

Introduction

Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking and the Innocent Girl–Predatory Man Narrative

Survival sex—trading sex for a warm meal or a place to stay. The term is disturbing enough. It’s even more disturbing when it involves 13-year-olds trading sex just to stay alive. And this is not happening in faraway places. It’s happening in cities and suburbs around America. Teens being kidnapped and forced into prostitution.

—CNN, “CNN Newsroom: Sex Trafficking in the U.S.” (2012)

Emily, a 15-year-old ninth-grader, ran away from home in early November, and her parents are sitting at their dining table, frightened and inconsolable. The parents, Maria and Benjamin, both school-bus drivers, have been searching for their daughter all along and pushing the police to investigate. They gingerly confess their fears that Emily, a Latina, is being controlled by a pimp.

—NICHOLAS KRISTOF, “When Emily Was Sold for Sex” (2014)

Emily’s story, as outlined above, is harrowing but by now familiar. In Atlanta, for example, advocates who worked to open a treatment facility for “victims of child prostitution” shared a similar story about Monica, who was 12 when she

was forced into prostitution when she ran away from her home. The streets seemed a better alternative than the abuse she was experiencing at home. However, she became trapped in a world of brutal child exploitation. From a bus stop, she was lured to a waiting car and then forced into the trunk of that car. She was driven around town from place to place. She was raped at gunpoint at each stop. This was part of her indoctrination

Excerpt • Temple University Press

into prostitution. She was eventually taken to a hotel where her clothes were taken from her. She was forced to stay naked in the room while the pimps sold the key to various men for \$5 each to have sex with her. She was beaten, slapped, starved, forced to take drugs, and traded for sex. She was subsequently sold to a succession of pimps and drug dealers. (Boxill and Richardson 2007, 138)

Monica's story, taken from court case files, is a version of the now common tale of domestic minor sex trafficking (DMST) in the United States. While the details may vary in the media, in policy debates, or in the awareness and fundraising pleas by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), the general outlines remain the same: a young (often white) girl leaves or is lured from home, and an older (often brown or black) man, or group of men, groom her into a life of sexual exploitation. Sometimes she escapes on her own; often she is rescued when she is arrested for prostitution. Sometimes she remains free, but in other cases she returns to her pimp/trafficker and a life on the streets. Regardless of the details, she is young, innocent, female, and abused by bad men and their demand for sex and profit.

This particular story of gender, money, and venality has become the generalized narrative defining DMST in large part because it has been repeated so frequently across public domains. Politicians continually emphasize the scale of the problem (“100,000 to 300,000 young people are trafficked in the United States each year”),¹ and the *youth and innocence* of the victims in policy debates. For example, in Rep. Bob Goodlatte's (R-VA) testimony during the Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act (JVTA) hearings, he stated that the bill would create “a comprehensive, victim-centered grant program to train law enforcement, *rescue exploited children*, prosecute traffickers, and restore

1. This claim is invoked repeatedly in public policy debates (see, e.g., the floor debates for the Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act and Trafficking Victims Protection Act, which we discuss further in Chapter 1), media campaigns (e.g., Thorn: Digital Defenders of Children, formerly the Demi and Ashton Foundation), and news stories (e.g., Brown 2011; M. Fang 2013). As we show in Chapter 1, there is no evidence to support these numbers, and the original research from which these numbers were garnered has been both misrepresented and widely criticized.



Figure I.1. Federal Bureau of Investigation Innocence Lost National Initiative poster. Available at https://www.fbi.gov/about-us/investigate/vc_majorthefts/cac/innocencelost, accessed March 18, 2016.



Figure I.2. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office on Trafficking in Persons Rescue and Restore Campaign poster. Available at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/rescue-campaign>, accessed December 1, 2015.

the lives of victims. The bill also [provides] that *child advocacy centers* can and should use their resources to help victims of trafficking and other types of *child exploitation*” (emphasis added). Government agencies also, consequently, promote this story through efforts such as the FBI’s “Innocence Lost” campaign, whose associated advertising materials (e.g., Figures I.1 and I.2) and reports use particular notions of race, class, and gender to generate sympathy for particularly “innocent” victims: most often white, middle-class, cis-gender girls vulnerable to a predatory man, who is usually portrayed as black or brown.

Excerpt • Temple University Press

And beyond government, the mainstream media promotes this narrative to the public through a barrage of popular films and television shows about young girls forced into the sex trades, such as the movies *Taken* (2008), *The Whistleblower* (2010), and *Trade of Innocents* (2012); the miniseries *Human Trafficking* (2005); and episodes of popular police procedurals, such as *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit* (“Merchandise,” October 6, 2010) and *CSI* (“The Lost Girls,” November 12, 2009). Journalists have also taken to reporting on and framing the issue in this way, to the extent that the “news media ha[s] narrowly defined sex trafficking as a particular type of problem”—namely, as one associated with crime, law, and human rights issues in which, often, exclusively girls and women are the victims (Johnston, Friedman, and Sobel 2015, 240).² As a result, as Alexandra Lutnick (2016) explains, mainstream media outlets reinforce an existing “hierarchy of victimization,” where powerless young girls forced into trading sex are true, ideal victims (see also Andrijasevic and Mai 2016), while those who make active or strategic choices are viewed not as innocent but as complicit in their own suffering and thus not victims deserving of pity (Lutnick 2016, 82).

Although this “innocent girl–predatory man” narrative is not new, its contemporary iteration has shaped popular understandings of young people in the commercialized sex trades and thus has sparked new policy responses. According to the U.S. Department of State, sex trafficking occurs when a person is coerced, forced, or deceived into prostitution, or maintained in prostitution through one of these means after initially consenting, and it may involve young people or adults. Section 103 (8A) of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) specifically defines any person younger than 18 who engages in a sex trade—consensually or not, involving any geographic movement or not—as a victim of DMST. As a result, the TVPA now reclassifies all young people in the sex trades: they are no longer juvenile delinquents (Melrose 2010) but victims vulnerable to (predatory, dangerous) men acting as pimps, traffickers, and solicitors (colloquially known as “johns”). This is a significant shift in understanding that we discuss at greater length in Chapter 1.

2. See, e.g., the CNN short documentary *Selling the Girl Next Door* (2011).

Excerpt • Temple University Press

The redefinition of young people who trade sex as victims of trafficking is not just an issue of semantics or public policy lacuna—it has become the cornerstone of the dominant narrative about the dynamics of, and people involved in, sex trafficking. One result is that, in media coverage and policy debates, the terms “trafficking” and “sex trafficking” are frequently used interchangeably, synechochically turning the whole (trafficking) into one of its parts (sex trafficking). This mirrors the slippages in the definitions set out in the TVPA in which the experience of all young people in the sex trades has been collapsed into “sex trafficking.” Consequently, public and political discussions of this topic often fail to distinguish among modes of entry into the sex trades and among the vastly different needs of the quintessential trafficking victim and the other young people who trade sex due to a range of structural vulnerabilities that they must navigate. Not surprisingly, as media coverage of “sex trafficking” has escalated, so has public concern with and debates about the issue. In response, governments and nonprofit and philanthropic organizations have devoted extensive resources to fighting sex trafficking, to the degree it conforms to the narrow category created through media and policy narratives.

This general, unitary narrative does capture part of the story of DMST. But we also see an echo chamber effect whereby a partial story now stands in for the much more complex and multivalent stories of young people in commercial sex markets. Because the innocent girl–predatory man narrative has clear victims, villains, and heroes and resonates with dominant views of gender (women and girls are vulnerable and need protection from bad men, and good men/the state are powerful sources of this protection), it effectively captures and addresses the anxieties of a global age. In the United States, these anxieties include a sense that the country’s own “innocence” is under attack from terrorism, concerns about a shifting global economy that has decimated working-class jobs and well-being, and challenges to the supremacy of the heteronormative nuclear family. That is, what is at stake in these debates is more than just the integrity of individual girls’ childhood or sexual protection; the innocence of girls is a metaphor for an imagined “simpler” (“better”) time in U.S. history.

In stating all of this, we do not deny that girls are trafficked into the sex trades or claim that the public and policy makers should not be con-

Excerpt • Temple University Press

cerned about this issue. Nor do we deny that there are real dangers and threats to young people who trade sex. Instead, we want to better understand and advocate for vulnerable youth of all genders. In our analysis, this means maintaining a commitment to ending exploitation and to understanding young people's engagement in the sex trades through a gender lens. While these commitments also inform status quo trafficking narratives and related policy and research, we apply them in a way that emphasizes structures over individuation, particularly regarding gender. If the motivating concerns about the trafficking of girls are rooted in anxieties about global economic and political shifts, then a structural analysis is required. We thus argue for using an intersectional gender analysis to "operationalize" an anti-exploitation framework to address the social *structures* that *facilitate* sexual exploitation and to meet more of the varied and immediate needs of young people.

To do this, we first interrogate the dominant narrative to see how it has grown and influenced policy; and second, in light of this, we consider how well it stands up against a growing body of well-designed, peer-reviewed research on the topic that has emerged since the TVPA's initial passage in 2000. Thus, the remainder of this book presents a comprehensive narrative analysis of the recent, rigorous, peer-reviewed studies on youth in the sex industry, which show that the simple, unitary innocent girl–predatory man narrative is divorced from the complex reality for most young people who are in the commercial sex trades. While a small subset of commercially sexually engaged youth have experiences that fit the dominant narrative, this story often substitutes for a much more complicated story of who is in the underage sex trades and how they got there. Therefore, if the goal of anti-trafficking research and public policy is to end the exploitation of young people, then we believe that it is important to consider not just the media-ready story, but also the stories of *a wide range* of the young people in the sex trades: what are their needs and vulnerabilities? What kinds of policy and community interventions could lessen the exploitation these young people face?

We argue that to be unequivocally anti-trafficking, we need to see and understand the broader picture of young people who trade sex. In this way, while we do critique partial research and flawed methods

Excerpt • Temple University Press

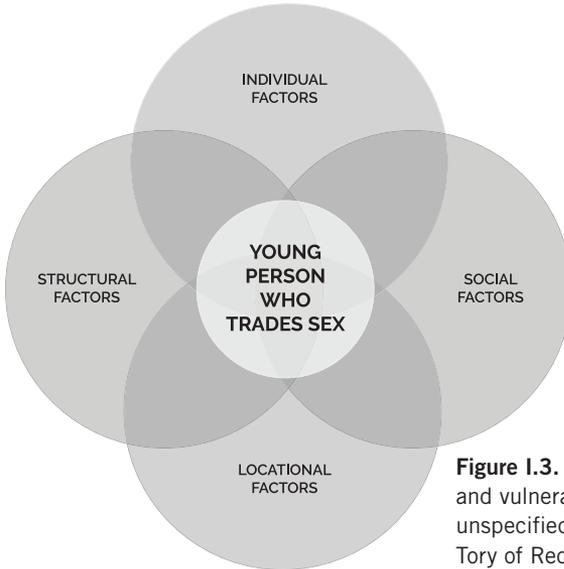


Figure I.3. Matrix of agency and vulnerability (factors unspecified). Created by Elspeth Tory of RedFish Graphics.

that have led to the dominant story—as we also critique “critical trafficking scholarship” that, to date, offers little in the way of substantive, service-oriented interventions for youth who need help now—our primary goal in this book is constructive rather than critical. From the studies we analyze, we build an intersectional model—a “matrix of agency and vulnerability”—to inform and improve research, policy, and community interventions (Figure I.3).

Our goal with this matrix is to *reorient* the analytical stance of researchers, policy makers, and the public. As Sara Ahmed (2006) has written in a rather different context, when we radically alter the perspective from which we view something, we can provoke a sense of disorientation that enables us to unsettle our assumptions. As we argue below, the major analytical shift in perspective we initiate through this matrix is to place young people—rather than discourses of sex and sexuality—at the center of the analysis. Our hope is that this matrix will offer a way to rethink current anti-trafficking interventions from a thoroughly anti-trafficking and anti-exploitation stance while privileging the needs of young people.

Why Write This Book Now?

Our interest in sex trafficking policy narratives was sparked by Majic's experience conducting fieldwork in January 2014 in Atlanta, Georgia, a city that many advocates and policy makers have characterized as a major hub for sex trafficking in the United States (Boxill and Richardson 2007; Craig 2015). In response to these concerns, policy makers at the state and local level there, as in many other jurisdictions across the nation, created and implemented a range of laws, policies, and programs to rescue and protect young people from predatory facilitators/traffickers and clients. Among the most notable of these was the "Dear John" campaign, an Emmy Award-winning public awareness effort that was led by the Atlanta Mayor's Office and ran from 2006 to 2008. Directed at men who may purchase sex, the campaign aimed to inform them of how their actions were illegal and harmful to girls (Majic 2017).

In the course of her research about on the campaign's development and impact, Majic interviewed various advocates and government officials who were involved with the Dear John campaign specifically and issues of sex trafficking more broadly. It became increasingly apparent to her that Dear John and other anti-trafficking policy initiatives in the city and state largely reflected the narrative that focused on rescuing young girls and punishing men. For example, one day, during an interview with a service provider-advocate who had long been involved in anti-prostitution work in the city, Majic noted the gendered nature of Atlanta's efforts to fight young people's engagement in the sex trades and asked whether, in light of the growing body of research showing that boys were also engaged in the sex trades, the city's efforts were adequate. The respondent acknowledged this fact about boys, stating that she had only recently begun to see them in court and that there were not adequate services for them. However, she went on to add, her organization needed to direct its limited resources to where "people are the most damaged"—these people are girls. And, she said, to her knowledge, boys who trade sex are more likely to "self-exploit." Recounting this interaction is not meant to dismiss this interviewee's efforts on behalf of young people who trade sex; instead, it highlights the disconnect that often exists

Excerpt • Temple University Press

between the dominant, gendered narrative and the more complex empirical findings about young people who trade sex that is increasingly documented through research.

Indeed, despite the increasing resources devoted to anti-trafficking efforts and the good intentions of media and NGO activists, a growing chorus of questions and data challenges the simple, gendered narrative behind these efforts. Even with the prevalence of horror stories in the mainstream media and the repetition of the claim of 100,000–300,000 young people being trafficked each year in the United States (Kessler 2015a), there are no reliable estimates of the total numbers of girls (or boys or transgender youth) who trade sex, consensually or otherwise. Currently, *prostitution* arrests provide one of the few semi-reliable estimates of the number of youth engaged in the sex industry, and government crime report data indicate that 8,177 young people were arrested for prostitution-related charges nationwide from 2003 to 2012 (Lutnick 2016, 78). This number is far lower than 100,000–300,000 youth per year, but these high reported numbers persist despite having been repeatedly debunked (Cizmar, Conklin, and Hinman 2011; Lutnick 2016; Stransky and Finkelhor 2008). Moreover, arrests of young people have actually *increased* since the passage of the TVPA in 2000, even as these individuals are, by law, DMST victims (Lutnick 2016).

This gap between (federal) victim status and (local) police practices of continued criminalization led abolitionist groups such as the Polaris Project and Shared Hope International to push for “safe harbor laws” that reiterate service provision rather than arrest as the most appropriate intervention for young people who trade sex. Unfortunately, as Kimberly Mehlman-Orozco (2015) documents, these efforts have failed to make a dent in arrest rates. And once young people come into contact with the criminal justice system, the innocent girl–predatory man narrative continues to shape how their experiences are interpreted and whether government agents and social service providers will hear their stories.

In the United States, police are inconsistent in their treatment of youth who trade sex, with studies of law enforcement case files indicating that between 31 percent and 40 percent of juveniles involved in sex trades (or alleged to be involved in sex trades) are viewed as delin-

Excerpt • Temple University Press

quents (Halter 2010; Mitchell, Finklehor, and Wolak 2010). Further, data from the FBI indicate not only that prostitution-related arrests have increased since the implementation of the law but also that the arrest of girls specifically has driven this increase, suggesting a “sexual double standard that penalizes girls” (Lutnick 2011, 22–23). This is not particularly new. As feminist criminologists have noted, “In the United States, girls have historically been jailed for being ‘sexually immoral,’ running away, and being in need of supervision” (Chesney-Lind and Merlo 2015, 80). Compared with girls, boys who trade sex are more likely to be charged for nonsexual “quality of life” crimes, especially “disorderly conduct, drug possession, jumping the turnstile in the subway, or trespassing” (Curtis et al. 2008, 89).

Given the disconnect between the narrative and the experiences of youth who trade sex in the United States, we build on the work of many “critical trafficking scholars” who demonstrate that the dominant narrative seems to operate largely as a gendered moral panic about *sex*, disguising “varied ideological projects, such as the socio-emotional politics of contemporary capitalism, prostitution abolitionism, the politics of migration, contemporary understandings of childhood, and other socio-legal concerns” (Marcus and Curtis 2016, 482, internal citations omitted). While “moral panic” is a term often too easily lobbed at any argument with which one disagrees, as we show in Chapters 1 and 2, the emergence of the innocent girl–predatory man narrative ticks all the definitional boxes: facts are distorted and exaggerated, and although incidents do not often happen in the way the dominant narrative suggests, the framing and dominant understanding of a phenomenon changes (Cohen 2009, 119) so that a mass movement “emerges in response to a false, exaggerated, or ill-defined moral threat to society and proposes to address this threat through punitive measures: tougher enforcement, ‘zero tolerance,’ new laws, communal vigilance, [and] violent purges” aimed at a clear “scapegoat” (Lancaster 2011, 23).

To shift the discussion out of a moral panic framework, we tackle four central questions: (1) Who are the youth who fit the government’s definition of DMST (younger than 18 and trading sex)? (2) What leads them into the sex trades? (3) What are the salient features

Excerpt • Temple University Press

of their experiences once they are trading sex? (4) What changes to research and policy could better address the exploitation and vulnerabilities they face? There is a wealth of rigorous, peer-reviewed research on these questions scattered across academic journals and some books; individually, these works look at bits and pieces of the story about why and how young people end up on the street, in the sex trades, or both. Together, this body of work disavows the unitary, individualizing account that dominates public policy debates and media coverage of young people who trade sex, but the narrative it offers is not simple or simplistic. Instead, it is complex and harder to hear than the dominant, reductive narrative. Yet it is no less important.³ In this sense, our book—like Lutnick’s *Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking* (2016)—serves as a synthesizing analysis of more methodologically robust research to tell the more nuanced story about youth in the sex trades. Our work in this book complements her efforts and adds a theoretical intervention into both research and policy.

This theoretical intervention constitutes our second purpose in writing this book. From offering a more accurate view of the young people in the sex trades and how they got there we build an alternate model for future research and policy development (see Figure I.3), which we label a matrix of agency and vulnerability. This matrix applies an intersectional lens to the complex factors of structurally produced domination that lead some youth into the sex trades and then shape their experiences once they are engaged in commercial sex markets. We use this matrix to demonstrate the varied needs of youth who trade sex and to give credence to how young people navigate their personal, social, and political terrains.

Plan of the Book

If public policy is both to combat effectively the victimization of young people and to facilitate young people’s agency inside and outside the sex trades, we need to account for and counter the moral

3. We develop the ideas of simple and complex policy narratives in Chapter 1.

Excerpt • Temple University Press

panic narrative.⁴ Hence, in Chapter 1 we examine the dominant policy narrative's history and the political circumstances generating its current form, summarizing the more familiar critiques of the policy narrative while drawing out its intersectional race, class, and gender dynamics and the very particular erasures it facilitates. The chapter serves as an epistemological history of “innocence” in prostitution and trafficking policy, and we conclude it by outlining relevant contemporary consequences of this history for young people today who trade sex in the United States. These consequences set the stage for our analysis of empirical studies of youth who trade sex.

We undertake a comprehensive narrative analysis (CNA) of the more methodologically robust empirical research that has been conducted about and with young people in the sex trades in the United States in Chapter 2. After initially doing a broad search for all studies of young people who trade sex in North America conducted since 2000—that is, since the passage of the original TVPA—we homed in on peer-reviewed, well-designed empirical research to try to capture rigorous studies that span ideological perspectives. Our goal in deriving an understanding of young people who trade sex, which gave rise to our intersectional model for future research and policy, was to sample widely in an effort to guard against our own ideological biases in terms of how young people and “sex work” can and should be understood.⁵

With this background, in Chapter 3 we develop an intersectional framework (the matrix of agency and vulnerability) to analyze the dominant narrative, the research generating it, and the policies that have been passed in this area. This matrix also points to a way forward, suggesting an approach to research that allows for a more complex standpoint *while still being* explicitly and unequivocally anti-trafficking. As such, the matrix offers a positive theoretical and practical contribution to the anti-trafficking literature, and it builds on Patricia

4. We understand that public policy does not follow easily or linearly from theory, but we also argue that the theoretical and narrative framing of policy problems does affect how policies develop. Better trafficking policy is not guaranteed to result from better theory and problem definition, but it is an important step in the process of policy reform, especially if it can positively affect the research on which policy makers rely.

5. For more on reflexivity in research and the “lessons we learned” in researching and writing this book, see Majic and Showden (forthcoming).

Excerpt • Temple University Press

Hill Collins's (1990) "matrix of domination" that was central to early intersectional theorizing. By building on the work of Collins—as well as that of bell hooks, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and other early and more recent intersectionality theorists—we can capture the complex dynamics that lead young people into commercial sex and shape their experiences once there, and we then make feminist demands of state and community actors in response.

These demands shape Chapter 4, where we suggest how our matrix could be applied in both research and policy-making domains. We emphasize the need for, and model ways to engage, reflexivity in anti-trafficking research, and we outline some community interventions that could work with the research and policy proposals that follow from our matrix. We also note here that there are efforts by some nonabolitionist sex worker activists currently in place, and we think about how to build on them to make them more intersectional and less ideological. Part of this intersectional approach to research and policy must include efforts to better disseminate academic research results to those most directly affected by anti-trafficking policies.

A Note on Terminology

In sex work and trafficking research, as in any other area of inquiry and activism, language is loaded and coded: vocabulary choices convey ideological biases, privileges, and gender and class assumptions. But in addition to highlighting the ideological nature of language, part of our argument is that the conceptual confusion in trafficking studies, and the expansion of the term "trafficking" to cover all commercial sexual activity by minors and most activity by adults, is fundamental to the policy and research problems we outline and try to address. That is, this conceptual sleight of hand is deliberate in crafting a particular narrative and essential in generating support for the well-intentioned policies that are meant to address (sex) trafficking but often make the choices and circumstances for youth on the streets even more difficult. Thus, we need to clarify here the terms we use and why we use them.

First, we follow the social welfare and social policy researcher Alexandra Lutnick (2016, 2) and use the term "sex trades"—instead of "sex work," "prostitution," "commercial sexual exploitation," and "traf-

Excerpt • Temple University Press

ficking”—to “refer to the act of trading sex for some type of payment.” We do this “because [sex trades] brings with it minimal assumptions” about those in this population and their experiences, and it can include or denote exploitation from structures and individuals, negotiation, desperation, and employment (Lutnick 2016, 2). While we are sympathetic to Margaret Melrose’s argument for using the label “prostitution,” as it directs focus back onto the *institution* of prostitution rather than on individual actors, we prefer “sex trades” and its equivalents (“commercial sex,” “trading sex,” and “selling sex”) to capture the fact that money is not the only good sought in commercial sexual exchanges and to avoid moralizing about the youth engaged in these exchanges. However, we use terms such as “prostitution” and “sex-trafficked youth” when quoting sources that use them, and we use the term “survival sex” when it is used in the research we cite to reflect commercial sex acts engaged in by the most marginalized and oppressed young people.

Further to this point, we also use the term “sex trades” rather than “sex work” in this book because we are talking about youth rather than adults, and the dynamics of the youth market are rather different from those of the adult market. “Sex work” is a term that arose from sex worker rights activism in the 1970s and 1980s (Leigh 1997) and—in our view—makes sense for describing the majority of the adult prostitution market, where sex work is a job and the conditions of labor are the most significant feature of the market. These laboring conditions (rather than ideologies of sex) shape “the meaning of the purchase,” to borrow a phrase from Elizabeth Bernstein (2001; see also Schotten 2005). But youth are often *trading* sex for shelter or food; they are not necessarily engaged in the sex trades regularly (as work) but instead are often doing so on an as-needed basis. For youth, the push and pull factors are often different from those for adults, and the sex trades are more often a means of getting by, as opposed to a job in a brothel or a career working as an escort. We extensively detail these push and pull factors in Chapter 2.

Second, when referring to the young people (those younger than 18) who are the focus of our book, we use people-first language. Thus, we use terms such as “young people who trade sex,” for example, which puts the person before the activity and allows us to account for a variety

Excerpt • Temple University Press

of situations.⁶ We also use this language because it is unnecessary—and we believe unwise—to impose our own views on young people through our choice of descriptors and before the evidence about their activities is even assessed. At the same time, people-first language reminds us that the assessments and perspectives of the youth on the street are critical for generating good knowledge and useful policy in this area.

Third, we talk about youth “on the street” because that is where most young people engaged in the sex trades are located (whether through economic coercion, coercion by another person, or some degree of “choice”) and studied. This is not to deny that some young people who are trafficked, sexually exploited, or involved in the sex trades are, in fact, *not* “out there” on the street but are instead “inside,” most often in their own homes. But we cannot say much about the trafficked youth who are being abused at home because there are very few studies of them; thus, estimating how many “trafficked” youth fit this profile is exceedingly difficult. We do discuss youth who are sexually abused by family members “inside” rather than on the streets where we have empirical studies to support claims about their experiences. And part of what we critique is the way the dominant narrative too often treats sexual abuse by family members as less significant (even though it is far more pervasive) than sexual abuse by strangers.⁷

Fourth, we avoid the term “trafficking” whenever possible, even as (and, indeed, because) we are “troubling” its use in this book. As Ronald Weitzer (2015, 225), among many others, has argued, trying to define the terms of debate in the area of sex trafficking and human trafficking is “something of a quagmire” because, in short, there is no clear definition of or agreement about what (sex or labor or human) trafficking involves and how distinct or synonymous these terms ought to be. In public policy in the United States and internationally, deception and coercion are keys to the TVPA’s definition of human trafficking. The principal international trafficking convention, the

6. As Lutnick (2016, 2) writes, “Most young people never use the term *trafficking*. . . . [T]he same is true for the term *victim*.”

7. See Chapter 1. In the focus on young people endangered by strangers (“bad men out there”), trafficking policy and advocacy obscures the dangers of what radical feminists in the 1970s and 1980s made clear is the more common site of sexual exploitation of young people: the family home.

Excerpt • Temple University Press

United Nations Trafficking Protocol of 2000 (frequently referred to as the Palermo Protocol), also includes “the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability, or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation” (UNODC 2004, 42, cited in Weitzer 2015, 225). However, these policies do not define their terms (except for “exploitation” in the Palermo Protocol, where it is tautologically and unhelpfully defined as “exploitation”).⁸

In addition, the term “trafficking” suggests movement, but movement is not a necessary element of the crime of human trafficking for either the United States or the United Nations. In addition to “exploitation,” a central requirement for “human trafficking” is “deception” rather than “movement.” For young people who trade sex, deception is presumably a function of their age, which precludes their ability to knowingly engage in such activity. As a result, as we noted above, U.S. policy is redefining all commercial sexual activity by minors as DMST, even when no third party is involved. When third parties are involved, we use the language of “facilitators” in lieu of “pimps” or “traffickers” because the range of third parties covers far more than those ideologically loaded terms indicate, with families and friends being the most frequent “facilitators” (a point we develop and support in Chapter 2).⁹ And while the terms “DMST” and “commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC)” are often used interchangeably, DMST is more precisely a subcategory of CSEC and as such is focused specifically on prostitution and survival sex. The larger category of CSEC includes (among other forms of abuse) selling child brides and child pornography (see Clayton, Krugman, and Simon 2013). These terms evolved out of advocacy group work and have been adopted by the U.S. government, but we aim to avoid the language of CSEC here.¹⁰

8. The full title of the United Nations Trafficking Protocol is the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children.

9. The exception here is when we are quoting or discussing specific material that itself uses the “pimp” or “trafficker” label—e.g., when explaining the TVPA’s trafficking narrative above.

10. See, e.g., the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention’s 2014 white paper “Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children/Sex Trafficking.”

Excerpt • Temple University Press

Finally, to add to the confusion, in media and policy discussions, human trafficking is also often conflated with or described as “modern-day slavery” and, in more gendered and sexualized incidences, “female sexual slavery.” As Kamala Kempadoo (2015) documents, this conflation emerged in the late 1990s from the work of Kevin Bales, who published the book *Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy* (1999, 2004) and founded the U.S. organization Free the Slaves, an offspring of the group British Anti-Slavery International, which was established in 1839 to end the enslavement of Africans. Since then, Bales has also created the Walk Free Foundation, which developed the “Global Slavery Index,” an internationally recognized system that ranks nations according to their estimated prevalence of slavery. Included among those who view human trafficking as slavery are the Global Freedom Network (an offshoot of Walk Free) and its religious group signatories, as well as a number of academics, businesspeople, and journalists (such as Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn).

Indeed, “modern-day slavery” is also now the U.S. government’s preferred term for “sex trafficking.” As Janie Chuang (2014, 623) writes, “In the fall of 2012, President Barack Obama and former secretary of state Hillary Clinton explicitly advocated replacing the term *trafficking* with *slavery* because they considered the latter to be more accurate.” As a result of these efforts, the Office on Trafficking in Persons explicitly set out to help “foster a modern-day-slavery abolitionist movement” through the “development of the website slaveryfootprint.org. . . . The [U.S. Agency for International Development] joined in the anti-slavery efforts, partnering with MTV Exit, Free the Slaves . . . , and slaveryfootprint.org to engage students world-wide” to get more actively and creatively involved in preventing trafficking and rescuing victims (Chuang 2014, 626). For these advocates, modern-day slavery “is not the same as chattel slavery as it is not premised on the ownership for life of one person by another, as was the case in the enslavement of Africans and ‘classical’ slavery. Rather, it is located in the notion of force or violence by an individual or company towards another, through which the victim loses control over her or his life and comes to exist in a state of total unfreedom” (Kempadoo 2015, 10).

Excerpt • Temple University Press

But conflating trafficking with slavery, so defined, further muddles discussions of human trafficking. As Kempadoo (2015) and others (see, e.g., Chuang 2010; O’Connell Davidson 2006) write, many incidents of “slavery” look more like debt bondage and do not necessarily involve the physical restraints (e.g., chains) or violence that held African slaves in bondage. Adding to this confusion is the fact that many individuals experience force, exploitation, and coercion in *legal* work situations, where the distinction between forced labor and poor working conditions is unclear. And in the case of sex trafficking, the term “slavery” is complicated further because those who conflate these activities “do not draw on the earlier black slavery abolitionism as the modern day anti-slavery campaigners do. Instead the analysis and moral outrage builds from a history of campaigns against ‘white slavery’ and focuses on the workings of patriarchy, with an almost exclusive focus on sexual violence against women” (Kempadoo 2015, 11).

Of course, no terms are perfect, and as we have mentioned, all language choices are ideological. But we hope that, in choosing and explaining why we have opted for these descriptors, we have made clear our concern for the needs of a broad range of youth and have indicated our focus on understanding how intersecting social, political, and personal structures in which they are enmeshed may enhance their vulnerabilities to and in trading sex. The sex trades involve girls, boys, and trans and genderqueer youth of all races, all of whom could benefit from researchers’ and policy makers’ adopting a more intersectional approach to understanding and combating DMST.