



**VIRTUAL BROTHEL:
PIMPING & TRAFFICKING
GO ONLINE**
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I am going first because I give a very broad overview, and Detective Stack gives a very specific, hands-on approach to the issue. I'm very honored to be with him. It's people like him who really do the work that needs to be done on the streets, so I'm very grateful to him.

This has been a fantastic conference, and the presentations have just been stellar.

During most of the twentieth century, pimps, madams, traffickers, exploited their victims on street corners and in brothels. Girls and women would be paraded up and down the street in front of cars driven by johns. The buyers chose the one they wanted. The brothels – the madam would call the girls downstairs to the parlor, and a lineup would pass by the johns. The john would say, "I'll take the one in the red teddy." The exploiters (in other words) were the ones who had to go looking for the victims. The johns had to go in search of the prostitutes, and the victims were the ones who were moved to whatever location had the most potential for the most customers.

That was then, and this is now. That's the sound of a victim being sold online. That's the sound of a john buying a human being. That's the sound of a child being groomed by a predator. That's the sound of profits for today's pimps and traffickers. Pimps and traffickers want to make money. They do that by exploiting people, exploiting the demand for prostitutes, exploiting the victims they ensnare, and exploiting the market conditions that allow sex trafficking and prostitution to flourish. Pimps, traffickers, and even prostitutes capitalize on the demand for commercial sex by catering to it online.

Pornography is also thriving on the Internet. According to toptenreviews.com, there are 42 million pornographic websites. That's 12% of all websites and 68 million pornographic search engine requests every single day. That's 25% of all total search requests. How many of those 68 million requests will lead to the viewer wanting to buy sex afterwards? Well, the retail stores know they need to get people to buy something, and they have to do it while those people are in the stores looking around, because if the person leaves before buying they are not likely to come back and purchase something. Online, the pimps know that lesson well, so they want to make it very quick and easy for the porn viewer to find a prostitute online.

For a few years, that pathway was through Craigslist – specifically, their adult services section. In September of 2010, Craigslist shut down their U.S. adult services section. In December of 2010 they followed suit for their international version, too. Some of the Craigslist traffic moved to thebackpage.com. Sudhir Venkatesh, a professor of sociology at Columbia University, interviewed 290 prostitutes in New York City. He found that even before Craigslist developed their “adult services section”, prostitutes were setting up on Facebook to find their clients there. Of the 290 women, 61% had used Craigslist, but now 83% have moved to Facebook. Venkatesh says that by the end of this year (2011) Facebook will be the leading online recruiting space. What does it say about our culture and our economy, that not only are pimps and traffickers utilizing the virtual brothel, but so are women that have no pimp?

For johns, what’s not to like about the virtual brothel concept? They can order a prostitute right on their Blackberry. They can have a tryst at lunch and still make it to their afternoon appointments, with no one the wiser. If they’re not sure about their choice, they can always log on to a john’s board to find out who they recommend or who specializes in their particular fetish. Let’s face it, much about what’s being said about oneself online is exaggerated, and since johns cannot see their choice in person, they look to fellow johns to enlighten them as to their experiences and their preferences. The virtual brothel exploits the victims, and not just while they are being victimized. Once a picture goes online, it’s never really gone. A website might remove the content, but if somebody downloaded it, it can be uploaded and circulated all over again – over and over again.

An FBI agent that I know recently interviewed a pimp in prison. He asked that pimp, “Where did you find kids for prostitution?” The pimp replied, “it’s easy. There’s an endless supply of runaways and other vulnerable kids in malls.” “How do you spot them?” the FBI agent asked. The pimp said, “I watch for girls who are alone. Most kids go to the mall with their friends or their parents. If a girl is alone, the chances are she is vulnerable. So I go up to her, and I say, ‘You’ve got pretty eyes.’ If she looks at me and smiles and says, ‘Thank you,’ I move on. But instead, if she looks down at her shoes and says, ‘No, I don’t have pretty eyes,’ he says, ‘I know I’ve got her.’”

I don’t know about you, but every time I hear that story, it brings a tear to my heart, because those pimps go out and look for vulnerable girls and young women to exploit. They go to the bus stations, they go to the shopping malls, they go to where teens hang out and they search for girls with low self-esteem, girls whose mom and dads have never told them that they have pretty eyes. In the Internet age, pimps use the Internet to find those vulnerable pre-teens and teens. They recruit the troubled teens in chat rooms, on social networking sites, and after they ensnare them, they exploit them on the websites like Craigslist and MyRedBook.

One pimp, Marvin Epps, was quoted in his indictment as writing in a chat log (and this is in lingo), “I don’t put the girls on the blade. It’s Y2K pimping. Get some professional beautiful elegant glamour shots, put them on those escort websites, and her phone goes snap.” Teens who sext take nude pictures of themselves and send them via phone or e-mail to someone else. They create (not knowing it) a path, via phone or e-mail, for somebody else to find them. These pictures can be spread all around their school and throughout the town, leading to that child feeling alone and ostracized, thus making them far more vulnerable to pimps. These pictures can also end up on the Internet and posted on porn sites or on pedophilia sharing sites. Pimps are expert manipulators, and they will use anything they know about that child to their advantage.

Sexting, Internet chat rooms logs, and social networking sites are great hunting grounds for them. These hunting grounds are loaded with prey and the ammunition with which to ambush the kids. Pimps and traffickers want to make money, like a modern company with a vision for growth. These

traffickers realize that the Internet expands their business. It increases their contact; it expands their reach. It multiplies their ability to meet the demand; and the websites are not local, they are international. That means the pimps can cater to pimps around the world, and when there is a major sporting event or some other big arena where there is a gathering, the pimps and traffickers just move the women and the girls to that event location and meet the demand. What better way to advertise that fact than on the Internet? With the Internet pimps can update a web listing or website daily. Do they have more requests for Asian girls than Caucasian girls? No problem, just change the pictures. Is Cincinnati not profitable enough? No problem, check the local websites in Atlanta; see if there is more action going on there. When a john travels to another city for business, he can check the websites ahead of time, he can order a prostitute to be delivered to his hotel room.

The market caters not only to selection, but to privacy and discretion. Richard Gere, in *Pretty Woman*, might have felt no shame driving up to a prostitute on the street and picking her up, but many johns don't want to go public and have everybody know what they are doing. One brothel in Prague realized there is more money in Internet porn than in prostitution. So what did they do? They now offer prostitution for free, but the catch is they film the johns having sex with a prostitute. The john makes their choice from options on a touch screen menu. Their exploits then are posted all over the web. This example illustrates perfectly the connection between pornography, prostitution and sex trafficking. If the brothel's demand exceeds its supply of prostitutes, sex trafficking victims will be forced to meet the demand.

Why does prostitution flourish on the Internet? For johns the reasons include seemingly unlimited choices for prostitutes, anonymity, lack of accountability, being able to discuss your sexual predilections with total strangers, and getting immediate support and affirmation. For the pimp, it's different. The pimps reason include the ability to advertise for a low cost, even reaching an international audience, no overhead costs, anonymity, and easy access to potential victims. The common denominator though is demand. Without men, and sometimes women, willing to buy another human being for the purposes of sex, there would be no prostitution and no sex trafficking.

Here is how it works: addiction to pornography drives the Internet porn sites. The Internet allows for instant gratification of the urge to view pornography. Today's technology makes it possible for that urge to be met anywhere, in public, at home, even at the office. When viewing porn turns into desire for a sex act, the virtual brothel caters to those desires, too. When children and young adults are added in to this mix, the consequences are often tragic, with their pictures being posted on the Internet, never to go away. Or they face coercion and threats leading to sexual exploitation. Parents need to make sure their children are aware of the dangers of sexting, of chatting with strangers online, and be aware that any information they post on their social networking sites can be made public. Parents need to know that children today cannot be isolated from these influences even in a Christian home, even in a home where parents try to be very diligent. Even though the kids may not have these influences in their home, their friends can supply access for them. Technology when used for good is an awesome and powerful tool to make the world a much better place. But when it's corrupted by pimps and traffickers as we have **seen** in so many presentations today, it is evil.

Let me conclude with a warning for parents and everybody in this room who cares about the nation's children. Unlike the old fashioned brothels that are in the sleazy parts of town, the virtual brothel is right in our homes, endangering our children and making the Internet an unsafe place for vulnerable kids.