

HOW PROSTITUTION WORKS

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INTRODUCTION

Prostitution, pornography, and other forms of commercial sex are a multibillion dollar industry. They enrich a small minority of predators, while the larger community is left to pay for the damage.

People used in the sex industry often need medical care as a result of the ever-present violence. They may need treatment for infectious diseases, including AIDS. Survivors frequently need mental health care for post-traumatic stress disorder, psychotic episodes and suicide attempts. About a third end up chronically disabled and on Social Security.

The sex trade plays an active role in promoting alcohol and drug problems. Pimps also use prostituted women in forgery and credit card fraud. The community must pay for chemical dependency treatment, insurance costs and incarceration.

In addition to these costs, the community loses the contributions which might have been made to legitimate community productivity by those used up in the sex industry.

The operators of sex businesses not only do not pay for these expenses, many manage to avoid paying taxes at all.

THE JOHNS

No business can afford to create a product for which there are no buyers. The first step in understanding the sex industry is to understand the customers, the johns.

Real sexual relationships are not hard to find. There are plenty of adults of both sexes who are willing to have sex if someone treats them well, and asks. But there lies the problem. Some people do not want an

equal, sharing relationship. They do not want to be nice. They do not want to ask. They like the power involved in buying a human being who can be made to do almost anything.

The business of prostitution and pornography is the use of real human beings to support the fantasies of others. Anyone working in prostitution who tells a john too much about who they really are, interferes with the fantasy. They risk losing a customer, and may get a beating as well. In real relationships with real people, you are stuck with the limitations of who you are, who your partner is, and what you can do together without hurting each other.

Some people do not want real relationships, or feel entitled to something beyond the real relationships they have. They want to play "super stud and sex slave" or whatever, inside their own heads. If they need to support their fantasies with pictures, video tapes, or real people to abuse, the sex trade is ready to supply them. For a price, they can be "a legend in their own minds."

The most common type of prostitution customer is the **user**. He is quite self-centered, and simply wants what he considers to be his needs met.

The user would deny any intent to harm anyone, and might even claim some empathy for the sex workers he uses. However, his empathy does not extend to discontinuing his using behavior, nor to helping anyone escape from the sex industry. He does not care whether the person he is using is unwilling or unusually vulnerable. He simply feels entitled to whatever he wants, whenever he wants it. If someone is hurt, that is not his problem. He feels that the fee he pays covers any damages.

He sees himself as a respectable person, and works to protect that appearance. Users provide a large, safe, and steady income for the pimps and other "businessmen," of the sex industry.

Sadists are people who have the ability to take pleasure in another person's fear, pain, or humiliation. They constitute about ten percent of the population. Sadists vary in severity, ranging from those who just make you feel bad, on up to those who do torture murders. There is a definite practice effect. If allowed to hurt people often, their sadism gets worse.

Physical, sexual, and emotional abuse by sadists drives their child victims from their homes into the street, trying to escape. The pimps and "chickenhawks" take it from there.

Sadists are attracted to prostituted women and children because they are willing to get into a car or come to a place where the sadist can be in control. Sadism is about control. Hurting people who cannot stop them is their most intense and pleasurable form of control.

Sadists play close attention to matters of power. They are most brutal with small women and children, and are more careful with larger women and men. They avoid people who may have someone to protect them, or someone who may take revenge on the victim's behalf.

There are pimps who specialize in supplying victims to sadists, and who base their fees on the amount of damage done to the victim.

Sadists are found at all levels of society, including the respected and powerful. They often use this, saying, "You are just a whore, nobody is going to believe you." If they do kill someone, they are very aware that, to some extent, the effort society puts into finding the killer will reflect the value placed on the victim. People working in prostitution are safe victims.

Necrophiles are people who can take pleasure in filth, degradation, and destruction. They are the users of the sick, the old, the psychotic, the brain damaged, the "tracked" and tattooed casualties of the sex industry, in the end stages of their lives. For necrophiles, broken bodies and broken minds are a turn on. They glory in their superiority over ruined human beings, and feel entitled to express their contempt in every way.

Necrophiles must keep their perversion secret from their friends and families, both to protect their social standing, and to protect their fantasies of superiority. Normal people just would not understand.

Child molesters participate in the sex industry in several ways. Some have been aware of a sexual attraction to children, often of a particular age and sex, from some time in late childhood. They then make the choice to act on it.

Some have sadistic characteristics. Children are easier than adults to control. The molester's own children, in his own home, are the easiest of all to control.

Necrophilic child molesters enjoy the knowledge that, when the molesters are finished with them, the children's lives will never be the same. They enjoy the fact that the children may later self-destruct in addiction, prostitution or suicide. It proves that they were right.

Sex offenders against children operate with varying degrees of sophistication. Some do careful "grooming." They use pornography to break down resistance, and supply drugs, alcohol, and money. Others just start out with forcible rape. Many claim unusual "love" for children. They claim that sex between adults and children is not harmful, and should be legalized. Pedophiles actually teach children that they are helpless, hopeless, worthless, and only good for sex and hurting.

A large portion of workers in the sex trade started out as sexually abused children. Some were even "broken in" by being shared with or rented out to others by their own families.

There are specialist pimps who provide children to johns. The fees vary depending on the age, sex and appearance of the child, as well as the amount of damage the child has already incurred.

When caught, the pimps and johns claim not to have known the child's real age. There is a market for small adults made up to look like children, both for direct sex and for pornography. But the truth is in the fees: real children sell for more than fake ones.

Prostitution buffs are like police and fire buffs, that is, people with an intense interest in those occupations even though they do not belong to them.

Prostitution buffs are people with a morbid fascination for or obsession with prostituted persons and their activities. Some characterize themselves as "researchers", and amass hundreds of pages of notes and photographs, that somehow are seldom published.

Others claim to be intent on religious redemption of "sinners", and spend huge amounts of time in vice areas, but never quite manage to offer anyone practical help.

A third group consists of "community livability" activists, who blame the people being prostituted for the behavior of the johns, pimps, and drug dealers.

As with any obsession, with some people it may get out of control. Police buffs may take unlawful police action, and some fire buffs eventually set fires.

Each type of prostitution buff strongly believes his or her rationalizations for their activities, and would vehemently deny any personal sexual interest. The trouble is, it is obviously there. They show a lot of subtle signs which may indicate to someone working in prostitution that they may be potential customers.

When a prostituted person approaches the buff to offer their services, the response may be unpredictable and dangerous. Sometimes the buffs will accept their services, and the worker may never realize that they are anything but a normal trick. At other times, they will be met with rage, as if they are making a hetero- or homosexual attack on the buff. They may be beaten, knifed, or thrown out of a moving vehicle.

Most of the "research" and "religious" buffs are men, and spend enough time studying their subject that their identifications of who is and is not prostituting are fairly accurate.

Many of the "community livability" activists are women. Some may pepper spray or draw weapons on young people who are in no way involved, but who fit whatever stereotype the activist has for what a prostitute should look like.

CUSTOMER STREAMS

Three forces generate streams of customers for prostitution: Isolation, sexual abandonment, and unusual interests. Prostituted people are used to service populations which are physically isolated from the life of their communities. These customers come from military bases, logging or mining camps, and from farm labor camps. Operators of these facilities often are involved in arranging for services through local pimps.

Other customers are isolated by travel, such as seamen, truckers, and traveling businessmen. Hotels and motel, bars and other businesses which

provide support services for travelers often also participate in arrangements for sexual services.

In some religious cultures, and some individual family cultures, sex is regarded as an unpleasant duty of marriage, and once the child bearing years are over, one partner may cut the other off from sexual activity. The sex industry does not reach out to middle-aged women, so their only choice is to have affairs. This may be morally unacceptable to them, or eligible partners may not be available. For them, there may be no solution.

For men, prostitution is quite available, and many men may see it as less wrong than having affairs, or as requiring less effort. These men provide a large and steady income for the sex industry.

Most of these johns would be classified as "users", and an unclear proportion of them might not be prostitution customers if they were not isolated.

Customers who remain in or near their home communities are more likely to use prostituted people due to unusual interests, such as sadism, pedophilia, or sexual addiction. They are isolated by the nature of their desires, rather than their location. For example, men who prefer sex with boys, but who do not view themselves as homosexual, support a whole segment of the industry involving prostituted males. It is unclear whether local law enforcement efforts, or the openness and aggressiveness with which the sex industry is allowed to operate in a community, affects the stream of "special interest" customers.

A large portion of prostituted people are also used in and around the communities where they grew up. The fact that survivors often meet previous tricks in local grocery stores and other random places can be a considerable problem for their recovery.

For those whose special interests place them at serious legal risk in their own community, there is sex tourism. Some cities in the US are well known to run more 'wide open' than others, that is, there are fewer and weaker laws on the books, and police and other officials are discouraged from enforcing them. These conditions are often the result of cooperation between business and elected officials, who are repaid by the sex industry in various ways.

THE PIMPS

No one really wants to have sex with five, ten, or twenty strangers a day, every day. Besides the sheer numbers involved, some of those strangers are going to use a person in ways that are bizarre, painful, disgusting, and occasionally fatal.

When people who have worked in prostitution call it repeated rape, they are not exaggerating or being "hysterical." They are being legally precise. Rape is sexual intercourse, against the will of the victim, carried out by threat or force.

In prostitution, the john performs the sex act with the unwilling victim, but subcontracts the intimidation and violence to another man, the pimp.

The john would like to believe he is paying for sex, but the person he has sex with gets little or none of the money. The money goes to the pimp to pay for the force needed to keep prostituted women and children working. It goes to the drug dealer who provides whatever it takes to keep the workers from becoming psychotic or committing suicide. It goes to pay the businessmen who provide the real estate, support services, and legal protection for the trade.

Pimps come in three general types. **Media** pimping, like other kinds, involves selling fantasies that ultimately hurt people. Two of their central lies are that women are only good for sex, and men are only good for violence.

They claim that they produce sex and violence because that is all that sells. In fact, many other things sell as well or better. (For example, Walt Disney and Steven Spielberg productions often are very successful.) Media pimps often have a tremendous sense of superiority over "common" people, yet lack the intelligence and creativity to do high quality work. They very much enjoy selling a degraded view of the human race.

Advertisers often implicitly promise that buying their products will bring happiness, power, and sexual success. After spending their money, the victims of this "bait and switch" scam find that they get only a pack of cigarettes, a bottle of shampoo, or a magazine full of dirty pictures. They are just as lonely and unhappy as before, but their money is gone.

Media pimps perform another "bait and switch" function, in cooperation with business level pimps. They attract young people hoping for fame and fortune in the legitimate entertainment business, and manipulate them into the lower levels of the sex industry.

They degrade ordinary people living ordinary lives, by showing only idealized characters with perfect bodies, high powered jobs, and plenty of money. The characters' problems are always solved in an hour or two, with a liberal application of sex and violence.

Real people, whose lives cannot hope to measure up to these "ideals", are made to feel inferior and worthless. The media pimps work to divert people from the ups and downs of real life, into dependence on the fantasy worlds that they sell. The sex industry, above all, sells fantasy regardless of who gets hurt.

The media pimps have a lot of money. They own magazines and newspapers, and produce movies and television programs. They can afford to hire law firms and advertising agencies to further their interests. Their money can buy access to political officials, and special treatment for their businesses. In return they offer favorable media exposure, and large campaign contributions.

Their money often goes to support various front organizations which work to direct public discussion toward "free speech rights," and away from the damaging effects of the sex industry on the women and children used in it.

Business level pimps extract profits from the sex industry in ways that minimize the risk of public exposure or criminal prosecution.

They own the bars and strip clubs which attract concentrations of potential johns. They offer jobs as dancers and hostesses to vulnerable young people who are potential candidates for more direct use in the sex trade. They own the adult book stores, massage parlors, motels, and legal brothels.

They posture as legitimate businessmen, conceal their ownership behind corporations and front men, and deny knowing that their property is being used in the sex industry. They charge sex businesses far higher rents and fees than they could get from legitimate tenants, which indicates that they know what the businesses are doing.

Through contacts in the business community, they arrange for sexual services for visiting businessmen, politicians, celebrities, and sports teams. By keeping these arrangements secret, business pimps insure a degree of protection for their other activities from their customers in high places.

Business level pimps separate themselves from the "dirty workers" of the sex trade by treating them as independent contractors rather than employees. This enables them to avoid having to pay taxes, overtime pay, health insurance, and workmen's comp. If one of the workers is arrested, the businessman is protected from any legal involvement. They subcontract any violence needed to the street level pimps.

With support from elements of the "legitimate" entertainment industry, as well as street level pimps, they produce and distribute commercial pornography.

They support and have the support of "civil liberties" advocates, who oppose censorship regardless of the harm done to the people used in making the pornography. They disclaim any responsibility for the actions of potentially violent sex offenders who use pornography to "fuel" their fantasies until they are ready to commit actual violence.

Business pimps often join civic organizations, make highly public contributions to charity, and play a role in local politics. They continually assert their identity as legitimate businessmen. When threatened, they call on the support of the real, legitimate, non-sex business community, often successfully.

Unlike street level pimps, the businessmen usually manage to hold onto their profits. They have investment skills, can afford lawyers, seldom are addicted, and rarely take the risks involved in garden variety crime. Often the greatest danger they face is from the Internal Revenue Service, not from the police.

Street level pimps are the foot soldiers of the sex industry. Typically, they are small time criminals, who have a high need for sadistic gratification.

The johns and business level pimps subcontract to these men the brainwashing, terror, beatings, and the occasional murder needed to keep prostituted women and children working.

Pimps are part of the business even where prostitution is legal. Brothels do not run employment ads. The brothel owners require that any new "employee" be "referred" by someone ready to supply whatever force is necessary to control the woman.

Street pimps learn the business from friends and relatives already in the business, from other criminals in jails and prisons, and from other pimps they meet hanging out in the bars and clubs. Occasionally, someone especially talented in greed and cruelty learns the trade solely by practicing on available victims.

Pimps tend to avoid identifying themselves as such, except to other pimps. They like to present themselves as husbands, boyfriends, or protectors. When caught in acts of violence, they try to prevent outside interference by claiming that it is "only a domestic matter." In fact, the pimps themselves are the greatest danger to those they exploit. The johns and the police are lesser hazards.

Street pimps pride themselves on their finesse, on controlling their victims by psychological manipulation. They claim that prostituted women and children give their money to the pimps because they "love" them. (In criminal language, "She loves me" means "I can control her.") Street pimps try to play down their use of threats and violence, despite the fact that it is their biggest contribution to the sex industry.

Throughout human history there has been the kind of greed that takes the form of wanting to own other human beings. Slavery died out in most areas because it was unprofitable compared to more modern methods of production. The one trade where the would-be slaver can still find success is in the sex industry. For many pimps, the gratification of owning slaves is as important as the drugs and the money.

Contrary to the images in the media, most pimps exploit members of their own race. Many are nearly the same age as their victims.

Most pimps are male. Women are becoming more and more involved as active operators in the sex industry. Some are involved in helping a male pimp to control his "stable," or act as madams in brothels owned by someone else. Some run "escort" or out-call services themselves, but maintain relationships through which they can call on male enforcers when needed.

Occasionally women are involved in supplying their own children to pedophiles, pornographers, or others in the sex industry. The mother's own addiction is the usual cause. Plain greed for money, and the mother's own sexual perversity are less common motivations.

Street level pimps usually spend their money on clothes, jewelry, cars, and especially on their own addictions. They often are involved in other types of crime, especially drug dealing, and may go to prison for those. Successful prosecution for pimping itself is quite unusual.

It is rare for a street pimp to hold onto his money and make the transition to a business level operator, but there always are a few at the business level who got their start as street pimps.

WHERE THE WORKERS COME FROM

The sex industry ultimately is about **power**. This is best demonstrated by the care which the industry takes to ensure that those it uses are powerless. The predators are neither irrational nor stupid. They watch carefully for a kind of "victim profile," and avoid anyone who may be uncontrollable or dangerous.

They focus on young people coming out of families that are abusive, disorganized, or non-existent. One fundamental function of the family is protection of its members, especially its children. The family also is a team, and all players must do their jobs. If a member is lost or disabled, others in the extended family or community must step in to carry on. When one or more adults in a family are absent, addicted, mentally ill, or severely demoralized, the children are in danger.

When the family is poor, or part of a devalued minority group, and opportunities for education and good jobs are limited, some members of those families may be willing to take risks. If the young people are being terrorized, beaten, or sexually abused by the very people who should be protecting them, many are going to take their chances on the street. For some, nude dancing or even prostitution may look better than no job at all.

If they are under age, have no address, or cannot afford to have their parents involved, most social service agencies will not help them. Children are still treated as some adults' property.

The juvenile system has little interest in noncriminal runaways or "throwaways." There are age requirements for normal jobs, usually between 14 and 18 years of age. The very young are practically forced into the sex industry, even before the pimps and johns get involved. They may have to do prostitution from age 12 or 14, until they turn 18, and can get a "better job" such as nude dancing.

There are three general patterns for "breaking" someone into prostitution.

In **slave taking**, a young male predator "befriends" a victim long enough to be sure she is not dangerous herself, nor protected by anyone who is. He manipulates her into a situation where she can be kidnapped and held in isolation in a place the slaver and his friends control. Over a prolonged period, she is terrorized, tortured, and gang raped. She is threatened with her own death, and that of anyone she loves.

Once she is convinced that her only chance of survival is to do exactly as she is told, she is "turned out." Her first "trick" may in fact be a member of the prostitution organization, set up to make sure she performs as directed. After she has been properly "seasoned," she is put to work for her captors, or sold to another pimp.

The **domestic violence transition** targets young people coming out of abusive homes who are emotionally needy, and have no real idea of what a normal love relationship looks like. They become involved with a "boyfriend" who initially treats them better than they have ever experienced before. The boyfriend gradually becomes extremely controlling, and eventually violent. He introduces commercial sex in terms of his pressing need for money, and "If you love me, you will do this." He quickly transitions from "just this once" into "You are just a whore, my whore!" and requiring daily prostitution. He continues controlling the victim with alternating emotional manipulation and explosive violence, while living on her earnings, for as long as she lasts.

The **"grooming"** process is used by older and more sophisticated predators, and is especially used on younger children. These perpetrators become adept at identifying abused, neglected, and depressed children, and "befriending" them. They develop a "special" relationship, one that isolates the child from others, and makes the child feel indebted to the groomer.

Slowly, resistance is broken down, using gifts, money, alcohol, drugs, and pornography. In the sex industry, pornography is not only a profitable product, it also is a working tool.

They engage the child in progressively more direct sex, and begin to merge the abuse into the child's identity: "You want this", "You like this", "You make it happen", "Now you are dirty, perverted, queer". These predators often are only interested in children of a specific age or appearance. When they develop beyond that, the kids may be passed off to pedophiles interested in older children. Being suddenly "dumped" for no understandable reason often is very painful for the child.

Over a lifetime these predators may victimize an incredibly large number of children. The emotional damage they do leaves a child even more isolated and vulnerable to further involvement in the sex industry.

GENDER DIFFERENCES

The experience of prostitution is remarkably similar for males and females, but there are some differences.

Most young men used in prostitution are heterosexual. They are drawn into the sex industry by many of the same forces as are women. Many johns consider themselves straight, and claim that only the prostituted young male is gay. Those used in male-on-male prostitution often are left with tremendous confusion about their actual sexual orientation. When trying to escape "the life", they may encounter all the prejudices encountered by gays, in addition to the stigma of prostitution. They are at higher risk of HIV than prostituted women.

Rape and sexual slavery are common in jails and prisons. There is considerable public support for it as a normal part of the punishment. Some of those who run institutions do their best to maintain a safe and controlled environment. They may be hampered by outdated, hard to supervise buildings and lack of staff. Others may care very little about what inmates do to each other.

Inmates who go to staff for protection often end up in protective custody which is practically the same as disciplinary isolation. The response of convicts toward "snitches" ranges from abusive to deadly.

Almost all of these traumatized men eventually are released. Many dissolve into alcohol and drug dependence, or are disabled by psychological symptoms. Others wander the streets, intoxicated, armed, and ready to react explosively to any threat of harm or humiliation.

Women used in prostitution usually have children sooner or later. Mothers who cannot protect themselves rarely can protect their children. In the endless whirl of sex, drugs and violence, the children may be neglected, traumatized, or even become merchandise in the sex industry themselves. One of the most painful events in the life of prostitution is losing custody of children, regardless of how good the reasons for that loss may be.

Most prostituted women want very much to be good mothers, often trying to give their children the love and care they never received themselves. The birth of a "trick baby", that is, one fathered by some unknown john, produces very complicated feelings. Some mothers can separate their feeling for the baby from the anger at the way the baby was conceived, but others cannot. Some "trick babies" are given up for adoption by mothers who fear that they otherwise might abuse them.

If the baby was fathered by a pimp, or is at least claimed to be in official records, the courts may fail to recognize, or ignore, the real nature of the relationship. The pimp may be given visitation rights or even custody. This gives the pimp a new person to threaten and a new means of controlling the mother. It makes escaping from the sex industry even harder than it already is.

Both male and female survivors of prostitution usually develop a tremendous hatred of men, especially those in authority. They hate both for the actual harm done, and for the help that was not given when it was terribly needed.

SOCIETY'S ROLE

The larger society provides the pimps with a very powerful weapon. It makes prostitution an **identity**, not an occupation. Once you have taken money for sex, you are a prostitute. Society does not allow an expiration date on that identity, nor a way to be publicly accepted as something else.

Society offers help to people in trouble largely based on the value set on that person. It is much easier to get help for a married, middle class, domestic violence victim, than for a refugee from the sex industry trying to escape from a pimp.

Many people prefer to view prostitution as a "lifestyle choice," or even an "addiction" to a lifestyle. They think most people in the sex industry are there to support their drug habits, when actually the drugs are used to cope with what is happening to their lives. Society assumes that nothing can be done to help them, so there is no need to try. The pimps count on it.

Being trapped, under the control of violent and merciless men, without hope of outside help, sets the stage for Stockholm Syndrome. When the victim cannot successfully fight or flee, she may try to form a protective relationship with her captor. She hopes that if she can prove her love and loyalty to the pimp, she can "love" him into being good. This can become such a desperate attachment that she actually believes she loves him, and passes up chances to escape. Stockholm Syndrome often is the real reason for what others see as the "choice" to stay in the sex industry.

Prostitution and the drug trade go hand in hand. Customers for sex often are buyers for drugs also. Many pimps are supporting their own habits, and dealing drugs as well.

The pimps consider drugs and alcohol a cost of doing business. Without the chemicals, their "livestock" may become psychotic or commit suicide. In addition to the brainwashing and violence, addiction provides a form of control. Drugs also produce isolation from people who otherwise might try to protect a victim or help her escape. The only creature less worthy of help than a prostitute, is an addicted prostitute.

The health effects of prostitution are devastating. Prostitution, especially in childhood, is at least as effective as war in producing post-traumatic stress disorder. Survivors usually have some combination of depression, anxiety, and dissociative disorders. Brain damage, psychosis, and suicide are common. Long term psychiatric disability, serious medical illness, and the effects of accumulating injuries shorten lives.

CONCLUSION

People who have had luckier lives, as well as those who profit from the sex industry in some way, frequently refer to prostitution and pornography

as “victim-less crimes”. They point to a tiny fraction of sex workers who actually might be involved by choice. They selectively read history to find some tiny minority, somewhere, at some time, who gained something in the sex business.

The very selectiveness of their attention indicates that, on some level, they know that for almost everyone, involvement in the sex industry is a terrible misfortune.

As many an old cop will say, “Anyone who thinks prostitution is a victimless crime, hasn’t seen it up close.”

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