



Media Action Toolkit:

Responding to Inaccurate and Harmful Portrayals of
the Sex Industry

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INTRODUCTION:

In Chicago alone, 25,000 women are involved in the sex industry. Far from being a chosen career, most are coerced into prostitution through force, emotional pressure, deception, or financial desperation. When this happens, they enter an industry sustained through violence and exploitation. Studies suggest that 82 percent of prostituted women in Chicago have been physically assaulted, and one study showed that 78 percent of women in the sex trade are raped, on average, 49 times each year. 92 percent wish they could escape immediately. **The average age for entry into prostitution in the U.S. is 12-14, and the average life expectancy from the date of entry is only seven years.**

But media representations rarely focus on the reality, instead normalizing the sex industry and trivializing the harms faced by its victims. Public perceptions are influenced heavily by these representations, with the effect of discouraging action against sexual exploitation and perpetuating the harms of the trade.

A key element to ending the growing abuses of sexual exploitation is to educate the public on the harmful realities of prostitution, human trafficking, and other forms of sexual exploitation. When media portrayals appear that ignore the injustices of the sex trade and even glamorize it, you have an opportunity to utilize the media to raise awareness about the harms of prostitution by responding to the media outlet through writing a *Letter to the Editor* or an opinion or editorial piece.

This toolkit exists to help you do this. It contains a number of examples of inaccurate and harmful portrayals of prostitution that are often offered by the media. In order to assist you with tailoring your response to the specific misconception, 'talking points' are included with each example. These talking points offer a guide to possible topics and facts that you can address when writing a response to local media outlets.

Before we delve into concrete actions you can take, we've provided a bit more background on prostitution:

Supply and Demand

Solving the issue of prostitution is complicated. Individuals involved in the sex trade need a variety of social services and other resources to exit the sex trade safely. Unfortunately, instead of viewing these individuals as victims in need of assistance, society tends to label them as criminals. This leads to a criminal justice response that disproportionately targets those selling sex and not the men who are purchasing or the pimps and traffickers who are profiting. In 2008, nearly two-thirds of prostitution-related arrests in Chicago were of the women and children who were being prostituted, while one-third were of customers, and only about 1 percent were pimps.¹ Although ample research informs us that the customers (or "johns"), pimps, and other traffickers are fueling the sex trade and abusing the women and girls in prostitution, the criminal justice and legal systems continue to target and punish the victims. **This one-sided focus fails to address the root cause of prostitution: the**

".prostitution is not a victimless crime. It's a terrible life, and a caring society has a responsibility to help these women."

– former Mayor Daley

demand to purchase sex. As long as this demand exists, more vulnerable women and children will be forced, coerced, and manipulated to meet the demand. The equation is simple: eliminate demand, eliminate commercial sexual exploitation.

In Illinois, incarceration rates for felony prostitution (again, just the selling side of the transaction) have increased by nearly 1000 percent since 1995, causing women in prostitution to face further barriers towards rehabilitation since an arrest record makes it more

difficult to secure a job or home. **The approximate cost of incarcerating the women is \$9-million-a-year.** The Johns, on the other hand, receive lesser punishments such as car impoundment, fines, and municipal violations, resulting in very little deterrence. Clearly, this \$9-million-a-year² strategy is not working.

¹ Data compiled by the Mayor's Office on Domestic Violence for the *Innersystems Assessment* and obtained through the Chicago Police Department.

² City of Chicago's estimated cost of arresting, prosecuting and detaining people for prostitution offenses (Sentencing Project 2002), www.sentencingproject.org.

Prostitution will not end unless we end the demand for it. By shifting the community focus from targeting women in the sex trade to eliminating the demand for paid sex, we believe we will see a real reduction in prostitution and the harms associated with it in our communities and in our city.

Prostitution in Chicago

Between 16,000 and 24,000 women and girls are impacted by the sex trade in Chicago every day.³

Many people believe that most people in prostitution are there of their own free will, or choose to do it to earn lots of money. But research conducted both in Chicago and nationwide reveals that a substantial percentage of women in prostitution are homeless, and/or survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault, and often start selling sex at a very young age. Many also experience mental health and substance abuse issues that go untreated.

Additionally, these individuals often experience extreme physical violence, sexual harm, and psychological trauma. Research on women working as prostitutes in Chicago shows that approximately 90 percent are physically, sexually, and emotionally abused at the hands of pimps and johns. This abuse results in a myriad of health problems, including sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, migraines, memory problems, sleeplessness, severe depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and eating disorders.

Prostitution Facts	
Prostitution is an act of violence which is intrinsically traumatizing.	
Average Age Entering Prostitution	13.5
reported a history of sexual abuse in childhood	85%
reported a history of incest	70%
Percentage That Said Porn Taught Them What Was Expected Of Them	52%
said porn was used to illustrate client demands	80%
said pimps regularly exposed them to porn	30%
Rough Percentage Of Prostitutes Who Were Victims Of Rape	75%
prostituted women who had pimps	90%
prostituted women raped by pimps	85%
Prostituted Women Were Raped 16 Times Yearly By Pimps	
Of 475 Women, Men And Transgender People In Prostitution From 5 Countries (South Africa, Thailand, Turkey, USA, Zambia):	
raped in prostitution	62%
physically assaulted	73%
currently or formerly homeless	72%
Wanted To Escape Prostitution Immediately	92%
Girls And Women In Prostitution Have A Mortality Rate 40 Times Higher Than The National Average	
women in escort prostitution that have attempted suicide	75%
completed suicides of prostituted women of all completed suicides reported by hospitals	15%
Ingredients: Excerpted from the Prostitution Fact Sheet, compiled by Melissa Farley, at the Prostitution Research & Education site, prostitutionresearch.com.	
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The Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children

The overwhelming majority of individuals engaged in prostitution have a history of physical and/or sexual abuse, with estimates ranging from 65 to 90 percent.⁴ **Incest has long been considered a**

“He promised me everything and better. Clothes, cars, house, himself. I was just looking for someone to love and love me.”
—prostitution survivor

form of “boot camp” for prostitution because it teaches its victims to expect and accept abuse, even from the people who claim to love and care for them most. It also teaches young people how to disassociate their bodies from their

minds, and as many women in the sex trade have expressed, being able to disassociate is necessary to survive the trauma of prostitution.

³ C. O’Leary and O. Howard, *The Prostitution of Women and Girls in Metropolitan Chicago: A Preliminary Prevalence Report* (Center for Impact Research, 2001).

⁴ M. Farley et al., “Prostitution and Trafficking in Nine Countries: An Update on Violence and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder” in M. Farley, ed., *Prostitution, Trafficking, and Traumatic Stress* (New York: Haworth, 2003), 33-74.

Commercial sexual exploiters in the U.S., commonly referred to as pimps, target particularly vulnerable youth, such as runaway and homeless adolescents (one out of every three teens on the street will be lured toward prostitution within 48 hours of leaving home⁵), and are constantly searching for younger victims, which often bring higher profits. Pimps understand the circumstances and tactics necessary to compel an individual into the sex trade, and seek out the most vulnerable women and girls to physically coerce or emotionally manipulate through false promises, verbal/physical abuse, and threats of harm to the victim and her family.⁶

**Prostitution is not the oldest profession,
but the oldest form of oppression.**

— US Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs,
“The Link between Prostitution and Sex Trafficking”

Nationally, **the average age females enter the sex trade is 12-14.**⁷ In Chicago, according to the Center for Impact Research, 35 percent of all women in the sex trade entered before the age of 15.⁸ The effects are devastating for these children. Youth in prostitution are seriously affected developmentally, suffering from lack of sleep, malnutrition, loss of appetite and concentration, addiction to drugs, sexually transmitted diseases, and a feeling of intense isolation. Additionally, they are often treated as criminals by law enforcement and judges, even though federal law states that any child under the age of 18 who has performed a commercial sex act is a victim of a severe form of human trafficking.⁹

What is Human Trafficking?

Victims of human trafficking are people forced, coerced, or deceived into labor or commercial sex. Labor trafficking is widespread in a variety of work situations that include small-scale businesses like restaurants and cleaning services and domestic workers held in homes, as well as large-scale operations such as farms, factories, sweatshops, and the supply chains of major multinational corporations. Sex trafficking occurs in all sectors of the sex industry, including street prostitution, online escort services, strip clubs, pornography, brothels, and the use of children for commercial sex. Some “mail order brides” become victims of both labor (domestic work) and sex trafficking. Under international law, any child involved in commercial sex is considered a trafficking victim, even if no force or coercion occurs.

⁵ National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, www.missingkids.com.

⁶ J. Raphael and J. Ashley, *Domestic Sex Trafficking of Chicago Women and Girls* (Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, DePaul University College of Law, 2003).

⁷ U.S. Department of Justice. (2007). *Domestic Sex Trafficking of Minors*. Washington, DC.

⁸ Raphael, J. & Shapiro, D. (2002). *Sisters Speak Out: The Lives and Needs of Prostituted Women in Chicago*. Center for Impact Research.

⁹ *William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008*, Public Law 110-457, 110th Cong. (December 23, 2008), codified at US Code 18 section 1591.

In the U.S., a person is a victim of sex trafficking if s/he is being exploited to engage in commercial sex. A person is a victim of a *severe form* of sex trafficking if:

- S/he is being forced, coerced, or tricked to either work or engage in sex for money, and s/he believes s/he would experience serious harm if s/he tried to leave the situation.

OR

- S/he is under 18 and is having sex for money. (It isn't necessary to prove force or coercion for minors; the law recognizes that children cannot meaningfully consent to sex).

It's important to remember that:

- Anyone can be a victim of human trafficking, including U.S. Citizens, foreign nationals, men, women, adults, and children.
- Trafficking is not smuggling or forced movement. While transportation or movement may be involved in human trafficking, trafficking is simply forced/coerced labor; it doesn't require transportation or movement across borders.
- Trafficking does not require physical abuse, force, or restraint. Often, traffickers use psychological manipulation/abuse, deception, threats of harm, or debt manipulation to control their victims.

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood . . . Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

—United Nations, articles 1 and 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)

Prostitution vs. Human Trafficking: Similarities and Differences

When we think of a woman in prostitution compared to a victim of sex trafficking, different images come to mind. We tend to blame women in prostitution for their involvement in the sex trade, but view victims of sex trafficking as innocent. Indeed, our response to victims of sex trafficking is almost uniformly sympathetic, while our response to women in prostitution is usually arrest, incarceration, and blame for “getting themselves in that situation”. So what is the real difference between sex trafficking, and prostitution?

The William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008 defines “severe forms of trafficking in persons” as the following:

1) sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion or in which the person induced to perform such an act is under 18, or

2) the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.¹⁰

“We’re talking about money here. Millions of dollars and these people don’t think about these women as human beings. They think of them as dollars and cents. Chicago, Houston, St. Paul, Minnesota—these crimes are happening in every community in America, big and small.”

—Marcie Forman, Director of Investigations for Immigration and Customs Enforcement

Sex trafficking is one form of human trafficking, which includes both exploitation for commercial sex (sex trafficking), and exploitation for other labor (labor trafficking). Pimps use similar tactics to other sex traffickers, including violence, threats of harm, and dishonest recruitment tactics.

Even though an adult in prostitution who entered the sex trade entirely of her or his own volition and does not have a third-party involved is not legally considered a victim of trafficking, it is important to move beyond legal definitions to understand the human rights

violations experienced by both trafficked and non-trafficked individuals in prostitution.

The sexual and physical violence and psychological harm inherent in prostitution erodes an individual's human dignity, concept of self-worth, and even basic health. This is because prostitution inhibits an individual's ability to live a life free from violence and harm. For example, a study by the Center for Impact Research confirmed that prostituted women in Chicago face a wide array of violence, including physical and sexual assault, as well as high rates of psychological trauma, homelessness, drug addiction, and chronic health problems.¹¹ The trauma of prostitution creates a startling fact: according to an FBI estimate, a woman's average life expectancy is only seven years

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Raphael and Shapiro, *Sisters Speak Out*.

after the date of entry into prostitution. **Girls and women in the sex industry also have a mortality rate 40 times higher than the national average¹².**

Further, when we compare the life circumstances that precede entry into prostitution and sex trafficking, and assess the overall devastation of sex trade involvement, the line between prostitution and trafficking becomes even more blurred. Regardless of whether or not an individual is involved in prostitution as a result of human trafficking or because of limited life opportunities or past abuse, the reality is that the sex trade is incredibly harmful, dangerous and demeaning. It is important to move past legal definitions to understand that prostitution harms everyone involved.

“We’ve created a legal dichotomy in America in which the federal government views prostituted children as victims, yet most states treat them as criminals. If state laws treated child prostitution more like human trafficking, then state social service agencies would play a more important role in helping this vulnerable population.”

-U.S. Senator Dick Durbin

Olivia’s Story...

Olivia grew up on the south side of Chicago, and to others her childhood may have seemed like that of any other girl. She would spend time with her friends, create adventures around the neighborhood, and spend hours at a time escaping into worlds of play and creativity. Yet by the age of 16, Olivia had already begun her descent into the world of strip clubs, prostitution, and drug addiction.

Olivia was raised by her mother and father, parents who might have seemed loving and caring to the outside world. Yet in the home, both were struggling with alcohol addiction. Olivia’s father was physically abusive to her mother on a regular basis. With alcohol always present in her house, Olivia became accustomed to a lifestyle of drinking at a very early age. She began to use alcohol when she was only nine years old in order to block out her parents’ fights and the abuse in her family. Much of their childhood, Olivia and her siblings were left to care for themselves.

As Olivia got older, her father had health problems which eventually progressed to the point where he could no longer work and support their family. When her father became seriously ill, the family moved into a housing project. At twelve years of age, money was scarce for Olivia’s family and Olivia began to earn extra money by helping a family friend, or “uncle”, with groceries. Soon this “uncle” became sexually abusive and would reinforce the abuse with money given to Olivia and her sister.

Desperate to escape an abusive family and the hardships of life in the projects, Olivia left her home, following her older sister to Job Corps. Though she was only sixteen, Olivia gravitated towards an older crowd in the program, drinking and partying much of the time. Despite her substance use, in ten months she completed Job Corps with a G.E.D. and a nursing certificate.

Life could have taken a positive turn at this point; Olivia was finally free from an abusive home and the addictions of her parents. But finding work was hard. When finding a job proved challenging, an older friend helped Olivia secure a job as a barmaid on the south side of Chicago. Not long after being hired at the bar, Olivia moved on to more lucrative work through employment at a strip club on Rush Street. When she joined the club, she thought they were actually searching for dancers. It didn’t take her long before she realized that authentic dance talent was not what they were searching for. As

¹² Melissa Farley, The Prostitution Fact Sheet, prostitutionresearch.com.

she began to strip and endure the harassment and degrading comments from patrons, Olivia turned again to using alcohol to cope and numb herself against this reality that had become her life.

“You kind of desensitize yourself to what is really happening, and you are using more and more alcohol.”

Olivia craved attention when she worked on Rush Street, and would do almost anything to gain the interest of adult patrons—the type of attention that she never got from her parents. While working at the strip club, Olivia began to see that there was more going on than just dancing: “I was very naïve, I had been to dancing school. I thought I was this great dancer...It doesn't take long to see what's going on in the club”. The longer she was there, the more she was pressured to perform beyond just the dance floor.

At 17, Olivia walked in on her friend injecting drugs. “I do this because I hurt so bad inside” her friend told her. Always searching for new ways to numb her pain, she injected. Olivia will always remember the intense sense of relief and freedom she felt the first time she injected drugs. She spent the next 18 years chasing that first high. Once Olivia began using heroin, she started turning tricks in the back rooms of the clubs where she was working to support her habit. According to Olivia, when using drugs, she no longer cared about the abuse of “johns” or the verbal cruelty that had become a daily reality within the club's walls. As Olivia's drug habit began to spiral out of control and the tracks on her arms became harder to conceal, she left the club and began an 18 year involvement in prostitution on Rush Street in downtown Chicago. Olivia's drug habit eventually left her homeless, and she became increasingly more dependent on her violent “partner”. This “partner” was responsible for collecting the money she made in prostitution, providing shelter, and supporting their collective drug habits. When Olivia didn't make enough money to support their lifestyle, he often violently abused her.

Prostitution transformed Olivia into a shell of the woman she had once been. “I was so tired. I was so totally abused. I was in such bad shape. I felt nothing. I cared about nothing. I was a walking zombie.”

The streets could have been the end for Olivia, just as it was the end for many of her friends in prostitution. Luckily, when she got to the point where the only solution was contemplating her own death, Olivia was approached on the street by an outreach worker who had been doing research on women in prostitution.

“I had become so comfortable with the idea that this is how I was going to die, that I just wanted it to happen and get it over with, because it was so painful.”

To her own surprise, the next morning Olivia went to meet with the researcher who then referred her to a substance abuse program for her drug addiction. Although it was difficult, Olivia resisted the urge to use and began her journey to recovery.

Olivia's childhood was unstable and she experienced incest, rape, domestic violence, alcohol abuse, and drugs, all of which pushed her towards a life of stripping, prostitution, and alcohol and drug addiction. Thankfully, with resilience and determination, Olivia lives to share her story and to help others overcome similar issues.

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR WRITING A MEDIA RESPONSE

- **Be brief:** Short, concise responses are more likely to be published than long, meandering ones. Letters should be no longer than 250-300 words; opinion or editorial pieces may be slightly longer, around 400 words. Longer responses are also more likely to be edited, giving you less control over which parts are kept and which are cut.
- **Be timely:** Try to respond within one or two days of the original piece's publication.
- **Be organized:** Start your response with a brief recitation of the portrayal you are opposing, including the article to which you are responding, the date it was published, and the author, if this information is available. Then provide a statement of your own position. Next present your evidence. Finally, close with a concise and strong restatement of your position.
- **Be polite and professional:** Do not be shrill, rude or abusive. Editors tend to discard responses containing personal attacks.
- **Be authoritative:** Use facts, evidence and/or research findings from reliable sources. If possible, also bolster your response with facts and quotes from authoritative sources; readers respect the opinions of people with special knowledge or expertise.
- **Be accurate:** Newspapers will usually edit to correct mistakes, but your piece is more likely to be published if it does not require editing. Proofread your response carefully for errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar. Ask a friend or colleague to read it and offer objective input.

PORTRAYAL #1:

Neglects Demand Side of Prostitution

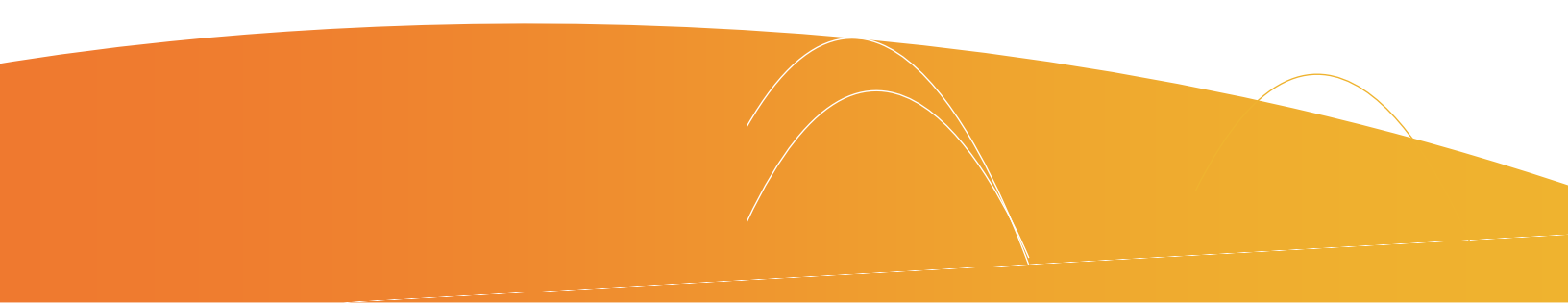
News stories and editorials about prostitution frequently focus only on the girls and women who are prostituted and occasionally on the pimps and traffickers prostituting them, while the men who purchase sex remain invisible. Your response to these stories should encourage editors, reporters and readers to ask who is purchasing sex and to see tackling demand as an essential part of ending prostitution.

Suggested Talking Points:

- **Addressing the root cause.** Historically in the United States, law enforcement, the media, and the public in general have concentrated only on the supply side of prostitution – the women and girls involved and, occasionally, the pimps and traffickers who prostitute them. However, addressing only the supply side is a diversion, not a solution. This one-sided focus fails to address the root cause of prostitution: there is a demand to purchase sex. As long as this demand exists and continues to grow, more and more vulnerable women and children will be forced, coerced, and manipulated to meet that demand. The equation is simple: If we want to eliminate supply, we must first eliminate demand.
- **Fear of facing the facts?** Why does our society fail to ask the simple question: Who is purchasing sex? Perhaps it is because the answer scares us. Although it would be easier if we could, we cannot single out one type of man who purchases sex or just classify him as a “pervert” or “sex addict.” Research shows that these men can be from any and all walks of life, from college students to businessmen to factory workers. They are also often boyfriends, husbands, and fathers. No matter where they work or live, one commonality that links these men together is their exposure, usually from a young age, to our highly sexualized culture. They have been taught that “being a man” is tied to being sexually dominant. Our society may choose to ignore the demand side of prostitution because we are afraid that the men who exploit women and children through prostitution are not, in fact, a departure from our dominant culture, but that they are actually a reflection of it.
- **Proactive approach needed.** Prostitution will not end unless we address the demand. Addressing demand, however, must include more comprehensive tactics than simply

imposing harsher legal penalties for the crime of purchasing sex. While legal penalties are necessary to fight the impunity men feel when they purchase sex, successful demand elimination requires a proactive approach. To truly eliminate the harms of prostitution, we must first educate young men about this issue and shift cultural attitudes about not only prostitution but also the value of women. If men who purchase sex are a product of our culture, then we must work to change that culture. It is time to address all media and cultural institutions that promote, glamorize, idealize, and sexualize the violence, abuse, and degradation of women and children.

- **Re-framing purchase of sex.** As we combat the exploitation of women and children through prostitution, we should learn from the approach of Sweden, which has experienced widespread success by focusing on the demand side of prostitution. In 1999, Sweden introduced a revolutionary and progressive approach to prostitution policy that redefines prostitution as a crime of gender-based violence perpetrated by the buyer against the prostituted woman or child. In Sweden, men who purchase sex face a real risk of incarceration and criminal charges, while the prostituted women and children are offered the supportive services they need to exit prostitution. During the first three years that the law was in effect, the estimated total number of women involved in Sweden's sex trade dropped from 2,500 in 1999 to 1,500 in 2002, and now street prostitution has decreased tenfold. Also, as a result of the law, the demand for commercial sex acts in Sweden has also dropped by 80 percent.
- **Demand increases trafficking.** Perhaps the most striking success of the Swedish law is its effectiveness in combating human trafficking. Swedish police believe that 200-500 women and children have been trafficked into the country for commercial sexual exploitation annually. Compare these figures to those of Sweden's neighbors, all of which have about half of Sweden's population. Norway and Denmark each have about 6,000 victims of sex trafficking annually, while Finland has somewhere between 12,000 and 15,000 sex trafficking victims. Recorded conversations between traffickers over wiretapped phones have revealed that they no longer believe it is profitable to do business in Sweden and now bring their victims elsewhere, to places where the demand is higher.



PORTRAYAL #2: Advocates Legalization

Legalization of prostitution is often touted as a progressive solution to issues associated with the sex trade. However, the experiences of other countries, as well as here in the United States, have shown that legalization does not solve the problems that arise from prostitution and further fails to protect prostituted women and children. Your response to these portrayals should encourage the media and readers to acknowledge that legalization merely institutionalizes and legitimizes the abuse of women and children.

Suggested Talking Points:

- **Unregulated trade continues.** The argument that the legalization of prostitution will protect individuals involved in the sex trade ignores the fact that the vast majority of prostitution in a legalized system still occurs outside the reach of the law. In countries that have legalized prostitution, the illegal sector is estimated to be roughly three times larger than the legal, regulated sector. Therefore, even within this legalized system, the vast majority of prostituted women still face the same risk of harm and violence as they would in a system where prostitution is illegal.
- **Legality provides a cover.** Pimps, traffickers, and organized crime do not become legitimate entrepreneurs simply because prostitution has been legalized. Rather than comply with regulations like workers' rights, minimum wages, safety and health screenings, and tax laws, these exploiters merely find it more profitable to continue selling sex outside the legal system. The only difference is that legalization now provides them with a legitimate pretense for their actions.
- **Rise in trafficking.** As shown in places like Amsterdam and certain counties of Nevada, legalizing prostitution usually results in an increase in demand, as buying sex in these places is seen as a normal and encouraged activity. Tragically, this rise in demand then fuels an increase in human trafficking. To meet the new demand, pimps and traffickers force and coerce more women and girls into prostitution. Reports from countries that have legalized prostitution, such as the Netherlands and Germany have shown dramatic increases in the number of sex trafficking victims, especially child victims, into those countries.
- **Regulation is no guarantee.** The experience of the most notorious location for legalized prostitution — Amsterdam — has shown that legalization does not provide the protection supporters often claim it does. Recorded telephone conversations between pimps and traffickers have revealed that they believe the legality of prostitution in the Netherlands makes it an ideal market in which to operate. One study estimated that up to 80 percent of women working in *legal* brothels in the Netherlands are actually victims of human trafficking. The government of Amsterdam has decided to shut down nearly a third of the

infamous windows in the red-light district due to concerns that they are run by organized crime cartels as destinations for human trafficking victims. In one study done in the Netherlands, only three percent of individuals involved in prostitution stated that they believed that legalization was a good thing.

- **Human rights still at risk.** Legalizing prostitution in Nevada has done little to protect the human rights of prostituted women and children. According to the FBI, Nevada is one of the main destinations for child trafficking in the country. The bus depot in Las Vegas has become notorious for the pimps and traffickers who prowl it looking for homeless and runaway youth to recruit into prostitution.
- **Violence continues.** The violence that women experience in the sex trade does not disappear when prostitution becomes legal. Many studies have shown that women are regularly beaten and raped in Nevada's legal brothels. According to one study, 81 percent of women in Nevada's legal brothels desperately want to escape prostitution.
- **Reluctance to register.** Arguments stating that individuals involved in the sex trade would prefer to work in a regulated environment are negated by the fact that very few of the women in legalized prostitution actually register with the government or join unions. For instance, membership in official "Sex Worker's Unions" remains very low. In Germany it is around four percent. Though the stigma of *buying* sex is erased when prostitution is legalized, the stigma of *selling* it is not. Evidence shows that women are not eager to self identify and tend to avoid official registrations, even when registering comes with substantial incentives such as retirement benefits. Many individuals involved in the sex trade have stated that they would prefer help exiting prostitution rather than having their names on an official list of "whores."
- **Normalizes degrading image of women.** Legalizing prostitution sends the message that it is acceptable to objectify women. A society that accepts that a woman can be reduced to a purchasable object to provide sexual gratification sends a very strong message to all women and young girls: "Your sexuality is for sale." In countries and cities that have legalized "zones" where sex is sold, women not in prostitution who live in those zones experience frequent street harassment and solicitation since the men cruising there tend to view all women in the neighborhood as "for sale."
- **Distorts self-image of children.** Being exposed to legalized prostitution sends a strong message to children - boys *and* girls - about the worth of women and a man's entitlement to sex. One purchaser of sex in a study done by the Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation observed, "Kids are impressionable. They see [women in prostitution], and it's how they begin to look at all women." Legalized prostitution may also impact young women's sense of self and sexual boundaries. A 13-year-old girl trying to work out her sexual boundaries would be affected considerably by the knowledge that the boys in her life can purchase any sex act that she refuses to perform. These types of pressures can have serious implications for youth living in areas with legalized prostitution.

- **Health protection one-sided.** Legalization is often cited as a way to ensure health standards for individuals in the sex trade. But the protection of health is one-sided. Although prostituted women are regularly screened for sexually transmitted diseases, their customers never undergo similar checks. Since either party can transmit STDs, the claim of “better health” only ensures better health for those who are purchasing, not the women who are selling.

PORTRAYAL #3:

Depicts Prostitution as a Victimless Crime

Individuals who portray the sex trade as a victimless crime ignore the considerable amount of research that exposes the sex trade's many victims, from prostituted and exploited children to women trafficked across the country or even the world. Your response to these portrayals should highlight the violence and harm experienced by thousands of victims of prostitution to ensure that readers, reporters and editors cannot ignore them.

Suggested Talking Points:

- **Prevalence of children.** Referring to prostitution as a victimless crime ignores the high prevalence of children involved in prostitution. Regardless of the legal status of prostitution, children routinely become victims of sexual exploitation and severe sexual abuse for commercial purposes in the United States and throughout the world. Many studies, including one in Chicago, have found that the vast majority of prostituted women entered the sex trade before their 18th birthday.
- **Strong link to trafficking.** The link between human trafficking and prostitution is undeniable. Many individuals involved in the sex trade in the United States meet the federal definition of a victim of trafficking, and the U.S. State Department has stated that most victims of sex trafficking within the U.S. are women and children, particularly girls under the age of 18. Whether they have been brought from across the world or coerced into prostitution in their own city by a boyfriend-turned-pimp, trafficked women are victims of a heinous crime. For these women and children, forced into strip clubs, escort services, massage parlors or on the street, prostitution is nothing short of rape and slavery.
- **High level of abuse.** Prostituted women and children face a great deal of abuse from traffickers, pimps, and "johns" (the men who purchase sex). One study of prostituted women in Chicago found that 82 percent of the women surveyed had been physically assaulted and 83 percent had been threatened with a deadly weapon. In another study, 79 percent of the prostituted women reported being physically assaulted by their customers, and 76 percent reported regular beatings by their pimps. Still another study found that 78 percent of the women they interviewed were raped an average of 16 times a year by their pimps and another 33 times a year by johns. These women and children are often targets for criminals, such as serial killers, who feel that they may prey on them with absolute impunity. All of these facts are underscored by the FBI estimate that a woman's average life expectancy is only seven years after the date of entry into prostitution.
- **Coercive pimps.** Research has found that the majority of all prostitution in the U.S. is pimp-controlled. Pimps use violent means in order to maintain this control. Pimps

target girls or women who seem naive, lonely, homeless, and/or rebellious. At first, the attention and feigned affection from the pimp convinces her to “be his woman”; soon the pimp’s kindness is replaced by control and abuse. Many pimps keep prostituted women in virtual captivity through verbal abuse - making a woman feel that she is utterly worthless; and by physical coercion - beatings and the threat of torture. 85 percent of women in prostitution in one study also reported being raped by their pimps.

- **Trauma and stress.** Research in nine countries found individuals involved in the sex trade suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in both higher frequency and higher severity than Vietnam veterans. The psychological wounds from the sex trade run deep.
- **Abuse is consistent in all venues.** Indoor prostitution is just as violent as prostitution that occurs outdoors. Studies have shown that the relative rates of physical violence in indoor prostitution are on par with street-based activity. The basic power imbalance intrinsic to prostitution allows for extreme amounts of abuse to occur. Some studies have actually found that those who engaged in indoor prostitution suffer from higher rates of mental health disorders, such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, from their trauma than those who engaged in outdoor prostitution. Interviews with women in prostitution found that some women actually feel safer selling sex outdoors since they have more control over the clients they choose.

PORTRAYAL #4:

Suggests that Buyers of Sex are the Ones Being Exploited

Often, when news stories break about high profile individuals paying large sums to engage in prostitution, media can suggest that the men who pay for sex are being exploited or cheated by the individuals in the sex trade. Your response to this portrayal should highlight who the real victims of the sex trade are, and explain how the men who purchase sex remain the root cause of why the sex trade continues to exist.

Suggested Talking Points:

- Though some men do pay large amounts of money to purchase sex, it is rare that prostituted women are allowed to keep a significant amount of that money. Most of the money is taken by her pimp or “madam,” the brothel or strip club owner, or others who have control over her earnings.
- A power imbalance exists in the act of prostitution. Money is exchanged, yet the act of prostitution usually requires an individual involved in the sex trade to submit to the demands of the buyer. The “john” pays a specified amount to feel a sense of control over the interaction. The fact that money is exchanged does not negate the abuse and exploitation that prostituted women and children experience.
- Statements that normalize the sex trade or portray the buyer as a victim erase men’s culpability in the exploitation of prostituted women and children. These assertions are deeply offensive for the innumerable individuals who have suffered profound physical and psychological harm as result of sexual exploitation.

PORTRAYAL #5:

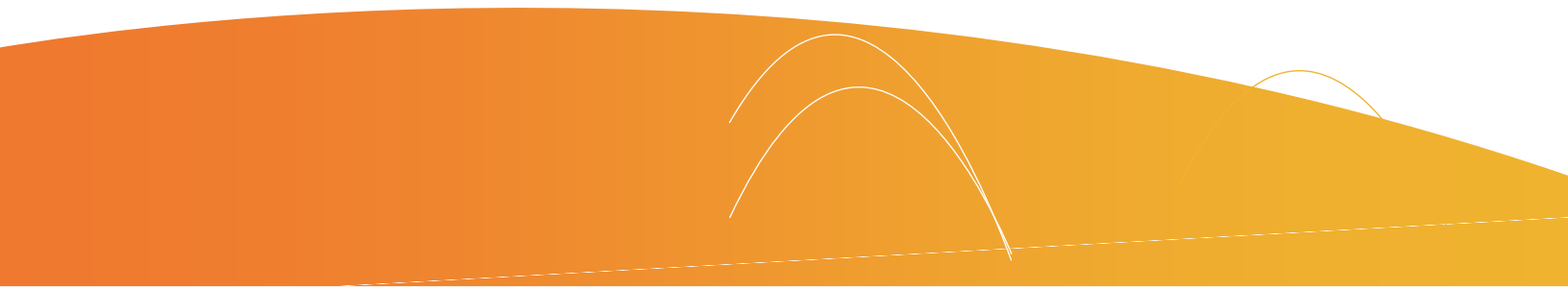
Depicts Prostitution Solely as a Personal Choice

Mainstream media frequently portray prostitution as a personal choice of the women who enter the sex trade. These women are depicted as having a variety of career choices and simply opting to enter prostitution. Your response to this portrayal should express the limited viable options (or lack thereof) that many women and children have before they become involved in the sex trade, and the force used in many cases, as well as the overwhelming difficulty they experience in exiting prostitution once they are involved.

Suggested Talking Points:

- **Basic survival.** Free choice implies that a person has been presented with a wide variety of viable options and simply picks the one she feels is in her best interest. This is rarely the case for those who end up in the sex trade. Studies that have addressed individuals' reasons for entering the sex trade have found that the most common reason is meeting basic survival needs. Indeed, there is a high correlation between homelessness and prostitution. Lack of economic opportunities – or the lack of a shelter in a cold winter – can be just as coercive as methods used by traffickers who force women and children into prostitution. Arguing that prostitution is a choice ignores that fact that 92% of individuals in the sex trade want to escape it immediately according to Prostitution Research and Education.
- **Children do not choose prostitution.** Free choice implies free consent. However, when discussing the concept of personal choice and consenting parties, we cannot ignore the high prevalence of children in the sex trade. These children are not legally old enough to consent to sex, and therefore, when men “purchase” sex from youth, they commit statutory rape and commercial sexual exploitation of a child.
- **Trafficking prevalent.** Sex trafficking is a key contributor to the sex trade both in this country and in countless others. Many individuals involved in the sex trade in the United States meet the federal definition of a victim of trafficking, and the U.S. Department of State has stated that most victims of sex trafficking within the U.S. are women and children, particularly girls under the age of 18. Whether they have been brought from across the world or were coerced into prostitution in their own city by a

boyfriend-turned-pimp, trafficked women are victims of a heinous crime. For these women and children, forced into strip clubs, escort services, massage parlors or on the street, prostitution is nothing short of rape and slavery.



PORTRAYAL #6

Ignores the Presence of Children in the Sex Trade

The media generally portray individuals involved in prostitution as consenting adults. However, a large percentage of the individuals involved in prostitution in this country are children. Your response to this portrayal should state the facts of this reality and push readers and the media to see these children not as prostitutes but as victims of exploitation.

Suggested Talking Points:

- **Children at risk worldwide.** UNICEF and the United Nations Population Fund estimate that 2 million children worldwide are exploited in prostitution and/or pornography every year. The overwhelming majority of those involved in the sex trade are either currently children or teens, or adults who entered before they turned 18.
- **Children in the U.S.** A 2001 University of Pennsylvania study found that 300,000 youth in the U.S. alone are at risk of commercial sexual exploitation at any time. The U.S. State Department has stated that many victims of sex trafficking within the U.S. are girls under the age of 18, and that underage girls constitute the bulk of victims in all commercial sex markets, including pornography, stripping, escort services, and prostitution. The U.S. Department of Justice states that the average age of entry into prostitution in the United States is 12-14 years old.
- **Child victims treated as criminals.** According to the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, any child under the age of 18 years old that is used for the purpose of exploitation through sexual servitude (prostitution), regardless of the presence or absence of economic leverage, manipulation, fraud, coercion, threats, force and violence is considered a victim of a severe form of human trafficking. Tragically, in the U.S., these children are routinely arrested and charged with prostitution.
- **“Purchase” is child abuse.** Children are not legally old enough to consent to sex, and therefore, when men “purchase” sex from youth, they commit statutory rape and commercial sexual exploitation of a child. Every child that is involved in “prostitution” is actually a victim of child abuse.

PORTRAYAL #7: Uses the Term “Sex Work”

Often, the media use the term “sex work” when discussing prostitution, thereby equating the sexually exploitive process of prostitution with normal labor. Your response to this portrayal should expose the falsity in this equation and explain how the use of this term normalizes the sex trade.

Suggested Talking Points:

- **Sanitizes exploitation.** The associations people have with different words have immense weight and can shape their opinions of an issue. The term “sex work” sanitizes the exploitation of individuals in prostitution, strips it of its negative context, and legitimizes prostitution as just another form of work.
- **Ignores abuse.** Prostitution, when viewed in the context of employment, fundamentally differs from any other work setting. In other work situations, employees would not be expected to tolerate physical, mental, and sexual violence and abuse. No other occupation treats women as a commodity, as an object for trade between a seller (the pimp) and a buyer (the “john”), or expects a woman to submit to the customer’s every demand merely because he has paid money.
- **Ignores danger.** Prostitution differs from normal work in the amount and type of danger involved. People in prostitution face a “workplace” homicide rate 51 times higher than the next most dangerous job for women (working in a liquor store). No legitimate job lists its acceptable “occupational hazards” as rape, sexual assault, torture, and homicide. Even countries that have legalized prostitution recognize that it is unlike any other “job.” For instance, the Australian occupational safety guidelines recommend that women entering prostitution take classes in hostage negotiation skills.
- **Legitimizes demand.** Use of the term “sex work” legitimizes the demand for prostitution by portraying sexual exploitation as an equal business transaction. It therefore excuses men for the abuses they perpetrate on individuals involved in the sex trade.

PORTRAYAL #8:

Proposes that Pimps Provide a Valuable Service

Several forms of media – film and music specifically – glamorize the role of pimps in prostitution. In modern culture, pimps are portrayed as men to be admired and as protectors of the women and girls they prostitute. Your response to this portrayal should expose the true function of pimps – controllers, manipulators and abusers of the women and children they exploit.

Suggested Talking Points:

- **No real protection.** Some portrayals suggest that women under the control of a pimp suffer less violence from customers. This contradicts findings in many research studies, including a number completed in Chicago, that have shown that pimp-controlled girls and women suffer the same amount, or even more violence from customers, than those without pimps. Any so-called protection provided by pimps is likely extremely minimal. As pimps typically do not accompany the women and children that they exploit on “dates,” they are not in a position to protect against rape, beatings, or murders by “johns” during the actual incident.
- **Pimps are perpetrators.** Even if a few women under the control of a pimp do suffer less abuse at the hands of customers, they still face enormous violence from the pimps themselves, thus negating any supposed protection. Pimps use violence, coercion, and deception to lure women and girls into prostitution and keep them from escaping. In one study, which is reflective of many others on the same subject, 86 percent of women under the control of a pimp said they are physically abused by their pimps, and 50 percent of these women stated that their pimps assaulted them frequently or daily. Eighty percent of the women reported sexual assault by their pimps. The women also reported various forms of control by the pimp including the forced use of drugs, isolation, confinement, restraints, death threats toward them or their family, and the use of weapons.
- **Pimps enforce danger.** Pimps make money by forcing women into dangerous situations and often care little about what the women must endure to earn this money. At least one study in San Francisco found that the pressure to earn money for their pimps forced many women to expose themselves to additional risk by allowing customers not to wear a condom (which usually raises the price) or accepting “dates” with men with whom they may not feel comfortable.

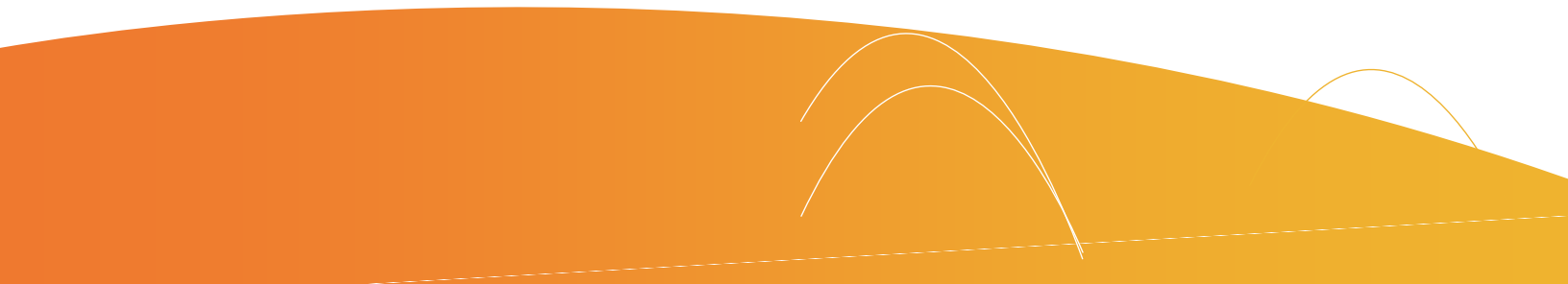


PORTRAYAL #9:

Suggests that Prostitution Prevents Rape

Occasionally, opinion pieces, editorials or media figures will imply that the allowance of prostitution by society reduces rape as men who are inclined to rape would have an outlet to meet their sexual needs. Your response to this portrayal should point out that rape is not about sex but about power and harm, highlight the reality of rape statistics, and emphasize that prostituted women and children are often victims of rape as well.

Suggested Talking Points:

- **Rape in the sex trade.** The claim that the allowance of prostitution would prevent rape exposes a clear misunderstanding of the motivations behind rape. This argument seems to imply that men rape women solely to meet sexual urges. However, the frequency in which prostituted women and children themselves suffer rape and sexual assault quickly negates this notion. For example, one study of women in the sex trade found that 78 percent of them were raped an average of 16 times a year by their pimps (usually to assert their control over these women) and an additional 33 times a year by “johns.”
 - **Does not reduce rape.** No evidence exists to support the claim that women not involved in the sex trade would somehow be more protected from rape and sexual violence if prostitution were more tolerated. In fact, a recent study conducted by the Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation of 113 men who purchase sex in Chicago showed the opposite. In this study, 27 percent of these men acknowledged that they had committed sexually coercive acts against women. Nineteen percent admitted to committing rape. The study also found that men who use women in prostitution frequently justify the rape of women both in AND outside of the sex industry.
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- **Women are not there by choice.** Any argument that suggests that women are putting themselves in danger of rape by being involved in the sex industry, and are thereby in part responsible for any abuse they face, ignores the fact that most women are not there by choice. Most enter out of financial desperation or because they are forced by pimps and traffickers. Many are children, who are not legally old enough to consent to sex, so the question of choice is irrelevant. According to one study, 92% wish that they could escape.
- **Distorts image of women.** The sex trade objectifies women, and encourages a perception among men in society as a whole that women can be bought. Women who live in areas with a high level of prostitution face frequent harassment and solicitation, since the men in the area tend to see all women as “for sale.”

PORTRAYAL #10:

Suggests that Prostitution is Natural or Fulfills a Need

Mainstream media often refer to prostitution as “the world’s oldest profession” and justify it as part of the natural order of the world. Likewise, men are often portrayed as possessing a naturally aggressive sexual behavior and as needing prostitution as a way of expressing that behavior. Your response to this portrayal should encourage readers and the media to see prostitution not as natural but rather as a reflection of a culture where women’s bodies and sexuality are commoditized.

Suggested Talking Points:

- **Self-control should be expected.** Justifying prostitution by saying it is natural or fulfills a need is no more rational than justifying rape as being natural or fulfilling a need. We do not accept this rationalization for rape because people *can* and *are* expected to control their sex drives. The same expectations should be applied to prostitution.
- **Men have a choice.** Suggesting that men require prostitution in order to express a naturally aggressive sexual behavior implies that men are merely the puppets of their own sex drives. This insinuation dehumanizes men and disregards their ability to make responsible choices. Knowing that prostitution is exploitative and violent to the women and children involved in it, men should be encouraged to exercise the power and responsibility they do have to make the choice not to participate in this harmful system.
- **Aggression should not be encouraged.** Even if there were evidence that men possessed a naturally aggressive sexual behavior, these behaviors and attitudes should not be encouraged. Much of the research into prostitution has clearly found that prostitution is harmful and exploitative to the women and children involved in it. Women and children should not have to tolerate abuse in order to meet an assumed sexual need of men.
- **No entitlement.** Many people are able to enjoy and appreciate sexual relationships, and find that it can enhance their lives and relationships. However, nobody is entitled to sex, nor, unlike food or shelter, do they need it for survival.



PORTRAYAL #11:

Implies that “High-Class Call Girls” Typify All Prostitution

We often hear breaking stories about women involved in “high-class prostitution,” especially when a politician, celebrity, or other well-known figure is involved. The whirlwind of publicity surrounding one of these events often obscures the realities of the sex trade. Your response to this portrayal should point out that these so-called “high-class call girls” represent the minority of women and children exploited through prostitution and that, even if they are classified as “high class,” these women also often face the harms and danger endemic to all forms of prostitution.

Suggested Talking Points:

- **Likely history of trauma.** The life histories of these “high-class call girls” are often unknown. Seldom do we know what led her to enter prostitution. The woman involved in the Eliot Spitzer case, Ashley Dupree, was vilified for using the sex trade to dupe men out of large amounts of money and garner fame for herself. However, had the media researched Dupree’s history, they would have found that she escaped from an abusive home, was a runaway when she entered prostitution, and had most of her assets, including those large amounts of money paid by the “duped” men, controlled by a third party. As this story illustrates, even “high-class call girls” often have a history of physical and/or sexual trauma.
- **Exploitation continues.** By focusing so much on the case of one individual, the news media are obscuring the reality of prostitution in this country. Prostitution is rarely glitzy and glamorous. For the vast majority of individuals involved in the sex trade, prostitution is defined by violence, abuse, and trauma. Prostituted women and children are often subjected to some of the most extreme forms of exploitation and harm. While one particular story may portray prostitution as a way of “living the good life,” the truth is that prostitution is only a “get-rich-quick” scheme for pimps and exploiters, who seldom allow the women and children they control to keep the money they make.
- **Violence is widespread.** A 2002 study of prostituted women in Chicago found that, regardless of the type of prostitution activity, whether it occurred on the streets, in drug house, or in hotels, high percentages of all the women surveyed had experienced physical violence, with customers being most frequently identified as the perpetrators of this violence. Twenty-one percent of the women in escort services reported being raped more than ten times.

PORTRAYAL #12

Uses Phrases Like “Living a Dangerous Lifestyle” When Describing the Victim of a Crime

When a violent crime is perpetrated against a woman in prostitution, the media often highlights that the woman was involved in the sex trade, implying that her participation in prostitution or her “dangerous lifestyle” was to blame for the crime committed against her. Your response to this portrayal should remind readers and the media that our society should not blame the victim or accept violence against any person.

Suggested Talking Points:

- **Universal right to safety.** No one deserves to be the victim of a crime. Ever. No one has the right to threaten, injure, maim, rape, rob, or kill anyone else, regardless of who the victim is. To imply that individuals in the sex trade are somehow devoid of the right to safety is to say that they are somehow less than human. Implying in any way that the victim brought a crime upon themselves exculpates some of the most violent criminals.
- **Lack of choice.** This type of language is blaming the victim at its worst. First, using the term “lifestyle” implies that individuals in the sex trade are there because they choose to be. Second, it excuses the crime by placing the blame on the victim. Very few individuals in the sex trade are there because it is their preferred “lifestyle.”
- **Justifies abuse.** Crimes are perpetrated against individuals in prostitution because criminals know they can prey on these individuals with virtual impunity. Framing the issue by focusing on the victim’s “lifestyle” helps to promote the very apathy that allows violent criminals to attack individuals already exploited in prostitution without fear of reproach or redress. As one of the most prolific serial killers in U.S. history, Gary Ridgeway, said, “I picked prostitutes because I thought I could kill as many of them as I wanted without getting caught.”

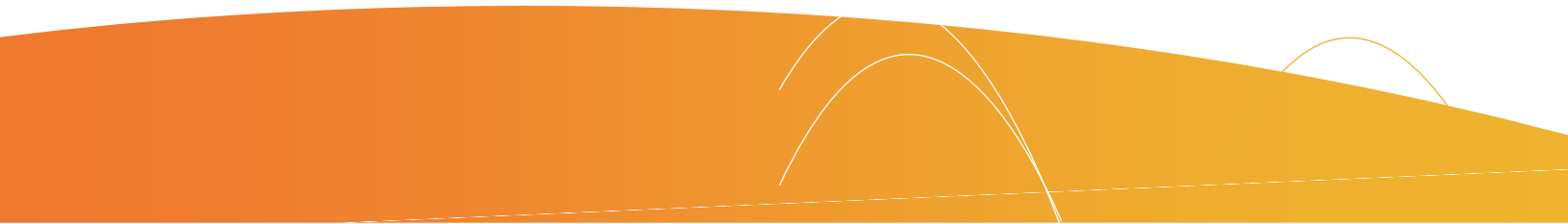


PORTRAYAL #13:

Glamorizes and/or Normalizes Prostitution

Prostitution is often depicted in film and media in either a glamorous way (think: “Pretty Woman”) or in a humorous way where the women in the sex trade are viewed as objects of amusement. Your response to this portrayal should expose the reality: Prostitution is harmful, exploitive, and dangerous.

Suggested Talking Points:

- **Ignores harm.** The sex trade is not glamorous - it is a world filled with violence, exploitation and abuse. When media glamorize the sex trade, they paint a false picture that legitimizes prostitution and conceals its inherent harms.
 - **Makes manipulation easier.** Glamorizing prostitution makes it easier for pimps to lure vulnerable individuals, especially young girls, who may believe the falsely attractive and empowering depictions of prostitution in the media. Pimps can easily use glamorized portrayals of prostitution as part of a powerful manipulative trap to recruit young girls and women.
 - **Reduces public action.** Glamorizing and normalizing prostitution sends the wrong message to the general public about what prostitution is truly like. In debates about prostitution policy, these glamorized portrayals become the public’s point of reference. These portrayals lead the public to believe that women choose prostitution from a variety of viable options and that prostitution does not harm the individuals involved. With these false representations in mind, the public is less likely to support programs that help individuals in prostitution exit the sex trade or policies that target the men who purchase and exploit individuals in the sex trade.
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PORTRAYAL #14:

Publicizes Events, Like “Pimp and Ho” Parties, that Glorify the Sex Trade

When local activities are planned that glorify the sex trade, the organizers will often publicize the event in local media. Without an effective response, these events send the message that prostitution and its exploitation of women and girls is acceptable. Your response to this portrayal should draw media attention to the fact that these events are not harmless fun but rather a glorification of sexual exploitation. Additionally, you should send a letter to or meet with the organizers of the event, taking the opportunity to educate them on the harms and realities of prostitution.

Suggested Talking Points:

- **Normalization.** The normalization of the sex trade perpetuates the harm of the sex trade, and this “normalization” is growing stronger all the time (the word ‘pimp’ being used to describe everything from cars to baby clothes, pole dancing classes sprouting up at gyms throughout the country, etc.). “Pimp N’ Ho” parties are no exception, since they use the backdrop of the sex trade as an excuse for people to dress up in racist stereotypes of pimps and glamorized portrayals of prostituted women.
- **Celebrates slavery.** “Pimp and Ho” parties are not only incredibly racist (since the majority of individuals who attend are white and dress up as African-American stereotypes of pimps and prostitutes), but these parties also celebrate modern-day slavery. Our society would never tolerate a party where men dress up as slave owners, and yet these parties invite them to dress as “pimps” who often act in that very same role in the lives of the women they prostitute.
- **Glorifies culture of violence.** Pimps are perpetrators of unimaginable amounts of violence towards women in prostitution. And yet the organizers of this event continue the glorification of this culture by hosting a party dedicated to batterers. “Pimp and Ho” parties celebrate a culture of violence against women. By hosting this party, the organizers trivialize the harm experienced by 25,000 women each year in Chicago alone.
- **Trivializes abuse.** “Pimp And Ho” parties make light of this abusive pimp-prostitute relationship. Pimps use violence, coercion, and deception to lure women and girls into prostitution and keep them from escaping. In one study, which is reflective of many others on the same subject, 86 percent of women under the control of a pimp said they are physically abused by their pimps, and 50 percent of these women stated their pimps assaulted them frequently or daily. Eighty percent of the women reported sexual assault by their pimps. The women also reported various forms of control by the pimp including the forced use of drugs, isolation, confinement, restraints, death threats to

them or their family, and the use of weapons.



PORTRAYAL #15:

Portrays Sex Trafficking as Only Happening Abroad or Solely to Foreign-Born Victims

Special reports in newspapers, on shows like Dateline, or even fictional books and movies often have the effect of making sex trafficking and the commercial exploitation of children appear to be a foreign problem. Your response to this portrayal should inform the media and readers that sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation happen in the United States as well, even in our own neighborhoods and communities.

Suggested Talking Points:

- **U.S. children are victims.** We sometimes hear stories of men purchasing sex acts from 14-year-old girls in other countries. Though sexual exploitation abroad is a travesty, we in the United States should not believe that we are immune. Sexual exploitation of children happens on a large scale here as well. According to federal law, any child under the age of 18 who has been induced to perform a commercial sex act is a victim of a severe form of trafficking. Given that the average age of entry into prostitution in this country is 12-14, we know that there is a high prevalence of American-born child sex trafficking victims. According to the FBI, between 100,000 and 300,000 children are involved in the sex trade annually here in the U.S. The prostituting of children and child sex trafficking is not solely a problem facing other countries.
- **U.S. citizens are trafficked.** Americans generally tend to think that human trafficking in general is a crime that occurs in other countries, or to U.S. citizens who brought it upon themselves. These assumptions are misconceived. Trafficking happens to U.S. citizens in every U.S. state, as shown by each state's law enforcement and prosecution statistics and the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting Procedure. The Federal definition of human trafficking in the Trafficking Victims Protection Act includes both U.S. citizens and foreign nationals; both are equally protected under the Federal trafficking statutes and have been since 2000. Moreover, a trafficking victim does not need to be transported between states or brought in from another country to be a victim of sex trafficking; they may simply be forced into prostitution through harsh means of control and exploitation by pimps and madams. The prostituted

woman on your local street corner may well be a victim of human trafficking. Even if not, it is highly likely that she is experiencing the same types of hardships faced by an internationally trafficked victim.

- Americans often perceive U.S. citizens who have been subjected to trafficking as anything but victims. While images of foreign trafficking victims often engender feelings of sympathy, human trafficking victims in the U.S. are often referred to as criminals, prostitutes, child prostitutes, runaways, throwaways, addicts, or juvenile delinquents. Traffickers are often referred to only as pimps.



PORTRAYAL #16

Argues that Fighting Demand Puts Women at Risk

Some articles argue that if we tackle the demand side of prostitution we will put women at greater risk since they will have to move their prostitution-related activities further underground and to less visible areas. Your response should highlight that fighting the demand side of prostitution has been shown to reduce prostitution, which is the only proven way to offer protection to prostituted women and girls.

Suggested Talking Points:

- **Assumes current safety.** The argument that fighting demand puts the women in prostitution at risk assumes that prostitution, as it currently exists, is somewhat safe. Prostitution already occurs in illegal venues and hidden places, and it is violent and extremely harmful. Research nationwide has consistently found that there is no such thing as “safe work” in the sex trade. Physical and psychological harm occurs at similar rates irrespective of where the sex act is being sold. Focusing on demand helps identify perpetrators and reduce violence, not increase it.
- **Proven effect.** Going after demand is one of the only strategies proven to reduce the number of women and girls involved in prostitution. Reducing the number of participants is the surest way to decrease the number of women and girls at risk and the violence and harm that they suffer.
- **Criminalizes victims.** Prostitution is not legal, and focusing more on demand instead of those selling does not change that dynamic. It only shifts the attention of law enforcement from criminalizing the exploited women and children to a more appropriate and effective place - stopping the perpetrators of this exploitation.

APPENDIX:

Sample Responses to Media Portrayals

SAMPLE #1:

Opinion Piece on Press Coverage of Eliot Spitzer Scandal_

Responding to Portrayal #2: Advocates Legalization; Portrayal #3: Depicts Prostitution as a Victimless Crime; and Portrayal #10: Suggests that Prostitution is Natural or Fulfills a Need

There are major words and concepts missing from the discussion about Eliot Spitzer's recent crime. The most glaring one is patriarchy. If the sex trade were an equal opportunity employer (exploiter?), then it would make sense that there would be equal numbers of men and women selling sex. But the truth is very different. It is overwhelmingly women who end up selling their bodies, predominantly to men. As a society, we have constructed this dangerous idea of masculinity as being entitled to sex. And that is why so many are excusing Spitzer's behavior — it's really just "boys being boys."

But is it just a "male thing" to purchase the bodies of others? If so, why do so many men not buy sex? And why do so many of those who do have incredibly conflicted feelings about it? As one 'john' I interviewed said, "I don't like to see women subjugate themselves to anything. But I use rationalization to justify my use of prostitutes."

Another concept missing from the debate is an expanded understanding of why Spitzer's actions were wrong. Yes, he crusaded against corruption and helped bring down organized crime, so his actions illuminate his hypocrisy. He has a wife and family and has brought major pain into their

lives. But what about the injustice surrounding Spitzer's feelings that not only is it his right to purchase a human being's body but that he can use the bodies he has purchased to live out sex acts, which accounts have implied were sometimes physically harmful to the women?

We can get lost in debates about legalization or the difference between those who "choose" to be in the sex trade and those who end up selling sex out of survival needs. But this is dangerous for the following reasons:

1. It sets up a false dichotomy between "safe" prostitution, or prostitution that occurs behind closed doors, and "dangerous" prostitution, or prostitution that occurs on the street. Research nationwide has consistently found that there is no such thing as safe work in the sex trade. Physical and psychological harm occur at similar rates irrespective of where the sex act is being sold.
2. Prostitution is not simply an interaction between two people. It is a system or an institution that is based on making money. It is a system that recruits young girls and people with limited resources and often histories of sexual abuse. In the United States the average age of entry into the sex trade is 12-14. Can we really say prostitution is a victimless crime when the majority of those in it start as children, experienced childhood sexual abuse, suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder and experience physical harm at the hands of customers? If prostitution is such a victimless crime then why are women in the sex trade ten times more likely to be murdered?

There are two paths of activism that might emerge from the Spitzer case. The first is a push towards legalization, something that has not worked in other countries and has actually served to increase the number of women and children trafficked illegally into the sex trade. The second is moving towards the acknowledgement of how the sex trade harms those in it, those buying, and our society as a whole. By using this opportunity as a starting point to have these important conversations, we can transform a very unfortunate situation into an opportunity to work towards a culture that does not accept, and is free from, commercial sexual exploitation.

SAMPLE #2

Letter to Venue Regarding Its “Pimp and Ho” Halloween Party

Responding to Portrayal #14: Publicizes Events, Like “Pimp and Ho” Parties, that Glorify the Sex Trade

Dear Sir or Madam:

I was incredibly disappointed and offended to learn that Crobar Nightclub is hosting a “Pimp and Ho” Halloween party. “Pimp and Ho” parties are not only incredibly racist (since the majority of individuals who attend are white and dress up as African-American stereotypes of pimps and prostitutes), but these parties also celebrate a culture of violence against women.

“Pimp And Ho” parties are just an additional way that the harms of prostitution are normalized in mainstream culture. Celebrating men who abuse and rape vulnerable women is completely unacceptable.

Pimping is a form of slavery. Pimps use violence and intimidation to control women and girls and to coerce them into prostitution. The statistics are frightening. Eighty-six percent of pimps’ victims are physically abused, with 50 percent being assaulted frequently or daily. Eighty percent are sexually assaulted, 71percent are controlled by drugs, 69 percent are confined, 61 percent have weapons used against them and 34 percent have death threats to them or their families.

Pimps are perpetrators of unimaginable amounts of violence towards women in prostitution. And yet your club is continuing the glorification of this culture by hosting a party dedicated to batterers.

I hope, with this information, your club decides to change the theme of its Halloween party. By hosting this party, you are contributing to trivializing the harm experienced by 25,000 women each year in Chicago alone.

Sincerely,
Rachel Durchslag
Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation

SAMPLE #3

Letter to Editor Regarding *Super-Freakonomics* Review

Responding to Portrayal #8: Proposes that Pimps Provide a Valuable Service

Dear Editor:

I was deeply disappointed by the lack of analysis in your column “Superfreaky idea pits pimps vs. real estate agents” by Mark Brown. Brown’s column reviews the new sensationalist book by Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner where they, yet again, reduce complicated social issues into simplistic economic explanations. In the article, Brown highlights the finding in Sudhir Venkatesh’s analysis of street-level prostitution, cited in *Super-Freakonomics*, that pimp-controlled prostitutes suffer less violence from customers. However, this finding is in contradiction to other research, including Chicago-based studies by Jody Raphael of DePaul University, that have shown that pimp-controlled girls and women suffer the same amount or more violence than those without pimps

Women involved in the sex trade are exposed to physical, emotional and sexual violence on a daily basis. The majority suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, disassociation, and long-term physical harms. While reducing the exploitation of the sex trade to a purely economic argument and extolling the “value” of pimps, Levitt and Dubner ignore this devastating harm suffered by prostituted girls and women, much of it from pimps, their so-called “protectors.”

Even if these women do suffer less abuse at the hands of customers, which goes against the findings of all Chicago research studies where the researchers actually talked to the women and not the pimps, they still face great violence from the pimps themselves. This common consequence of having a pimp is not cited in Brown’s column, perhaps because it was ignored by Levitt and Dubner.

Although I cannot speak for the real estate market, I deem it safe to say that homeowners do not have to endure beatings and sexual abuse by their real estate agents to access their services.

Levitt and Dubner likely added this chapter to their book less to provide valid social arguments and more to stir up controversy. However, their analysis, along with the superficial comments of Bishop Magic Don Juan quoted in the column, makes light of a destructive industry that perpetuates the harm that is done when we normalize abuse against women and girls. If you wanted to really tap into “The Bishop’s” expertise, it would have been more appropriate to ask him about the violence and intimidation that pimps use to control and manipulate the women they prostitute.

Rather than taking “the *Freakonomics* guys to a Players Ball,” as suggested by Mark Brown, I suggest that Levitt and Dubner show respect to the women and girls being prostituted in Chicago by not reducing their life experiences into some silly economic equation in order to sell a book.

Christine Evans
Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation