

Human Trafficking and the Objectification of Women

Awareness

Human trafficking is a modern-day form of slavery with over twenty-seven million people enslaved worldwide. The scope of the problem is hard to define because human trafficking is largely a hidden crime, making accurate numbers of trafficking incidents difficult to determine. It is a crime under state, federal and international law and is currently the second fastest growing criminal activity, exceeded only by the illegal drug trade.

There are two major types of human trafficking: **sex trafficking**, in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act is under 18 years of age; and **labor trafficking**, which is the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision or obtaining of a person for labor or services through the use of force, fraud or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage or slavery.

Sex trafficking is especially reprehensible because it specifically targets vulnerable women and girls. Some victims are abducted; others are

runaways or are lured out of poverty or sold by their destitute families. Many are desperate for acceptance and enticed by the false promise of romance, good jobs or a better life.

Pimps and johns see them as easy prey and exploit them, especially the young women. The victims are often kept on the streets until they meet their quota of money for the night, which they must turn over to the trafficker. If they rebel, they are beaten, raped, drugged and starved into submission. The pimps recognize that women under their control are a more lucrative source of income than selling drugs because the same girl can be sold over and over for years until she is no longer useful or dies.

The links between human trafficking and other social justice issues, such as poverty, immigration, and violence against women and children are complex. Factors contributing to the tragedy of human trafficking are:

- Growing demand for both labor and commercial sex services
- Lack of access to appropriate social services such as safe housing, employment, addiction rehabilitation and mental health services
- Cultural factors such as racism, caste systems, bigotry, etc.
- Pornography
- Lack of respect for the dignity of persons
- Sexually explicit content of videos and lyrics to music

The focus of this module is the **objectification of women** as



a significant contributing factor to human sex trafficking and the creation of a climate in which violence and exploitation of women and girls is both tolerated and tacitly encouraged.

In her paper, *Objectification of Women*, Phyllis B. Frank says: “A definition of *objectification* might be: portrayals of women in ways and contexts which suggest that women are objects to be looked at, ogled, even touched, or used, anonymous things or commodities perhaps to be purchased, perhaps taken - and once tired of, even discarded, often to be replaced by a newer, younger edition; certainly not treated as full human beings with equal rights and needs. Once a class of human beings are seen as objects or commodities, or in ways that effectively reduce them to objects, it becomes much easier to use them as one would an object, with as little, or no, regard.”

Objectification of women is obviously common in mainstream media,



advertising, calendars, Hollywood movies and magazines – it is seen everywhere. Half-naked female bodies are displayed on walls; in public, like objects; exposed female bodies are used as markers of male territory or turf. This raises immediate signals of discomfort, and of menace, for women. In short, the direct negative effects on women, as they are exposed to it daily are: negative self-images, shame about themselves, diminished feelings of dignity, autonomy, privacy, and safety.

The objectification of women can lead women and girls to believe they are old and unattractive even in their 20's, that they are not taken seriously and cannot match in real life their photographed, objectified image even if they are young and beautiful.

The objectification of women may contribute to a “climate” in which violence and exploitation of women are both tolerated and tacitly encouraged. Once a class of human beings is seen as objects or commodities, or in ways that effectively reduce them to objects, it becomes much easier to use them as one would an object, with little or no regard. It can become the norm.

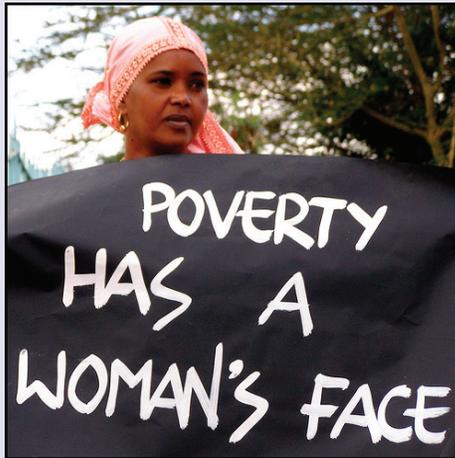
[Source: *Objectification of Women* by Phyllis B. Frank]

Throughout history, sexual objectification of women has been a constant in society. Women were, and in many cultures still are, perceived as inferior to men; and therefore are to be dominated, subdued and controlled.



Nike *Make Yourself* campaign was launched to encourage women to improve their bodies.

They are then simply treated as an instrument of sexual pleasure, a “sex object” or commodity to be bought and sold, used and abused without regard for their personhood or dignity.



The objectification of women results in many crimes committed against women:

- **Gender-based abortions** primarily target female children around the world, especially in cultures such as China, India, Pakistan and Indonesia which devalue women in general.
- Women are forced to bear a disproportionate weight of the world's **poverty** ~ performing over 66% of the world's work, earning 10% of the income and owning 1% of the land. This poverty largely results in female unemployment, lack of education and denial of health care, a particular problem for pregnant women in developing countries.
- Women and girls are most often the victims of **pornography** and **prostitution**.

Why Is This Happening?

In the developing world, some of factors leading to the lowered status of women are:

- Cultural norms in some societies which have long viewed women as being of lower value.
- Refusal of poor families to educate girls who, when married, become the property of the husband's family.
- Desperately poor families viewing their girl children as less productive and therefore as objects to be sold.

In the developed world, some of the issues of great concern involving women are:

- The breakdown of the nuclear family and the lack of moral guidance for the children.
- Violent behavior in the home and on television often directed at the woman.
- The availability of pornography on the internet and in many forms of advertising.
- The demand for sex on the one hand and the money to be made from it on the other.

What Is Being Done?

The Obama Administration has become actively involved in the fight against human trafficking. In April 2013, **The President's Advisory Council on Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships** (www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/advisory_council_humantrafficking_report.pdf) gave their Report of Recommendations to the President. The Council's ten proposals detailed what can be accomplished nationally when both government and the private sector collaborate.

Many faith-based organizations are also working towards eliminating this scourge of society. They include but are not limited to:

- The **Bakhita Initiative** networks Catholic Sisters across the U.S. and provides best-practices, resources and programs directed toward eliminating human trafficking.
- The **Salvation Army** (www.salvationarmyusa.org/usn/combating-human-trafficking) and **Catholic Relief Services** (crs.org/slavery-human-trafficking) are involved in assisting victims, often providing immigrant resettlement services, mentors, education, job training, and guidance for families in need of better role models. Additionally, they provide direct

services to women to rebuild their own lives and better those of their children.

Many groups are collaborating to address human trafficking in countries worldwide. These grassroots organizations work to educate the general public about human trafficking taking place in their geographic locale and its danger to their children. Other grassroots organizations have also been effective in mounting campaigns which have led law enforcement to close massage parlors. Three of these are:

- **SOAP** (Save Our Adolescents from Prostitution) (www.free-international.org/soap.html) reaches out to the victims of pimps with the national hotline phone number (888-3737-888) and text address (233733 or BeFree) for victims to contact the national hotline for help.
- **Magdalene Houses** in Nashville and elsewhere are among the few facilities with a high success rate in leading human trafficking victims out of slavery. They provide the necessary free services to women who wish to leave the underground sex culture.
- **Clean Hotels** (www.cleanhotels.com) is a national program encouraging hotels and motels not to offer in-room pornography as part of their TV menu.

Reflection



What are our values and sources of our hope in the battle against the degradation of human beings?

Scripture

- 1 Cor. 6:19 *Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.*
- Matthew 5:27-28 *Lust ... adultery in the heart*
- Matthew 25:35-40 *Whatever you did to one of the least of these, you did to me.*

- Romans 5:20 *Where sin increased, grace overflowed all the more.*

Catholic Social Teaching

- “Man and woman have been created, which is to say willed by God...in perfect equality as human persons. ‘Being man’ or ‘being woman’ is a reality which is good and willed by God. ...and possess an inalienable dignity which comes to them immediately from God, their Creator. Man and woman are both made with one and the same dignity in the image of God (and) reflect the Creator’s wisdom and goodness”

— *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church.*

- Rights of the Human Person: “Flowing from our God-given dignity, each person has basic rights and responsibilities. People have a fundamental right to life and those things that make life truly human: food, clothing, housing, healthcare, education, security, social services, and employment.”

— *Rerum Novarum* (1891) # 5, 9, 48, 55, 62; Peter Henriot S.J. et al., *Catholic Social Teaching Our Best Kept Secret*, © 1985, Center of Concern, Washington, D.C., pp. 34, 35.

- “Duties of Employers: Not to treat workers as slaves: to uphold the dignity of workers, not to impose more work than a person can endure, pay a just wage, not to tamper with worker’s savings.”

— *Rerum Novarum* #31, 32.

- “Pope Francis has repeatedly spoken out against human trafficking, referring to such particular aspects of it as forced domestic work, child labor and prostitution, calling it the most widespread form of 21st century slavery.”

— *Agence France-Presse*

- Pope Francis, besides speaking out against human trafficking, called for a conference at the Vatican in November 2013 to propose an ‘action plan’ against human trafficking and modern-day slavery.

Action

The scope of human trafficking is exceptionally large. It is immensely valuable for people to be connected with a group to have any significant impact on this crime. Some of these groups and programs are mentioned in the **What is Being Done** section above.

However, as individuals, people can also become involved and effective:

- Pray and sacrifice daily for both the victims and the perpetrators of human trafficking.
- Subscribe online or through the mail to anti-human trafficking newsletters.
- Write letters to local newspapers, keeping the human trafficking issue alive and spreading the news about developments.

- Contact a popular columnist, asking her/him to write a news article on the topic.
- Bring pressure through letters to the editor concerning *Backpage.com* which publishes on the internet, urging them to remove their 'adult' section advertising the availability of persons for commercial sex.
- Discuss with store managers the offensiveness of the pornography on their check-out counters. Some high school students have made it a practice to turn magazines like *Cosmopolitan* backwards at store checkout counters.
- Join parish social action groups such as *JustFaith* and encourage them to focus on human trafficking.

Further Information

Bakhita Initiative

www.bakhitainitiative.com

Provides a nationwide network of U.S. congregations of Catholic women religious, connecting those involved in activities to end human trafficking. The website makes available a database and a visual of cross country contacts that will serve to strengthen and unify efforts of the Sisters.

Polaris Project

www.polarisproject.org

This organization works on eradicating all forms of human trafficking and serves victims. Polaris Project operates a 24/7 national hotline: 1-888-3737-888 or text "BeFree" (233733).

Intercommunity Peace & Justice Center

www.ipjc.org

The Intercommunity Peace & Justice Center, Seattle, WA, is sponsored by eighteen religious communities. Provides classroom webinars, prayer resources and faith based presentations on human trafficking.

JustFaith

www.justfaith.org

A parish program focusing on the engagement in the life of Jesus and the call to be about God's dream of justice and compassion in a world scarred by the domestic and global poverty crisis.

Operation Broken Silence

www.operationbrokensilence.org

A project that made an analysis of the Online Memphis Sex Industry and human trafficking in which they

analyzed the information that traffickers, pimps and victims provided to *Backpage.com* as a means of advertising prostitution. It highlights the trends, patterns and economics of human trafficking in Memphis.

Additional Websites

Human Trafficking/Modern-day Slavery

- **Catholic Health Association**
www.chausa.org/humantrafficking
Offers posters and many other anti-trafficking resources free of charge—English & Spanish
- **Shared Hope International**
www.sharedhope.org
Focuses on trafficking of children.
- **Stop Trafficking newsletter**
www.stopenslavement.org
Provides world-wide information on human trafficking
- **Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking**
www.castla.org
- **Children of the Night**
childrenofthenight.org/home.html
- **U.S. Department of Health & Human Services: Rescue and Restore Campaign**
www.acf.hhs.gov/trafficking
- **For state information**
<http://www.state.gov/i/tip>

U.S. Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking is a collaborative, faith-based network that offers educational programs and materials, supports access to survivor services, and engages in legislative advocacy to eradicate modern-day slavery.