

12-2019

## Sex At Any Cost: How Gender Inequality, Capitalism, And Pornography Are Driving A \$99 Billion Industry

Gina Vucci  
*Dominican University of California*

<https://doi.org/10.33015/dominican.edu/2019.HCS.ST.04>

**Survey: Let us know how this paper benefits you.**

---

### **Recommended Citation**

Vucci, Gina, "Sex At Any Cost: How Gender Inequality, Capitalism, And Pornography Are Driving A \$99 Billion Industry" (2019). *Senior Theses*. 124.  
<https://doi.org/10.33015/dominican.edu/2019.HCS.ST.04>

This Senior Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Scholarship at Dominican Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Senior Theses by an authorized administrator of Dominican Scholar. For more information, please contact [michael.pujals@dominican.edu](mailto:michael.pujals@dominican.edu).

Gina Vucci  
Sex At Any Cost  
Senior Project  
May 15, 2019

## **Sex At Any Cost:**

### **How Gender Inequality, Capitalism & Pornography are Driving A \$99 Billion Industry**

There are more slaves today than at any other time in human history. In its 2017 report, “Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage,” the International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that there are more than 40 million slaves worldwide. This paper accompanies a 6-part webinar series that explores how gender inequality, capitalism, and pornography are driving a \$99 billion illegal industry.

### **What is human trafficking?**

According to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), human trafficking is defined as: “The acquisition of people by improper means such as force, fraud, or deception, with the aim of exploiting them.” While the terms “human trafficking,” “forced labor,” and “modern-day slavery” are slightly different in meaning, they’re often used interchangeably. I will be using them throughout this series, as well as the terms “sex trafficking” and “forced prostitution,” which are forms of human trafficking.

Human trafficking and human smuggling are often confused. The two crimes are very different and it is critical to understand the difference between the two. Human trafficking involves exploiting men, women, or children for the purposes of forced labor or commercial sexual exploitation (a crime against an individual). Human smuggling involves transporting an individual who voluntarily seeks to gain illegal entry into a foreign country (crime against a state

or government). It is possible the crime may start out as human smuggling, but quickly turn into human trafficking. A key distinction between smuggling and human trafficking is freedom of choice (Stop The Traffik).

Many people think of slavery as having been abolished in the 19th century; in truth, it was only made illegal and pushed underground. Today slavery is less about people literally owning other people (although this still exists), and more about a victim being exploited for another person's gain, and held against their will through force, fraud, or coercion. Similar to slavery in pre-abolition times, victims of modern-day slavery are controlled by their exploiters, and do not have the freedom to choose what work they do, when they do it, or receive or keep any earnings (Anti-Slavery International).

Of the 40 million people enslaved around the world today, ILO estimates that 25 million of them are in forced labor, and 15 million are in forced marriages — that's approximately 5.4 victims for every 1,000 people in the world. One in four victims of modern slavery are children (Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage). After drug dealing, trafficking of humans is tied with arms dealing as the second largest criminal industry in the world, and is the fastest growing (UNODC).

Women and girls are disproportionately affected by modern slavery, accounting for 29 million of the 40 million victims worldwide. Women and girls make up 99% of the victims of forced labor in the commercial sex industry, and 84% of victims in forced marriages (Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage). It is important to note that women are not victims because they are inherently vulnerable, but because of systemic discrimination and gender inequality.

There are two main categories of slavery: labor trafficking and sex trafficking. Labor trafficking is the criminal act of recruiting, harboring, transporting, or obtaining a person for labor or services through force, fraud, or coercion (UNODC). In the U.S., labor trafficking is commonly found in domestic work environments (maids and nannies), restaurants and food service, health and beauty (nail salons and spas), construction, and traveling sales crews. Industries that rely on slave labor include agriculture, coffee plantations, cacao farms (chocolate), cobalt mines (for electronics and cell phone batteries), clothing factories, and other types of factories.

The term “domestic servitude” refers to people working in private homes who are forced or coerced into serving, or lied to and told they can’t leave. Nannies and domestic servants make up a large number of such victims in the U.S. These domestic workers perform work within their employers’ households, and provide services such as cooking, cleaning, childcare, eldercare, gardening, and other household work. Because it is happening in homes, it is very difficult to expose. Victims of domestic servitude commonly work 10 to 16 hours a day for little to no pay. (Human Trafficking Hotline). According to ILO, domestic work is poorly regulated and undervalued. In many countries, domestic workers are not considered “workers” but rather as informal “help,” and are excluded from national labor regulations.

The term “forced labor” refers to people forced to work under the threat of violence and for no pay, who receive only food, water, and minimal shelter. These slaves are treated as property. In contrast, people in “bonded labor” are compelled to work in order to repay a debt,

and are unable to leave until their debt is repaid. This is one of the most common forms of slavery worldwide today.

Many forms of trafficking involve children. Child slavery is often confused with child labor. Many children in poverty are forced to work for their families, which is considered child labor. Child labor is harmful for children and hinders their education and development. Child slavery or trafficking (including sold by their families to traffickers) is the enforced exploitation of a child for their labor for someone else's gain using force, fraud, or coercion (Anti-Slavery International).

Forced marriage is a form of modern slavery as well. Forced marriage can be coupled with other forms of slavery; for example, children who are trafficked for sex may also be sold into forced marriages, and adults who are forcibly married may also be trafficked for labor or sex. The majority of victims of forced marriage are women and girls.

Sex trafficking, another form of forced labor that's commonplace in the commercial sex industry, is also known as forced prostitution or referred to as sexual exploitation. Sex trafficking is defined by the UNODC as "the criminal act of recruiting, harboring, transporting, or obtaining a person for paid commercial sex through force, fraud, or coercion." Forced prostitution is immensely profitable (and relatively low risk), generating an estimated \$99 billion in illegal profits (ILO). Victims are sold over the internet, in illegal brothels or illicit massage businesses, and strip clubs, as well as on the street or in hotels and motels. Because 99% of victims are women and girls, advocates consider sex trafficking as the most extreme form of gender-based violence. Again, women are not inherently vulnerable; they are made vulnerable by economic, education, and environmental injustice through systemic discrimination and gender inequality.

It's important to note that there are women who choose sex work. However, our goal as anti-trafficking advocates is to focus on those who are forced, not those who choose sex work as their profession.

Trafficking is found all over the world, including the United States. According to the Polaris Project, human trafficking takes place 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, in every zip code of every state of the U.S. In fact, according to a study by the Urban Institute, and also found in the Polaris Project report, "Typology of Modern Slavery," the majority of trafficking victims in the U.S. are U.S. citizens or here on legal visas. Percentages vary across industries; however, the majority of victims trafficked are from within the U.S..

### **Who Are The Victims Of Human Trafficking?**

The majority of human trafficking victims worldwide are women and girls. While human trafficking spans all demographics, there are some circumstances or vulnerabilities that lead to a higher susceptibility to victimization and human trafficking (Polaris Project). Runaways and homeless youth are at the greatest risk. A recent study from the National Center for Missing and Exploited children found that within 24 hours of being homeless, many runaways are approached by a trafficker. In 2017, an estimated one out of seven endangered runaways who were reported to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children were likely child sex trafficking victims. Other populations at high risk for trafficking include children in foster care, high school and college students, victims of war or conflict, migrants, foreign nationals, and targets of social discrimination based on gender, race, class, education, documentation, and sexual orientation (Polaris Project). Victims of physical violence, sexual assault, childhood abuse and neglect,

poverty, homelessness, drug addiction, alcoholism, and regular exposure to pornography are particularly vulnerable.

Traffickers routinely target college and university students for recruitment.. These students are away from home and support, and have greater access to drugs and alcohol, which can make them easy prey for traffickers. Due to increased tuition and cost-of-living expenses, more and more college students are turning to “escort” and “modeling” jobs to pay their bills. Whether they are deceived or enter into such arrangements willingly, they often end up trapped (Department of Education, “Trafficking in America’s Schools”). Another high-risk factor for college students is the high incidence of dating violence: women aged 16-24 experience the highest per capita rate of dating violence. This makes them vulnerable due to the strong correlation between sexual exploitation and dating violence, with 33%-90% of victims of sexual exploitation reporting previous abuse (Break The Cycle, National Coalition Against Domestic Violence).

### **Who Are The Traffickers?**

Traffickers blend into society and are skilled at employing force or fraud. Traffickers can be men, women, and teens of every race and socioeconomic level, as well as college students, family members, friends, boyfriends, strangers, and acquaintances, in addition to more overtly criminal-appearing gang members or drug traffickers. All use some form of coercion, supplemented by other means to gain and maintain control of their victims. They recruit through the internet, various types of force, kidnapping, manipulation, false promises of high-paying work, and religious coercion (Polaris Project). Traffickers also use their victims, referred to as “bottom girls,” to gain the trust of other women and girls. They also commonly pose as

boyfriends and romantic partners who are often referred to as “Romeo pimps.” Again, sex trafficking is a high-profit, low-risk enterprise garnering \$99 billion annually. Sex traffickers can earn \$150-200K per victim, per year, and often control four to six victims at a time. Traffickers are not average people; they are smart, calculating criminals who approach trafficking as a sophisticated and coordinated business. There can be several traffickers involved in recruiting just one victim — from targeting to grooming to recruiting to maintaining control.

Human trafficking is thriving due to demand. Similar to legal businesses, it’s built on the foundation of supply and demand. Traffickers exploit victims to fill the demand for cheap labor and have a mass number of vulnerable populations to exploit (Institute for Faith Works and Economics). The stages of grooming include targeting a victim, gaining trust and information to exploit, filling a need to build a dependence, isolating the victim from family and friends, beginning abuse, and then maintaining coercive control. Some of the tactics traffickers use to maintain control include manipulation through “love,” gifts, and adoration; controlling a victim’s money, ID, and documentation; threats of violence toward the victims and/or their family; threats to expose humiliating pictures publicly or to their families; and threats of prison and deportation.

### **Purchasers, Pornography & Forced Prostitution**

The profile of an online sex buyer is a caucasian male, average age of 49 (with an average age range from 18-79), college educated, married, and with a median annual income of \$141,500 (Demand Abolition). Men who buy sex, according to Partners Against Child Trafficking (PACT), believe pornography and rape myths (that it is not harmful, that women are benefiting, that women deserve it); believe payment entitles them to harm to a woman (violence

in addition to sex acts); purchased sex for the first time before the age of 25 years old on average; and use pornography on a regular basis.

Technology has made pornography more affordable, accessible, and anonymous than ever before, and is fueling staggering rates of consumption. In 2016, *Pornhub*, the most popular and prolific site for viewing pornography, reported that 91,980,225,000 videos were watched on their site (that's 12.5 videos for every person on the planet). For 2018, *Pornhub* reported 33 billion visits to their site — that's 82 million per day and nearly 1,000 visits per second (*Pornhub*, “Year In Review”). One of the most popular types of pornography on their site is categorized as “amateur” — a dangerous description because many of the “amateurs” are victims of trafficking who are not only being exploited for commercial sex, they are also being violated online. They are often abused, assaulted, or raped, with these scenes being recorded, uploaded, and sold online.

*Pornhub*'s “Year In Review” figures show how normalized porn viewing has become, and the amateur videos' popularity (along with “teen” porn) point to the escalation that occurs with continuous porn consumption. Valerie Voon, in her Cambridge University study of the brain, found changes in brain activity when subjects were viewing porn; over time, the physical structures of the brain can even be restructured. Porn stimulates the brain's pleasure center, the same part of the brain stimulated by heroin. The more this section of the brain is stimulated, the more dopamine is released; the body begins to crave more activity to stimulate the release again and again. To meet this need, the craving grows not only for more porn, but often for “hard-core” or increasingly “edgy” porn. This type of porn includes aggression, violence, and rape. As these cravings increase, so is the demand for prostitution.

Pornography is harmful in several ways. For the individual, porn is addictive; and heavy porn use can cause depression, anxiety, and mental and emotional distress. In relationships, porn can be destructive, influencing expectations regarding sex, intimacy, and violence, and changing attitudes toward women and girls. Evidence also shows links between pornography and global issues such as sexual violence, human sex trafficking, and prostitution. In these ways, pornography is a significant threat to public health (Truth About Porn).

Pornography can also be harmful to both the viewer and the victim in other ways. Because pornography portrays women and girls as commodities, easily bought and sold online, porn dehumanizes women and girls and makes them targets for abuse. Porn reinforces gender inequality and normalizes violence against women. These complex social issues must be addressed from multiple perspectives.

The link between pornography and prostitution is undeniable. In retail, there's a saying that "browsers become buyers," and this applies to browsing pornography and purchasing sex as well. Research from the National Criminal Justice Resource Center (NCJRC) of the Department of Justice (DOJ) shows that men who go to prostitutes are twice as likely to use pornography compared to the general population. Another advocacy and research group, Human Trafficking Search, links pornography and prostitution through their findings that more than 80% of survivors report buyers show them porn before abusing them, and many show up wanting to "perform" the acts they've been watching online.

Sex trafficking and exploitation is predominantly carried out through forced prostitution. According to reports compiled by a National Task Force Group on Sex Trafficking, Pornography, and the Commercial Sex Industry, a division of the National Organization for Men

Against Sexism (NOMAS), 86% of prostituted women are controlled by pimps (a.k.a. traffickers). However, it is important to distinguish between sex work and forced prostitution. There are men and women who choose sex work and have control over their bodies, time, and money. The focus of many anti-trafficking efforts and other abolitionist movements, on victims who are recruited through force, fraud, abduction, or coercion.

### **What can you do to end human trafficking?**

Don't become overwhelmed! There are MANY ways you can get involved in the fight to end human trafficking, large and small. First, you can learn to recognize the signs of trafficking, especially if you're a student or parent. Here are some of the most common signs:

- Sudden gifts, expensive clothing
- A new cell phone or two phones
- Large amounts of cash
- Presence of an over-controlling "boyfriend," often older
- Tattoos that they aren't able to explain or try to cover up
- Changes in online behavior, new profiles/groups/friends
- Not free to leave or come and go as they wish
- Is under 18 and is providing commercial sex acts, or is over 18 and has a pimp/manager, often called "daddy"
- Untreated STIs (Sexually Transmitted Infections)
- High security measures at work and/or living locations
- Poor physical health
- Shows signs of abuse, restraint, or confinement

- Works excessively long or unusual hours
- Not in control of their own money or ID

Signs of child trafficking, in addition to what's listed above:

- Withdrawing, missing school, poor grades
- Lying about age, fake ID
- Shows signs of physical abuse such as burn marks, bruises, or cuts
- Appears malnourished
- Avoids eye contact and social interaction

In addition to learning the signs of trafficking and recruitment, you can increase your awareness of the ways you might be contributing to the objectification of women and girls, the commodification of their bodies, or normalizing violence against them. Pornography does not exist in a vacuum. Media, music, movies, and magazines can all portray women as objects and influence how women and girls are viewed and treated in society. You can also avoid normalizing prostitution or pornography; this includes making or laughing at jokes and tolerating this behavior in others and online.

When shopping, you can become a conscious consumer by supporting ethical brands and fair-trade companies. Avoid “fast fashion” brands and choose quality over quantity. Also, check for slave labor in the supply chains of your favorite chocolates and coffee. Spending an extra dollar or two on items and products made without slave labor can save lives.

One of the ways you can have the greatest impact is to remember that women and girls are not inherently vulnerable; they are made vulnerable by economic, education, and

environmental injustice through systemic discrimination and gender inequality. Any actions you can take to educate and empower women and girls and promote gender equality will not only help victims of trafficking, but help you too. Equality benefits everyone.

If you need help, want more info, or want to report a tip, you can contact the Human Trafficking Hotline confidentially, 24 hours a day, seven days a week:

- Visit: [humantraffickinghotline.org](https://humantraffickinghotline.org)
- Call: 1 888 3737 888 (1-888-373-7888)
- Text: 233733 (BEFREE)
- Live chat: [humantraffickinghotline.org](https://humantraffickinghotline.org)

## Works Cited

“2018 Year in Review.” *Pornhub*, 31 Jan. 2019. Web. 16 May 2019.

[www.pornhub.com/insights/2018-year-in-review](http://www.pornhub.com/insights/2018-year-in-review).

“Connection Between Sex Trafficking and Pornography.” *Human Trafficking Search*, Web. 16 May 2019.

[humantraffickingsearch.org/the-connection-between-sex-trafficking-and-pornography/](http://humantraffickingsearch.org/the-connection-between-sex-trafficking-and-pornography/).

“Domestic Servitude | Enslavement of Live-in Help.” *End Slavery Now*, Web. 16 May 2019.

[www.endslaverynow.org/learn/slavery-today/domestic-servitude](http://www.endslaverynow.org/learn/slavery-today/domestic-servitude).

Eby, Baylee. “The Economics of Human Trafficking.” *Institute For Faith, Work & Economics*,

27 Apr. 2017. Web. 16 May 2019. [tifwe.org/the-economics-of-human-trafficking/](http://tifwe.org/the-economics-of-human-trafficking/).

“Gender & Slavery.” *Free the Slaves*, Web. 16 May 2019.

[www.freetheslaves.net/community-development/gender/](http://www.freetheslaves.net/community-development/gender/).

“Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage.” *Report: Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage*, International Labour Organization, 19 Sept. 2017. Web. 16 May 2019.

[www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS\\_575479/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_575479/lang--en/index.htm).

Hilton, Donald. “VIDEO: Neurosurgeon Dr. Donald Hilton Reveals Shocking Scientific Truths About Porn.” *Fight the New Drug*, Web. 16 May 2019.

[fightthenewdrug.org/media/neurosurgeon-donald-hilton-jr-truths-about-porn-harms-brain](http://fightthenewdrug.org/media/neurosurgeon-donald-hilton-jr-truths-about-porn-harms-brain)

Naylor, Rick. "Child Sex Trafficking: Who Are the Buyers?" *PACT*, Rick Naylor

<https://pact.city/Wp-Content/Uploads/2019/02/PACT-Logo-2019-No-Bg-300x195.Png>,

23 Nov. 2018. Web. 16 May 2019. [pact.city/child-sex-trafficking-buyers/](https://pact.city/child-sex-trafficking-buyers/).

"NCMEC Data." *National Center for Missing and Exploited Children*, Web. 16 May 2019.

[www.missingkids.org/ourwork/ncmecdata](http://www.missingkids.org/ourwork/ncmecdata).

"No Buyers = No Business." *Demand Abolition*, [www.demandabolition.org/](http://www.demandabolition.org/).

"Porn and Prostitution: What Is The Difference?" *Fight the New Drug*, 22 Aug. 2018. Web. 16

May 2019. [fightthenewdrug.org/porn-and-prostitution/](http://fightthenewdrug.org/porn-and-prostitution/).

Searls, Samantha. "Intersectional Justice." *End Slavery Now*, 29 Mar. 2017. Web. 16 May 2019.

[www.endslaverynow.org/blog/articles/intersectional-justice](http://www.endslaverynow.org/blog/articles/intersectional-justice).

Seitz, Antoaneta. "United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime." *United Nations Convention*

*against Transnational Organized Crime*, Web. 16 May 2019.

[www.unodc.org/unodc/en/organized-crime/intro/UNTOC.html](http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/organized-crime/intro/UNTOC.html).

"Smuggling or Trafficking: Knowing the Difference » STOP THE TRAFFIK." *STOP THE*

*TRAFFIK*, 15 Apr. 2019. Web. 16 May 2019.

[www.stopthetraffik.org/smuggling-trafficking-knowing-differences/](http://www.stopthetraffik.org/smuggling-trafficking-knowing-differences/).

"The CNN Freedom Project." *CNN*, Cable News Network, Web. 16 May 2019.

[www.cnn.com/interactive/2018/specials/freedom-project/](http://www.cnn.com/interactive/2018/specials/freedom-project/).

"The Victims & Traffickers." *Polaris*, 29 Feb. 2016. Web. 16 May 2019.

[polarisproject.org/victims-traffickers](http://polarisproject.org/victims-traffickers).

"The Victims." *National Human Trafficking Hotline*, 23 Apr. 2018. Web. 16 May 2019.

[humantraffickinghotline.org/what-human-trafficking/human-trafficking/victims](http://humantraffickinghotline.org/what-human-trafficking/human-trafficking/victims).

“Trafficked Women, Used in Prostitution, Are Not ‘Sex-Workers.’” *NOMAS*, 15 Feb. 2017.

Web. 16 May 2019. [nomas.org/trafficked-women-prostitution-sex-workers/](http://nomas.org/trafficked-women-prostitution-sex-workers/).

“Typology of Modern Slavery.” *Polaris Project*, Web. 16 May 2019.

[polarisproject.org/sites/default/files/Polaris-Typology-of-Modern-Slavery.pdf](http://polarisproject.org/sites/default/files/Polaris-Typology-of-Modern-Slavery.pdf).

“US Citizen Sex Trafficking.” *Polaris Project*, Web. 16 May 2019.

[polarisproject.org/sites/default/files/us-citizen-sex-trafficking.pdf](http://polarisproject.org/sites/default/files/us-citizen-sex-trafficking.pdf).

Voon, Valerie. “Cambridge University Study: Internet Porn Addiction Mirrors Drug Addiction

(Voon Et Al., 2014).” *Your Brain On Porn*, 10 July 2014. Web. 16 May 2019.

[www.yourbrainonporn.com/cambridge-university-brain-scans-find-porn-addiction](http://www.yourbrainonporn.com/cambridge-university-brain-scans-find-porn-addiction).

“What Is Child Slavery - Anti-Slavery International.” *Anti-Slavery International*, Web. 16 May

2019. [www.antislavery.org/slavery-today/child-slavery/](http://www.antislavery.org/slavery-today/child-slavery/).