

## Pornography: prostitution's identical twin

*Together with trafficking they make one exploitive sex industry.*

Melissa Farley | Aug 28 2015

<http://www.mercatornet.com/articles/view/to-abolish-prostitution-we-must-also-fight-pornography/16728>



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*Many people – from politicians and celebrities to exited survivors of prostitution – are outraged at the decision of the prominent human rights group, Amnesty International, to advocate full decriminalisation of prostitution, including sex buyers, pimps and procurers. Prostitution abolitionists explain that prostitution is almost always inseparable from coercion or trafficking. But, says researcher Melissa Farley, prostitution is also closely linked with pornography and other iterations of sex businesses. Here she explains how they form one exploitive sex industry.*

**Why can't prostitution become just "sex work" as Amnesty, WHO, UNAIDS, and Human Rights Watch propose? After all, pornography has been mainstreamed for some time.**

The argument that prostitution is a job is made from the perspective of pimps and sex buyers, not from the perspective of those in it. For those in it, prostitution is not a job, it is "paid-for rape."

Please don't mystify the sex industry. Don't assume it's vastly different from other types of exploitation and human cruelty. The real lives of those who are trafficked or prostituted or made into pornography are often indistinguishable from the real lives of victims of rape, incest and intimate partner violence. The main difference is money. Profits turn sexual assault of children, rape, domestic violence, humiliation and sexual harassment, and pictures taken of those things - into a business enterprise.

Like other global businesses, there are domestic and international sectors, marketing sectors, a range of physical locations out of which sex businesses operate. There are many different owners and managers, and the sex trafficking industry is constantly expanding as technology, law, and public opinion permit.

### **How exactly are pornography, prostitution, and sex trafficking the same?**

More than 80 percent of the time, women in the sex industry are under pimp control - that is what trafficking is. Pornography also meets the legal definition of trafficking if the pornographer recruits, entices, or obtains women for the purpose of photographing live commercial sex acts.

Women are coerced into pornography by deception, threats, or violence. A survivor of pornography and prostitution explained that she had been pressured to do more extreme sex acts on film, was physically hurt, and was raped on film - just the way women in prostitution are pressured by pimps and sex buyers to perform more harmful and dangerous sex acts.

Pornographers are specialty pimps who use pornography to advertise prostitution and to traffic women.

Backpage, which advertises and sells pornography, is owned by a Dutch company. Recently the Massachusetts Attorney General said, "most of the human trafficking cases that our office has prosecuted involve advertisements on Backpage."

### **Does the justice system generally recognise these links?**

Here is an example of the links between pornography, prostitution and trafficking: Glenn Marcus ran a torture pornography website. He psychologically coerced a woman to permit pornography of her to be sold on Slavespace.com. She brought charges against Marcus who was her pimp/pornographer/trafficker - and torturer. At one point he stuffed a ball gag in her mouth, sewed her mouth shut and hung her on a wall.

Her attorneys used the following definition: *Sex trafficking is coercing or selling a person into a situation of sexual exploitation, such as prostitution or pornography.* On March 5, 2007, pornographer Marcus was convicted of sex trafficking. This legal decision reflects a deepening understanding of the ways in which

pornography, prostitution, and trafficking are the same for the person who is being sexually coerced and exploited for profit.

Another example: The convergence of different arms of the sex industry can be seen in a law enforcement action in Las Vegas. A sex business that looked like an office complex from the street, blended pornography production and trafficking with escort and webcam prostitution. On a webcam site, the sex buyer pays to chat with women who prostitute on streaming video, performing in real time what masturbating sex buyers pay them to do.

In this case, the pimp/pornographer rented six offices that functioned as Internet pornography businesses, and as cyber-prostitution via webcam, and a place where women were pimped out to hotels and to a brothel. As you know, Nevada has legal pimping in rurally zoned brothels, but prostitution in Las Vegas is illegal, so when the women were pimped to Las Vegas hotels, that is trafficking.

**It is not difficult to imagine that the experiences of the women are much the same.**

The same oppressive experiences channel women into pornography, prostitution, and trafficking. Childhood abuse and neglect, a lack of quality education and job training opportunities, culturally mainstreamed misogyny, racism and poverty - all coerce women into the sex trade.

The same kinds of violence against women are perpetrated in pornography, prostitution, and trafficking. Women in prostitution face a likelihood of weekly rape. A Canadian woman in prostitution said, "what is rape for others, is normal for us." A woman at a Nevada legal brothel explained that legal prostitution was "like you sign a contract to be raped."

The emotional consequences of prostitution and trafficking are the same in widely varying cultures whether it's pornography or trafficking, high class or low class, legal or illegal, in a brothel, strip club, massage parlor, or the street.

Symptoms of emotional distress among those in sex businesses are off the charts: depression, suicidality, posttraumatic stress disorder, dissociation, substance abuse. Two-thirds of women, men and transgendered people in prostitution in 9 countries met diagnostic criteria for posttraumatic stress disorder. This level of emotional distress is the same as the most emotionally traumatized people studied by psychologists - battered women, raped women, combat vets, and torture survivors.

**Why do sex industry advocates de-link pornography, prostitution and trafficking?**

The answer is because it increases profits. Disconnecting trafficking from prostitution and pornography normalizes most of the sex industry. Here's how the de-linking works:

Every time an adjective is put in front of the word prostitution, pornography, or trafficking, it falsely carves out a group of human beings who we allow to be sold for sex.

For example: forced vs voluntary trafficking - it's assumed that some people volunteer to traffic themselves; child vs adult pornography - it's assumed to be normal and mainstreamed to make pornography of adults; illegal vs legal prostitution - it's assumed that legal prostitution reduces harm and thus it's acceptable.

Did we de-link child from adult slavery? Did abolitionists focus on saving child slaves, leaving their parents behind? No they did not.

Do we de-link various injuries in situations of domestic violence? Do advocates focus on only the most extreme cases and leave behind the woman who "only" has bruises but no broken bones? No we do not.

**Yes, these women are harmed, but how does the sex industry harm the rest of us?**

Pornography is a public health crisis. It's time to start linking all arms of the hydra-headed sex industry, and understand that yes, individuals who are pornographized and trafficked and prostituted are harmed. And the sex industry also harms the rest of us.

It co-opts and steals our autonomous sexuality. Pornography trains men who watch pornography to abuse and demean women; it shows men how to treat women, including how to be a sex buyer. Pornography teaches women that it is their position in life to tolerate that abuse. Boys who learn about sex from watching pornography - and that is most of them - never learn about loving or intimate sex.

Sex business entrepreneurs count on our tolerance for social injustice.

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*This Q&A is adapted from a talk Dr Farley gave last month at the National Center on Sexual Exploitation, Washington DC, at a symposium on "Pornography: a Public Health Crisis".*