the hardest, and whites work the easiest, or not at all. This is a flip-flop of the neo-colonial image of the “sleepy Mexican,” one disseminated in popular culture representations of a Mexican peasant in sombrero snoozing by a cactus, and one that has continued to fuel anti-immigrant policies. The kids contrasted themselves to whites, and to white professionals, who they also saw as lazy and less meritorious. Martha related the example of a girl at her Catholic school who refused to work in her father’s shoe store. This girl, Martha said, “is not literally white but we call her white” because she refused to work with her family. Veronica also suggested this racialized construction of work. “White people,” she said, “don’t even work the hardest. . . . They’re lawyers or stuff like that.” Who works the hardest? “It’s the Mexicans and the Hispanics,” she said.

Most of the respondents talked not about whites, but about their Latino peers in their local environment, and they constructed street vending as a virtuous alternative to crime and delinquency. The street vendor kids said their nonworking peers had lots of idle time. They reasoned that with all this idle time, their peers were more likely to get in trouble and turn to drugs, stealing, and gangs.

It [vending] gets you tired, but you have like time to do it. And you’re not doing dumb stuff over there, seeing tv, sitting down, I dunno, doing drugs, *tu sabes* [you know] not doing bad . . . like my cousin, he got into jail like three times already because he’s like stealing and doing drugs and he’s a gangster. I don’t want to be like him. (Nadya, thirteen)

He [neighbor] just sleeps, smokes, drugs and then like he goes and eats and he don’t even help his parents. And I feel bad for his parents because one of two *no puede caminar* [cannot walk]. . . . Like if it was me, I have to help my parents. (Veronica, eighteen)

Es mejor que estés trabajando que te cachén robando. [It’s better to work than be caught stealing]. I mean, that’s the way I see it. I ain’t stealing. (Martha, seventeen)

The street vendor youth also challenged racialized notions of illegality and inferiority associated with Mexicans. One young woman, Veronica, had started selling cups of sliced fruit on the streets of Los Angeles with her mother when she was twelve years old. She recalled the teasing she had endured from school friends this way:

They used to tell me, “You sell in the streets? Aren’t you embarrassed? People look at you and you have to tell them to buy your stuff!” So they were making fun of me, like, saying that I’m right here in the street, like a Mexican person selling in the streets. So they’d be telling me, “Ha! You’re a wetback!” . . . I wanted to cry because they were making fun of me, but then I got over it.

This statement, and the experience of being labeled with an epithet such as “wetback,” underlines the racialized connotations of the job. To be selling on the street is to be “like a Mexican person.” It marks one publicly as marginal, backward, subordinate, and inferior. Another girl also said that she imagined that people who saw her selling on the street probably saw her as “a Mexican,” when in fact, she identified as “Hispanic” as a U.S.-born, U.S. citizen. She thought people would be surprised to learn she was born in the United States. This distinction and the street vendor youths’ contestation suggest the contours of widely circulating notions of racial hierarchy and immigrant inferiority. Notice that in both instances, the girls were selling in public venues where nearly all the customers were of Mexican or Central American origin, yet they initially felt shamed that street vending seemed to mark them as more Mexican than their peers.

Getting Out of the House

Work and pleasure were not altogether separate, and the street vendor girls came to appreciate the ability to get out and about, to find their perch on the street corner. The streets are not generally seen as an appropriate place for girls, and as research shows, the adolescent daughters of many Latino immigrants often experience homebound confinement and “lock down” situations at home (Lopez 2003; Gonzalez-Lopez 2005; Smith 2006).

Many Mexican immigrant parents restrict their adolescent daughters’ spatial mobility beyond home and school in the belief that girls require special protection to maintain virginity (Smith 2006; Gonzalez-Lopez 2005). Moreover, as residents of poor urban neighborhoods plagued with crime and violence, parents sought to limit exposure to these dangers by controlling their daughters’ whereabouts. The adolescent girls who got into street vending thus enjoyed new opportunities for spatial mobility and sociability. Adriana in particular enjoyed street vending at a local park in East L.A. on Saturdays. The park served as a popular photography site for *quinceañeras* (elaborate and highly ritualized fifteenth birthday parties). Every Saturday, the park was visited by dozens of young girls dressed in elegant puffy dresses and elaborate hair

up-dos adorned with shiny tiaras. Adriana sold alone on Saturday afternoons but was often selling next to Nadya (age fourteen), who sold hot dogs with her mother and little brother. Adriana is only thirteen years old, but she enjoyed talking to Nadya about plans for their own *quinceañeras*. One day, both Adriana and Nadya were evaluating the dresses and shared preferences for a particularly shiny gold dress. Members of the *quinceañera* parties usually purchased fruit from Adriana and hot dogs from Nadya's family. This was good for the girls, as they made more money on sales, but it also gave them an opportunity to inquire about the party information such as the seamstress who made the dress, cost of party, location, and so on. This was useful information for their own party planning, and it helped pass the time.

For some girls, street vending provided an opportunity to see their own relatives who no longer lived in the same neighborhood. Amanda and Mariana worked with their parents selling fruit, and their business was so prosperous that the family purchased a store and then a home in the Asian and Latino immigrant suburb of El Monte. The girls moved away from their cousins in East L.A., but on Sundays, when Amanda and Mariana sold fruit on the streets, they visited with their cousins. One Sunday morning, two of Mariana's cousins were cheerfully chatting with her, and they grabbed Mariana by her arm and asked her if she wanted to go to McDonalds across the street, where they were buying breakfast. Mariana looked at Estrada and asked if she could watch the cart. With her assent, she immediately left with her cousins, laughing and joking about the time they went to the beach with their relatives.

The street vendor girls contrasted their current work experiences favorably with the boredom they had experienced at home. Mariana, who sold fruit on weekends, found that street vending could be entertaining and socially stimulating. "*Me empezo a gustar porque te diviertes un poquito . . . me aburro estar alli en mi casa.* [I started to like it because you can have some fun . . . I get bored just being at home.]" Monica, who helped her parents sell *tamales* and fried bananas on weekends, also said that she did street vending for both of these reasons: "You're doing it because you have to help your parents out, but it's fun at the same time, because you have fun seeing different people everyday." Gloria, age fourteen, expressed pleasure in the public sphere that street vending opened up to her: "Before we sold tacos, I was at home Fridays and . . . it would be boring. Like just watching TV, and going on the computer and the same thing. . . . [Now] every Friday there is something different going on over there."

These are adolescent girls, who may otherwise have very few public or social outlets for fun. Street vending thus allowed them to contest particular limitations imposed on their spatial mobility and social engagements by

gender constructions, the ethnic culture of their parents, and the dangers of an impoverished inner-city *barrio*. While it appears that gender inequities are remedied by street vending, the unanticipated gains are double-edged as the girls' new and somewhat measured new freedoms and pleasures are dependent on their willingness to work. Meanwhile, their brothers can move about freely without having to do street vending.

Preparation for the Future

The street vendor kids are earnest about their future, and most reported that they planned to pursue education and seek better employment. They said that street vending is providing with them valuable experience with responsibility, and they believe this experience will help them in their futures while their peers will languish. Street vending, said one girl, "only make me more positive, to be someone better in life." Others concurred that effort expended at work now would help them in the long run.

You're learning to work for what you want and you'll find like a responsibility and you'll be like you'll be used to working, so it will help you to grow up. [When] you get a real job, you will be used to it, you won't have no problems, and you'll be like a fast learner, so it helps you. (Linda, sixteen)

Selling fruit is like, you know, how to work—how to be in the sun, how to run from the cops, or whatever. And if you get another job [it will be] like easy, you know. If I was selling fruit, I could do this. . . . And how to get along with people, 'cause you have to talk to people, you know. (Katia, twenty-one)

We think it's better for us so we could learn when we are more older, so we could learn, like, what to do and what not to do. (Esmeralda, fourteen)

You can learn something about life. . . . You're not going to be anyone in the world if you do nothing, and well, selling fruit is something. . . . That's why I always tell my friends, it's work. (Amanda, fourteen)

Along the way, the street vendor kids build up their self-esteem as they receive praise from adult customers who see them as exemplary youth, and they begin to imagine alternative futures. Lolita, who had been selling *churros*

and *raspados* alone since age fourteen, felt proud of the comments customers had made. “People will come and they’ll go, ‘I wish my kid was that responsible,’ you know. It feels good when people tell you, ‘Oh, you’re small but you’re already doing this.’” A gendered approbation was generally included in these statements. Veronica said that customers had said they wished they had a daughter like her. But not all street vendors readily embraced the “good girl” narrative that was imposed on them. Martha said of customers:

They are actually very nice. They are like, “I can’t believe you are helping your dad,” and they are like, “Oh, girls like you I would not mind having as a daughter-in-law, a future *nuera*,” and I’m like [thinking], “Chillax! I’m gay.”

We offer no bets on whether street vending results in brighter futures, but clearly the youth perceive street vending to be a temporary stage that leads to better options. In the process, they derive a strong sense of efficacy that vitalizes their dignity and self-worth.

Valuing Cultural Authenticity

The kids know that street vending is seen as “foreign,” “dirty,” “un-American,” and as a holdover from premodern Mexico. In a soft voice, Veronica recalled her friends asking, “Why are you guys selling in our country? You know that in America you don’t supposed to be selling in the streets. We’re not in Mexico.” These remarks were not only reminders that street vending is illegal in the United States, but they also served to position street vending as an income-earning activity antithetical to American values and modernity.

Yet these young street vendors reappropriated foreignness and transformed it from a disparaged value into positive associations with cultural authenticity. They took pride in the food they helped prepare and sell on the street. They sold food items that are traditional dishes from their parents’ countries of origin, and they were well aware that customers valued it. Moreover, they claimed that when many formal sector restaurants and especially the franchises sold items such as tacos or churros, they sold inferior quality products. The children took pride in the food they sold, knowing that they provided a valued service and tasty products to other Latino immigrants. This was no sanitized, overprocessed, tasteless Taco Bell fare, and the kids felt good about that. Veronica (quoted earlier) shifted her demeanor when discussing the food items: “*Tejuino*, like it is really known in Mexico. . . . We sell a lot because . . . they [Mexican customers] like how we make it.”

Similarly, Linda and Susana sold *pupusas* with their parents and according to them, their *pupusas* were the best on the block. They reported that the owner of a restaurant around the block had lowered the price of *pupusas* to \$1.50 in order to compete with them. Customers still preferred their *pupusas* even though priced fifty cents higher, at two dollars, because they were fresher and tastier.

Customers for authentic Mexican and Central American dishes have grown to include whites and other groups as “foodie” culture and the search for authentic ethnic and cosmopolitan dining has taken root in recent years. The street vendor youth recognized this, and this too brought them chest-swelling moments of pride. Some of the street vendors were beginning to gain traction with Internet food bloggers, leading the kids to simultaneously embrace authenticity and modernity of high-tech. For example, an Internet blogger ranked the *pupusas* that Linda and Susana’s family sold a nine out of ten and pronounced this East Los Angeles street vending site the best place to have “authentic Mexican and Central American food.” During the final months of fieldwork, the clientele became more numerous and more ethnically diverse. An Asian couple told Estrada that they had discovered the street vending site from an Internet blog. They made their way from stand to stand, holding a printout of the blog as their guide to the different food stands. Knowing that their Mexican and Central American dishes were enjoyed by both Latino and non-Latino clientele, and even ranked by outside food bloggers, allowed the street vendor youth to take a disparaged transgression (“We’re not in Mexico”) and transform it into a desirable and valued authenticity. Authenticity can serve as a tool of power and moral superiority (Zukin 2010), and in this case, selling authentic Mexican or Salvadoran food on the streets was transformed from a disparaged activity to a positive one.

Keeping it Secret

Finally, not all of the street vendor kids took pride in street vending. Some dealt with the stigma by confining their street vending to neighborhoods where their peers and others in their social circle were unlikely to circulate. Lolita, now age sixteen, had been selling *elotes*, *churros*, *raspados*, peanuts, and mangos alone on the streets and public parks since she was fourteen. Still, she felt uneasy about it. “I don’t know,” she explained, “it’s just that . . . I don’t see no other kids doing that, so I feel weird, you know?” When asked if her friends knew about her street vending, she vigorously shook her head. She realized she needed to contribute financially to her family, and although she could readily accept that obligation, she said she longed for a “normal job . . . [like] Starbucks, McDonalds, like any store around.”

Some of the adolescent street vendors sell in public places located miles away from their neighborhoods. Typically, their parents drive them to these spots, which are deemed to be better for business. This conveniently allows the adolescents to keep their street vending activities a secret from their friends. Some even keep it secret from their closest friends. Martha, Lolita's seventeen-year-old sister, reported that she had been in a lesbian relationship for nearly two years, yet she refused to tell her girlfriend what she did on the weekends. She said:

I don't tell her. She always asks me [what I'm doing] and I am like, "Don't worry about it." . . . She is kind of used to it. Every time she calls and asks, "Where are you?" [I say] "Not home." Ok I got that answer. And since they [parents] took my cell phone away, I hardly talk to her. But it is only mainly through My Space.

When asked what would happen if her girlfriend discovered that Martha sold corn on the streets, she said, "I don't know. I am pretty sure she would not judge me . . . but I don't know." She claimed they were planning to marry—this was when California momentarily permitted gay and lesbian marriages—yet she was apparently taking no chances on revealing her secret information about street vending.

Conclusion

Children have never been absolutely segregated from economic life (Zelizer 2002), and this is especially true among the poor in developing nations (Hecht 1998). Children who are not privileged by race, class, nation, and gender are simply under more pressure to work for money. The Latino street vendor children and teens that we interviewed for this article are not working for an allowance, or for personal spending money, but to ensure family economic well-being and advancement. They do so because they recognize the precarious economic position of their parents, and they feel an obligation toward their families, gratitude for their parents' support, and a shared belief that they should reciprocate as well. They are realists who recognize the acute economic constraints faced by their low-waged immigrant parents, who as Mexican and Central American immigrant workers lacking perfect English or legal authorization to work experience racial and migration discrimination. They know that without their help, their parents will not make ends meet.

Street vending, as we have shown, is an informal economic activity that is illegal yet highly visible in Los Angeles, associated with marginality,

illegitimacy, and backwardness. How do the street vendor children and teens deal with stigma, shame, teasing, and the criminalization of street vending? In this article we have highlighted the kids' agency in constructing positive meanings around street vending activities. None of them had been eager to get involved in street vending, but they managed to persevere by creating new narratives of intersectional dignity that made them feel proud of their work. They did this by reformulating the dominant controlling images of racial ethnicity, class, illegality, and gender that circulate in both the dominant society and the *barrio*.

The street vendor youth seek to create meanings that attribute positive values to their work and self-worth in much the same way that sociologists have found among other disparaged poor people. In this article, we have underlined how constructions of racialized ethnicity and gender are critical in this process. The Latino street vendor youth in East L.A. seek to distance themselves from both Mexicans who they label and racialize as inferior (criminal gangsters and lazy *fresitas*) and white people, who they perceive as lazy, spoiled, and overly privileged. Instead, they align themselves with Mexicans who work hard. Although Los Angeles is a multiracial city, the street vendor kids made no mention of African Americans and Asian Americans. Perhaps this is due to their experience of urban racial segregation and the distinctively Mexican character of the eastside of Los Angeles. Their social world appears in shades of brown and a distant, dominant white.

It is tempting to see the counter-narratives of intersectional dignities as cause for heralding a project of resistance, but we stop short of that. Are the street vendor kids really challenging the legitimacy of negative stereotypes and controlling images about Mexicans, illegality, poverty, and foreignness? To some extent, they are sustaining these images, insisting that these do not apply to them as street vendors, but perpetuating them by placing them on their peers who do not work. Similarly, they do not challenge local state policies that criminalize street vending, nor do they question the legitimacy of parental lockdowns of girls. Their counter-narratives of intersectional dignities will probably help them in the long run, fortifying self-esteem, but in some ways, the narratives reify negative stereotypes of others, and in doing so, reproduce ideologies that uphold social inequalities.

What are the implications of street vending for the children and teens' futures? As we have seen, the children and youth are committed to pursuing education, and some are in Catholic school and headed to college. The old ideas that Latino youth employment detracts from education clearly does not fit here, and our findings raise important questions for future research. Will the added income that the kids contribute to their families, and their developing

sense of personal efficacy, work ethic, and dignity, lead to beneficial outcomes of social mobility? That question is beyond the scope of this article, but longitudinal research might answer that.

In his acrimonious review, Wacquant (2002) alleges that the focus on positive moral constructions among the poor and disparaged is a major pitfall of contemporary ethnographic studies, leading to a “neo-romantic” valorization of conventional morality, one that is in line with neo-liberalism, and that ultimately directs our analyses away from power and inequalities. In this article, we have strived to underscore how intersecting structural inequalities lead to the conditions that prompt child labor in street vending and how in turn, when the youth construct narratives of restored intersectional dignity, they must necessarily draw from a sea of circulating images about racialized ethnicity, gender, foreignness, and illegality. We agree with Gowan (2009) who emphasizes poor people’s concerns with morality and reminds us of the multiple sources that lead to the valorization of manual street labor. As we have shown, these projects are important even to children and teens. Inequalities and moral constructions go hand in hand.

These young people are proud of the money they are earning, and they construct their own identities and street vending activity in a positive fashion. More than just mangos, *churros*, and tacos are being exchanged on the streets of East L.A. Among the street vendor youth, we see the development of identities of intersectional dignities as protection from the social injuries that come with performing stigmatized informal sector work in public urban spaces.

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Notes

1. Muñoz (2008, 116) chronicles a complex array of “local-state enforcement” agencies that enforce the illegality of street vending in Los Angeles. This includes the L.A. County Health Department, the Board of Equalization, the L.A. City Council Bureau of Street Services (focusing mostly on pirated DVDs), the L.A. City Council Department of Building and Safety, and the L.A. Police Department. In the late 1980s, Central American and Mexican immigrant street vendors responded to complaints from merchants and police crackdowns by forming the Street Vendors

Association, AVA (*Asociacion de Vendedores Ambulantes*) (Kettles 2007). AVA worked together with the L.A. City Council and advocates to legalize street vending, but the process was glacial and the outcome miniscule. A special vending district was finally established in MacArthur Park in 1999, but only fifteen permits were issued (Hamilton and Chinchilla 2001). The program was eventually terminated, and illegal street vending not only prevails, but thrives in Latino neighborhoods around Los Angeles. Street vendors are routinely fined and scattered by the authorities, but organizing efforts by *La Asociacion de Loncheros L.A. Familia Unida de California*, a group advocating for catering food truck businesses, and the Street Vendor Project of the Urban Justice Center in New York City are currently advocating for street vendors' rights. Local neighborhood efforts complement these projects.

2. Child labor is well documented and the object of controversy in developing nations, where scholars and commentators see the endurance of child labor as a social problem that is symptomatic of poverty (Basu 1999; Basu and Van 1998; Edmonds and Pavcnik 2008). In such conditions, child labor facilitates family economic survival, so some have suggested that it should not be condemned and eradicated, but viewed comparatively (Basu and Van 1998; Edmonds and Pavcnik 2008). Child labor may in fact improve poor children's life opportunities. The earnings of children, for example, may enhance their educational opportunities because it allows them to afford school supplies and tuition (Wahba 2006).
3. This project required two consent forms to be signed before each interview, a detailed one for the parents and one with simpler language for the minors. All consent forms were in Spanish and English.

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