



Here is the reality: if a pimp is concerned with making money, then he must have a product or service to offer in exchange for that money. That product is a prostitute and the service they offer is sex, a commodity that unfortunately is in high demand.

A prostitute, someone that is often shunned by society, is defined as “a woman who engages in sexual intercourse for money; whore; harlot”. Please forgive the coarse language here, but the terms “whore” and “harlot” certainly do not exude the same ‘coolness’ that the term pimp does, and society should be challenging the polarization of these two terms. While a pimp should be called by their true profession—a trafficker, a prostitute should be identified by their true title—a sexually exploited person. These are persons (most commonly women, and often children), that are defrauded, coerced or forced into lifestyles of sexual servitude. In the United States, the average age of induction into commercial sex is 12–14 years old and they are very real victims, not “child prostitutes”. The level of trauma experienced by sexually exploited persons is inconceivable.

One may question how children so young are being tricked into a life of commercial sex; the answer lies in what our children are being taught. It is important to note that there is no one profile or specific demographic of who might be targeted and exploited - a straight A student living in a wealthy suburb is just as susceptible to being a target by a trafficker as a child living in the city who may not be a high academic performer.



The reality is that the topic of human trafficking is not often discussed around the dinner table, nor are “pimps” something most parents warn their teenagers about. Much like the topic of child sexual abuse, it is a taboo subject difficult to discuss and understand. Traffickers are not strangers hiding in the shadows; they are out in the open befriending our children and becoming a part of their lives. They slowly and methodically scout out potential victims and manipulate them by offering nice clothing, jewelry, money and the society’s ultimate dream of fortune and fame. Often, these predators are known to the parents, posing as boyfriends or family friends. Then, they trap our children in a cycle of victimization and abuse. They can operate in plain sight because society has permitted a new definition to creep into our vocabulary, a definition where a pimp is “a very cool person.”

I recall a case I worked on as a detective many years ago. I was called out to assist on what officers believed might have been a human trafficking case. Arriving at the police station close to midnight, I was worn out, but I thought how much more worn out this poor 17-year-old girl, Emily—who had been involved in commercial sex at a hotel—must be. The interview began more easily than most—Emily was fairly forthcoming compared to many other victims. As her story unfolded, I learned that she had been trafficked since she was 14 years old, having been recruited and groomed by her trafficker whom she met through a friend at school. He persuaded her with slick words and an attitude of ‘coolness’, one that Emily would later describe as very suave and pimp-like, the kind that society portrays as flashy, fun, and successful. She shared that her trafficker quickly turned into

a monster, manipulating her into having sex with strangers for money. Over the next three years, she was forced to have sex with hundreds of men.

Emily went from an A and B student to barely passing, drawing the attention of her parents and school administrators, whose reaction was to lecture her on the importance of having good grades and focusing on her schoolwork. This, not surprisingly, had no effect. She began to fall asleep in class and became disorderly and disruptive—a common behavioral trait of those who are exploited. School counselors got involved and “counseled” Emily on the importance of doing well in school and behaving appropriately.

Her behavior continued to decline and eventually the juvenile court system got involved, appointing Emily with a probation officer, anger management counselors, and a substance abuse counselor.

## Pimps and Prostitutes... Words Matter

Article By: Bill Woolf

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I sat there listening as she poured her heart out to me, I became more confused with each turn of her story. How was it possible that she was surrounded by all of these professionals, yet no one ever identified her as a victim of human trafficking? Eventually I had to ask.

### Where had the system failed?

The answer was one I didn't suspect. Emily looked me square in the eye and with a tone more serious and direct than a judge at sentencing said, "Because no one ever asked."

I can only imagine the look on my face at that moment, but one thing was certain—the silence was deafening. I just couldn't comprehend that not one single person ever asked this child what was causing her to fall apart.

Wise and able beyond her years, Emily decided to break the silence for me and explain what she meant. "Everyone was too busy pointing their finger at me, telling me what I was doing wrong—that I needed to get better grades, to correct my attitude, to get my life and priorities straight—but no one ever bothered to ask me what was going on in my life to cause all of this.

If someone had just asked what was happening, I would have told them, but I never felt like they wanted to hear what I had to say, so I remained silent." She felt dirty, like she had done something wrong, she was after all a "prostitute" and that is not a cool thing to be. There are moments in one's life that leave an indelible mark, a vivid image that often alters

the course of a life—this was one of them. The reality that "we" - the community, professionals, everyone surrounding Emily - had failed her because we allowed these societal norms, this misperception, to infect children. We had failed this young girl and sentenced her to untold exploitation and abuse

Human trafficking is a reality in the United States, and it has the potential to touch each and every home in this country. It is necessary for parents and caregivers, corporate America, governments, and faith communities to be aware of the predators that are coming for our children and the societal norms that allow these profane words to be an accepted and glorified part of our everyday life. Society needs to re-define the term "prostitute" and acknowledge those labeled as such are persons experiencing exploitation, persons preyed upon by not so "very cool" people.

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