

Connecting The Dots Of HUMAN TRAFFICKING

From Foster Care

with
Rhonda Sciortino & Sandie Morgan

**In This
Edition:**

The Difference Between Trafficking and Prostitution



*Rhonda Sciortino, author of *Succeed Because of What You've Been Through, Successful Survivors, and Kindness Quotient*, serves as a National spokesperson for Safe Families For Children, Royal Family Kids, and as national champion of the Love Is Action Community Initiative. Rhonda used the character traits and abilities developed throughout an abusive childhood to create successful businesses that protected and defended child welfare organizations. She is a passionate speaker, trainer, and advocate.*

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Dr. Sandie Morgan, Ph.D., is Director of Vanguard University's Global Center for Women and Justice, overseeing the Women's Studies Minor, as well as teaching Family Violence and Human Trafficking and producing the Ending Human Trafficking Podcast. Sandie's background as a Pediatric Nurse brought her into contact with her first victim of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children. She is committed to equipping our communities to be a safer place for vulnerable youth.

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This is the third in a series of articles that will attempt to answer some of the questions people commonly ask about child sex trafficking.

In this series, we have addressed why men buy sex with young people, why some young people go willingly with the traffickers and don't try to get away, and now we're going to dive into the current debate about trafficking and prostitution.

First, let's establish that there is no such thing as prostitution involving minors under the age of 18. Every transaction of money in exchange for sex with a minor is trafficking, and it is illegal. While we're on the subject, let's clarify that every sexual encounter between an adult and a minor, without exchange for money, is statutory rape, and is illegal.

Some people believe that prostitution is merely a business transaction between two consenting adults. They believe that it is "victimless" and should not be a crime. Proponents of legalizing prostitution argue that bringing it out of the shadows and into the light of day will result in safer work environments for the people who have chosen this line of work, who are often referred to as "sex workers."

Others, like Donna M. Hughes, PhD Professor and Editor-in-Chief of "Dignity: A Journal on Sexual Exploitation and Violence," are vehemently opposed to decriminalizing prostitution. Dr. Hughes has conducted investigative research into the people and organizations that are active proponents of decriminalizing prostitution. Dr. Hughes states that the rationale for full decriminalization fails to consider violence and coercion in the sex trade industry, misreads research, and does not include research from venues where full decriminalization of prostitution has occurred. The full article is here: <https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/dignity/vol3/iss1/1/>

Another strong opponent of legalized prostitution is Janice G. Raymond, a longtime feminist scholar-activist on violence against women and sexual exploitation. Ms. Raymond wrote the book, "Not a Choice, Not a Job: Exposing the Myths about Prostitution and the Global Sex Trade." She wrote, "Many well-intentioned people support decriminalization of prostitution because they think this means decriminalizing the women in prostitution. But decriminalization means making the criminals legal by transforming pimps into third party managers, brothel owners into sexual entrepreneurs, and sex buyers into cordial clients or customers." Read the entire article here <https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1157&context=dignity>



When I want to learn about something, I try to find someone who has experienced it. So I went in search of successful survivors of former trafficking and prostitution. I was surprised to learn that some people who identify themselves as rescued trafficking victims or former prostitutes are in support of legalization of prostitution. Not unlike the general population, other survivors are strongly opposed.

Cherie Jimenez, survivor of prostitution and longtime director of the EVA Center, an exit program for prostituted women and girls in Boston Massachusetts, said (in response to the arrest of Robert Kraft, billionaire owner of the New England Patriots football team): "I have met hundreds and hundreds of young women caught in systems of prostitution, fueled by demand of mostly white, very wealthy, men of privilege and entitlement like Robert Kraft. These organizations like ESPLERP [Erotic Service Provider Legal, Educational and Research Project] are using the age-old narrative that Kraft is the real victim here as a billionaire celebrity who has been wronged, and they end up protecting the powerful. They use the same old argument that it's all consensual with no regard to the actual realities of what it is to sell parts of your body and all the situational factors such as poverty, racism, gender violence and a growing economic disparity that has rendered so many vulnerable women into systems of prostitution."

Another successful survivor, Harmony (Dust) Grillo, is adamantly opposed to the legalization of prostitution. Among the reasons she sites are, "Some argue that prostitution is just a job and that it is the stigma and criminalization that make it harmful, not the "work" itself. Mortality rates alone dispel this myth. Research indicates that the death rate of prostituted women is 240 times higher than any other profession." She goes on to say, "Those working towards legalizing prostitution do not represent the 84% of women in prostitution who, as research shows, are under third-party control or pimped or trafficked."

Ms. Grillo provides well researched reasoning in her entire article here: <http://iamatreasure.com/should-prostitution-be-legal>

Prostitution is illegal in the US (with the exception of some areas of Nevada), so it makes sense to consider the position of law enforcement on this issue. Florida State Attorney, Dave Aronberg, in his public

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statement following the arrest of Robert Kraft, described the wider ramifications of the crime of prostitution: "This is not about lonely old men or victimless crime. This is about enabling a network of criminals to traffic women into our country for forced labor and sex."

It seems that most people conclude that the important distinction between trafficking and prostitution is whether or not the "service provider" is a willing participant. The challenge with that conclusion is that former foster kids and other victims of childhood abuse, especially sexual abuse, are often all-too-willing to go along with activities that are physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually damaging to them.

If you're reading this column in Foster Focus Magazine, chances are that you are connected to foster care in some way. If so, you know that people who were mistreated as children will often do all manner of self-debasing things in order to belong, go along, and get along. And when they do, they say they want to be there and do that. They won't save themselves because they

don't think they need saving. Many adult victims of abuse were trafficked and don't even recognize that fact. When their drug addict mother used them in a trade with her drug dealing "boyfriend," they didn't think of themselves as being trafficked.

Tragically, many adult victims of child sexual abuse truly believe that their worth and value is in their looks and in whatever pleasure they're able to provide to others. They typically believe that they couldn't (or wouldn't want to) earn money doing anything else. So, do these "sex workers" choose prostitution as their line of work? Or, have they adapted as a result of the events of a painful past and used their extraordinary resilience to attempt to thrive in their distorted reality?

If you have a question about the commercial sexual exploitation of children, human trafficking, prostitution, or any of the other related issues, we want to hear from you on our facebook page: facebook.com/CONNECTTHEDOTSBETWEENFOSTERCAREANDTRAFFICKING/



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