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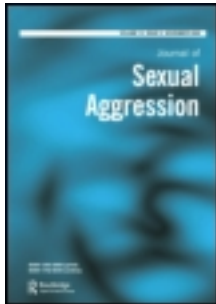
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‘Welcome to the Rape Camp’: Sexual exploitation and the Internet in Cambodia

Donna M. Hughes¹

Summary: This article reports a piece of original research into the links between the trafficking in women and children across the globe and how such trafficking practices have been facilitated by developments in technology and telecommunications. The connections between prostitution in the Mekong Sub-Region, pornography on the Internet, and sex tourism have also been researched, based on the experiences of women and children and the men who exploit them.

Keywords: pornography; sexual exploitation; the Internet; prostitution

Introduction

This paper will present an overview of the global sex industries, the trafficking in women and children, and the Internet sex industry in the context of prostitution in Southeast Asia. The economic policies and practices that tolerate and protect the sex industry and promote free trade on the Internet will be discussed as they relate to aspects of global sexual exploitation. The paper uses the case of an Internet web site called ‘The Rape Camp’ from Cambodia to structure an exploration of the nature, prevalence and normalisation of sexual exploitation in the Mekong sub-region, and its promotion globally on the Internet. The ‘Rape Camp’ web site greets viewers with the following welcome:

‘Welcome to the Rape Camp!
Welcome to the Year 2000
Welcome to Kampuchea
It’s not just live video chat
It’s an international experience’

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Part 1. Welcome to the Rape Camp Case

In October 1999, an American living in Phnom Penh, Cambodia announced that he was adding a live bondage sex show to his Internet site (*Deutsche Presse-Agentur*, 14 October 1999). His pornography web site, 'Rape Camp,' featured 'Asian sex slaves' who were used for 'bondage, discipline and humiliation.' The women on the web site were blindfolded, gagged and/or bound with ropes while being used in sex acts; some had clothes pins clipped to their breasts (*Xinhua News Agency*, 8 November 1999). Viewers were encouraged to 'humiliate these Asian sex slaves to your hearts content' (Welcome to the Rape Camp, March 2000). Expanded service was to feature live interactive Internet transmission of bondage sex shows from Cambodia with pay-per-view access in which customers could relay requests for torture that would be fulfilled within seconds (*Deutsche Presse-Agentur*, 14 October 1999). The fees were US\$15 for 10 minutes, US\$40 for 30 minutes, and US\$75 for 60 minutes (Fees to see Asian bondage, March 2000).

The pornographer justified his venture in sexualised torture by saying, 'I wanted a niche that I knew would sell' (*AP World News*, 22 October 1999). He explained, 'There is a big market in the US for Asian women. ... And when I start making money, I'll pay 10 percent in taxes. If I'm successful, I could get a lot of other guys doing it and get a lot of tax revenue' (*Associated Press*, 14 October 1999). He told the English-language newspaper *Cambodia Daily* that women were the 'biggest asset to export to the U.S.' (*Agence France Presse*, 7 November 1999). His web site also promoted prostitution tourism to men visiting Cambodia.

In an effort to avoid problems with local residents and officials, Sandler used Vietnamese women instead of local Khmer women for his web site (*Agence France Presse*, 7 November 1999). He claimed the women were not harmed or forced to perform the sex acts and were paid US\$20 each (*AP World News*, 22 October 1999). He rationalised his 'Rape Camp' by saying, 'They're selling these women anyway in prostitute houses, where they have to have sex with 10 men a day and get AIDS' (*Agence France Presse*, 7 November 1999).

He dismissed the contention that his 'Rape Camp' web site would increase violence against women in Cambodia. 'I have nothing against women here.' He explained, 'It's not being marketed to this community' and since few Cambodians had Internet access they weren't likely to see it. If his sexual bondage show caused violence against women in the United States—the community of the target audience—that was acceptable, even desirable. 'It might promote violence against women in the United States, but I say, 'Good.' I hate those bitches. They're out of line and that's one of the reasons I want to do this ... I'm going through a divorce right now. ... I hate American women' (*Deutsche Presse-Agentur*, 14 October 1999).

Once the pornographic web site came to the attention of the Cambodian Minister of Women's Affairs, Mu Sochua, she called for the pornographer's arrest saying, 'It's an act against the dignity and value of Cambodian women and children. ... We see this as an act of violence against women' (*AP World News*, 22 October 1999). She called for him to be charged with violating a Cambodian law prohibiting sexual exploitation and trafficking of women. Prime Minister Hun Sen and the Minister of Justice

supported her. Dan Sandler, 35, from Ashland, Oregon was arrested.

Cambodian officials discussed banning the web site, citing laws that protected Cambodian culture. 'He is a disgusting person who made Cambodia look bad,' commented the Phnom Penh Deputy of Police Chief Bit Kimhong. (*Agence France Presse*, 7 November 1999). News reports of the incident expressed fears that 'the government may go further and consider draconian legislation to monitor and censor the Internet' (*Agence France Presse*, 7 November 1999). But even after Sandler's arrest in Cambodia, the 'Rape Camp' web site remained on the Internet, located on a computer server in the United States.

Although Sandler faced up to five years in jail in Cambodia for violating the law on human trafficking and sexual exploitation, United States officials intervened with the Cambodian Interior Ministry to assist him. US officials arranged that he not be prosecuted, but deported. Sandler's passport was stamped by Cambodian police to ban him from returning (*Xinhua News Agency*, 8 November 1999). US officials accompanied him to the airport and the US Embassy had no comment (*Agence France Presse*, 7 November 1999).

None of the women were interviewed. No information about their well-being, experiences or wishes was included in the news stories.

Bill Herrod, identified as an 'American aid worker who played a major role in bringing the Internet to Cambodia' said, 'Here we are at a time when there is a growing civil society, a serious problem with domestic violence, and we're at the point of discussing legalization of prostitution as a way of controlling and protecting the rights of women, and now we've got somebody from outside Cambodia trying to introduce a new method of exploitation' (*Deutsche Presse-Agentur*, 14 October 1999).

Part 2. Sex industries and the trafficking in women

A transnational growth industry in sexual exploitation

In the last three decades, prostitution and pornography have been increasingly tolerated, normalised and legitimised, resulting in expansion of sex industries all over the world. Sexual exploitation has become a transnational practice whereby women and girls are physically conveyed from sending countries through transit countries to receiving countries, where men use them in legalised or widely tolerated sex businesses, and men physically travel around the world to buy women and children in prostitution, as a form of tourism. Through recently developed global communications technology, these forms of sexual exploitation are now carried out through phone lines and satellite transmission.

Prostitution and pornography have long been extremely profitable for organised crime and corrupt officials. They have been tolerated for so long they have become entrenched in many countries. Increasingly, the income from the sex industries has outweighed the abuse and exploitation of the women and children and enabled aggressive lobbying for official recognition and legalisation of the sex industry.

Currently, a number of international organisations are calling for recognition of the sex industry as a legitimate economic sector. A recent report by the International Labour Organisation said that prostitution and pornography represent:

... a commercial sex sector that is integrated into the economic, social and political life of these countries. The sex business has assumed the dimensions of an industry and has directly or indirectly contributed in no small measure to employment, national income and economic growth. The organizational structures and relations within the sex sector have become very diversified and complex. They involve a growing number of vested and powerful interests and networks of dependencies. (Lim, 1998:1)

Tolerance and *de jure* and *de facto* legalisation of prostitution and pornography have increased men's demand for women and girls to be used as sexual entertainment or acts of violence. The demand is met by increased recruitment of women and girls into the sex industry, usually by violence, deception or exploitation of those made vulnerable by poverty, unemployment and prior victimisation.

The United Nations estimates that one million women and children are trafficked each year for the purpose of sexual exploitation (*Xinhua News Agency*, 21 September 1999). The methods used in trafficking for sexual exploitation comprise a modern slave trade (Leidholdt, 1998). The perpetrators range from loosely connected procurers and pimps to transnational organised crime networks. The value of the global trade in women and children as commodities for the sex industry is estimated to be seven billion dollars annually (*Xinhua News Agency*, 21 September 1999). The trade in women is relatively low risk activity for procurers, who reap high profits compared to other illegal trade activities, such as drugs and arms, making it increasingly the preferred activity of organised crime (*Associated Press*, 23 February 2000).

Determining the actual revenue generated by the sex industry is difficult. Some figures refer only to the legal sector of the sex industry, the smallest portion, and don't include the money made illegally through the sale of women in brothels, massage parlours and on the street, or the sale of illegal materials, such as child pornography. According to one estimate, the sex industry makes at least \$57 billion a year, internationally (Morais, 14 June 1999).

Developing a tourist industry, including prostitution tourism, has been the strategy adopted by developing countries and supported by international financial institutions. Those calling for official recognition of the sex industry view the growth of the sex industry as a profitable, legitimate and respectable form of development for poor countries.

[The sex sector] is a significant source of foreign exchange earnings, with links between the growth of prostitution as a highly structured transnational business and the expansion of the tourist industry in these countries, as well as labour exports from these countries. (Lim, 1998:110)

According to the International Labor Organisation, in Southeast Asian countries income from sex industries accounts for between 2 percent and 14 percent of GDP

(Gross Domestic Product) (Lim, 1998:6). In Indonesia, money generated by the sex industry is estimated to be between US\$1.2 and 3.3 billion per year, or between 0.8 and 2.4 percent of the country's GDP. In Thailand, the yearly income from prostitution was between 450 and 540 billion baht (US\$22.5-27 billion) or about 10 to 14 percent of the GDP (Lim, 1998:10). Sex industries make a lot of money, most of it illegally. Many governments look longingly at the money made in sex industries and calculate how it could enrich them instead of organised crime.

Prostitution in the Mekong Sub-Region

In the Mekong sub-region of Southeast Asia, comprising all or parts of Cambodia, China, Lao PDR, Myanmar (Burma), Thailand and Vietnam, the sex industry has expanded or contracted, depending on the demand for women and children in prostitution and policies of those controlling the country. In Vietnam and Thailand, the sex industry grew and flourished due to demand mainly from US troops fighting in the Vietnam War (also called the Indochina War and the American War in Vietnam). In Cambodia, prior to 1975, women were readily available to those with money, especially foreign men brought there by the wars in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia (Swain, 1995). For some men, being in Southeast Asia meant adventure and opportunity to engage in previously restricted practices, such as drugs and prostitution.

'War is a kind of jailbreak which we welcomed for its freedoms and lifting of every kind of taboo. ... [T]he war also provided us with a certain freedom, which is why we liked being there. We felt we had broken loose and were accomplices in an escape from the straitjacket of ease and staid habits' (Swain, 1995:27, 37).

After the United States retreated from a ruined Southeast Asia, in Thailand the pimps found another market for the women and children in prostitution tourism, and the sex industry became a significant part of economic development, while in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, armed conflict continued and under communist rule prostitution was suppressed. In Cambodia, the Pol Pot regime emptied the cities, forcing the entire population onto agricultural communes. From 1975 to 1979, an estimated one-quarter of the population of Cambodia was murdered or worked and starved to death under the Khmer Rouge (Szymusiaak, 1999). In the work communes, prostitution was explicitly banned. Posted signs stated, 'No prostitution,' followed by the warning that anyone who disobeyed would be killed (Mydans, 15 April 1998). In 1979, Vietnam invaded Cambodia and until the Vietnamese withdrawal in 1991, prostitution was suppressed.

In the 1990s, two factors contributed to a resurgence of prostitution in Cambodia - the arrival of United Nations peacekeeping troops and economic liberalisation. In Cambodia in 1990, there were an estimated 1,500 women in prostitution. The arrival of 10,000 UN peacekeeping troops and civilian administrators of the United National Transitional Authority of Cambodia (UNTAC) in 1991 created a demand for women and girls in prostitution, and the numbers sharply increased. During this time, many women and girls from the countryside were domestically trafficked into cities to meet

the demand for women in prostitution. By 1993, when the UNTAC withdrew, 20,000 women and girls were in prostitution. Following the withdrawal of the troops, the numbers fell to 17,000 (UNICEF-Cambodia, 1996). With economic liberalisation came an influx of predatory entrepreneurs and increased forms of sexual exploitation. The numbers of women and girls in prostitution climbed again, so by 1996, an estimated 57,000 women and girls were in prostitution in Cambodia, with 70 percent of them in the two largest cities—Phnom Penh and Battambang (Kang and Phally, 1995:3).

Child prostitution is common in Cambodia. Approximately one third of all women or girls in prostitution in Cambodia are under age 17. One study counted 2,291 underage girls in prostitution, some younger than 12 years of age (Business News Review—Cambodia, 12 July 1999). Another report claims that there are 16,000 girls in prostitution who are under age 18 (Cochane, 10 November 1999). Throughout the decade of the 1990s in Cambodia, the age of girls in prostitution steadily declined. In 1992 the youngest known girls in prostitution were 18, but one year later, in 1993, 15 year olds were found in prostitution (Cambodian Women's Development Association, 1992 and 1993). The next year, in 1994, a survey found that 35 percent of women and girls in prostitution were under the age of 18 and some were as young as 12 years of age (Cambodian Women's Development Association, February 1994). By 1995, another survey found that approximately 31 percent were under age 17 (Kang and Phally, 1995:3).

Approximately US\$20 million is spent on buying women and girls in prostitution each year in Cambodia (Bernama, 1 December 1999). The women and girls are sold to seven to ten men per day and seldom allowed to keep any of the money. Girls in these circumstances are frequently beaten and forced to take drugs. The brothel owners earn an average of US\$3,300 a month from each girl (Hong Kong Standard, 30 November 1998). Poverty is often cited as a cause of prostitution. Although poverty is a significant factor compelling women into prostitution or making them vulnerable to procurers and traffickers, poverty doesn't seem to interfere with men buying women in prostitution.

Vietnamese women in prostitution in Cambodia

To accommodate the sex industries of Southeast Asia, the trafficking in women and girls is increasing rapidly in the Mekong sub-region of Cambodia, China, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. It is estimated that several hundred thousand woman and children have already been trafficked (UNIFEM-East and South East Asia, 23 September 1999). Centrally located Cambodia is a sending, receiving and transit country for transnational trafficking in women in the Mekong sub-region (International Organisation for Migration, January 2000).

Approximately one-third of the women and girls in prostitution in Cambodia are from Vietnam (Dunn et al., May 1995). In 1998 a report by the World Human Rights Organisation and UNICEF estimated that one-third of the 55,000 women in prostitution in Cambodia were under age 18 and most were Vietnamese (Associated

Press, 25 April 1998). There are increasing numbers of Vietnamese children trafficked to Cambodia to meet child sex abusers' demand for younger girls and men's demand for younger girls they think are less likely to be infected with HIV (International Organisation for Migration, January 2000).

One study conducted in 1996-1997, found that there are 14,725 women in brothels, 81 percent of them Khmer, 18 percent Vietnamese and 1 percent from other countries (Human Rights Commission, 1998). According to another source, in 1994 there are 13,000 women in prostitution in five provinces that were surveyed, of which 7,050 were Vietnamese (UNIFEM, 1998).

Sandler indicated that he used Vietnamese women on his 'Rape Camp' Web site instead of Khmer women, because it was more permissible to exploit Vietnamese women. There is historic prejudice and discrimination against Vietnamese in Cambodia as a result of military conflicts between Cambodia and Vietnam and the occupation of Cambodia by the Vietnamese in the 1980s. In Cambodia, there are ethnic Vietnamese who are citizens of Cambodia. Vietnamese women and girls are also trafficked from Vietnam to Cambodia to be used in the sex industry.

There have been law enforcement efforts to stop the trafficking of women and girls to Cambodia. Between September 1995 and April 1998, the southern border guards in Vietnam discovered 121 cases of child trafficking. They arrested 186 traffickers and freed 281 victims, including 31 who were under age 16 (*Associated Press*, 25 April 1998).

In Northern Vietnam in 1997, there were two prominent cases of trafficking of women and girls. In one case, a seven-member gang of Vietnamese traffickers was arrested in Hanoi for trafficking women for prostitution to Cambodia. They had trafficked at least 26 women to brothels in Phnom Penh, where they were paid US\$350-750 for each woman. Sixteen of the women returned to Vietnam after they escaped or their families paid ransoms. In 1998, the leaders of the gang-a husband and wife-were sentenced to 18 and 20 years in prison, respectively (*Deutsche Presse-Agentur*, 6 April 1998). In another case, 17 people were arrested for trafficking women for prostitution from Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam to Cambodia (*Nando Net*, 22 July 1997). Also, for many women and girls from Vietnam, Cambodia is only a transit country, from which they will be trafficked to other countries such as Thailand.

Prostitution tourism is a form of international entertainment for men on vacations or business trips. In Southeast Asia, after the withdrawal of US troops, the pimps needed a new market for the women and girls. They started advertising their services to foreign businessmen from Germany and Japan. Also, the development of the tourist industry supported prostitution as one attraction for foreign men. As the Internet developed, it became a forum to advertise the tours and services. Organised prostitution tours from the US started appearing on the Web in Spring 1995.

Part 3. Sex Industry on the Internet

A growth industry in the United States

Communications technology is a significant factor in the globalisation of sexual exploitation. The Internet and other types of telecommunication, such as satellite transmission, provide the sex industry new ways of marketing and delivering women and children as sexual commodities to male buyers (Hughes, 1999). As a rule, when a new technology is introduced into a system of exploitation, it enables those with power to intensify the harm and expand the exploitation. Using new Internet technologies, images of women's sexual exploitation are transmitted from local sites anywhere in the world to computer servers in countries where interpretations of laws protecting free speech and free expression extend to any sexualised images, including acts of violence against women, and from there, transmitted upon request to any place in the world that has an Internet connection.

The US is the country mainly responsible for the industrialisation of pornography and prostitution, either in the US or in prostitution centers created by the demand from US military personnel. The US is also the home of the Internet pornography industry. Pornography has always been a high profit industry. In 1996 Americans spent more than US\$9 billion on pornographic videos, peep shows, live sex shows, pornographic cable programs, pornographic magazines and computer pornography (*The Guardian*, 26 November, 1997). That amount is more than many other entertainment industries, such as film, music, and theatre.

As the Internet became increasingly commercialised and available to the public, the sex industry quickly moved to the Internet. This new forum provided pornographers access to global audience with almost no restrictions or regulations. It provided men, who are usually secretive about their exploitation of women and children, with easy, private access to unlimited amount of pornography.

The connection between the sex industry and Internet technology enabled the Internet industry to grow. The sex industry developed many of the ways of doing business over the Internet. Privacy and security measures, fast payment transactions, and web databases were developed by the online sex industry. Over the past six years, the sex industry and the Internet industry have been linked in their expansion and development. Sex industry sites on the Internet draw a lot of traffic and are highly profitable. By early 1998, Internet industry analysts estimated that the sex industry revenue from the Internet alone was US\$1 billion per year (*Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, 28 August 1998). Forrester Research reported, 'We know of at least three sites doing more than US\$100 million a year' (*Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, 28 August 1998).

In 1999, the market research firm, Datamonitor reported that 'adult content' sales on the Internet (which excludes revenues from the sales of merchandise or advertising) was nearly US\$1 billion dollars, and comprised 69 percent of the total Internet content sales (Moore, 26 May 1999). Eighty-four percent of the content sales were from US-based Web sites. Datamonitor, predicted that by 2003 the 'adult content' sales would reach US\$3.1 billion, about one half the anticipated revenue of online content sales (Moore, 26 May 1999). Established sex industry sites can expect to

make from 50 to 80 percent profits (*The Guardian*, 14 May 1998).

At the end of 1999, sex industry Internet subscriber sites represented the single largest segment of e-commerce on the Internet (*Business Newswire*, November 1999). There are approximately 40,000 individually run operations on the Internet. Intense competition among these sites has led many operators to attract buyers by supplying new material and more extreme images, such as bondage, torture, bestiality and child pornography.

Creating a market driven medium with no governmental regulation

The United States set the policy for the commercial development of the Internet. Ira Magaziner, referred to as the 'spiritual father of the Internet,' was the Senior Advisor to the President of the United States for Policy Development from 1993 to December 1998. He coordinated the US government's strategy on electronic commerce and the growing digital economy. He successfully advocated for a free market policy toward commercial development of the Internet, in which the private sector took a leadership role in developing and regulating the Internet, while the government took 'a conservative approach' so as to 'not harm' the growth and commercial development of the Internet (Magaziner, 10 September 1999). Magaziner claimed that the lack of governmental interference in the growth and development of the commercial Internet has given rise to 50 percent of the economic growth of the US economy in the past 7-8 years and propelled the US economy into its present period of low unemployment.

While trumpeting the economic success of the Internet, he did acknowledge a few side effects, such as violations of privacy, 'parents' problems with children, content problems and law enforcement.' In choosing how to handle the commercial growth of the Internet, Magaziner successfully advocated for the Internet to become a 'market driven medium, with no governmental regulation.' Because the Internet is a decentralised medium he claimed it would be impossible to censor it, so it was better to not interfere at all. His attitude toward the problems associated with lack of regulation, such as undesirable content and lack of protection of privacy and children, is that government should, 'Empower people to protect themselves.' He states that parents need to be 'empowered to protect children' from harmful content, such as sex industry sites, because 'the government can't be involved' in this role (Magaziner, 10 September 1999).

Although it is not publicly stated, the US government clearly adopted a policy of non-interference with the sex industry to enable it to be the pioneer of online commerce. Part of the decision of non-interference is reflected in the decrease in Federal prosecutions of violations of obscenity law. Since 1993, there has been a steady decline in the number of obscenity prosecutions. In 1993 there were 32 prosecutions; 1994, 27; 1995, 21; 1996, 19; and 1997, six. This drop is an 86 percent decline in the enforcement of obscenity law. Even the worst images, such as bestiality and torture have not been prosecuted.

Representatives of the sex industry in the United States think that the Clinton administration is friendly to their activities. In 1998, Paul Fishbein, publisher of Adult

Video News commented, 'It's a great time to be an adult retailer because sex sells and the consumer wants sexually oriented material every day' (Roemhildt, 5 November 1998). David Schlessinger, from Vivid Videos, the largest producer of pornographic videos in the US said, 'President Clinton is a total supporter of the industry, and he's always been on our team. ... It's not that Clinton has been outwardly supportive of the adult industry, but rather that he hasn't tried to quash it' (Roemhildt, 5 November 1998).

Sandler's 'Rape Camp' was a small-scale operation. Already much larger businesses are selling live sex shows in the unregulated environment of the Internet. For example, one of the largest companies selling live sex shows Private Media Group, which operates by satellite out of Barcelona, Spain. It can broadcast to 1,000 simultaneous customer connections and it has recently signed a contract with an encryption-enabled satellite, so the content can be hidden (Morais, 14 June 1999).

'I wanted a niche that I knew would sell'

For years 'Asian bondage' has been a specialist market within hardcore pornography. Much of the sexual attractiveness of themes in pornography is the portrayal of racist and sexist stereotypes (Russell, 1993). Men's cruel domination of submissive Asian women became a staple of pornography as it grew into an industry in the US during the 1960s, the same period when US troops sexually exploited, and at times, raped women in Southeast Asia. Sandler's 'Rape Camp' was designed to fit this market niche.

Those who seek to legitimise the sex industry acknowledge 'niche markets' and see them as a sign of diversification of the sex industry and even sophistication of men's preferences.

The [sex] sector responds to the changing tastes and sophistication of customers
The arrangements for commercial sex have become more diversified, to cater to specific market niches. (Lim, 1998:4)

The broadcasting of the 'Rape Camp' by live videoconferencing or live video chat is a high tech niche in the online sex industry market. This technology enables live person-to-person video and audio transmission. The new Internet video technology was released in the late Spring of 1995 and by the end of the year, it was delivering strip shows and live sex shows to buyers over the Internet (White Pine and Cornell, 3 May 1995; *Wired Online*, December 1997). One of its early uses by sexual predators was the live transmission of the sexual abuse of girls (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 23 October 1997).

Viewers using live videoconferencing can either watch the broadcast without interacting or communicate and even direct the sex shows by keyboard, telephone, or audio transmission. Due to the nature of the Internet, the acts being videoed can take place across a city or on another continent from the viewer. Live videoconferencing brought about the electronic merger of pornography and prostitution to create online prostitution.

With more customers having access to high speed Internet connections, transcontinental transmission of live strip and sex shows in which the woman responds to directives by men is a significant and growing 'niche' in the market. According to

market research by the Internet Entertainment Group, a producer of live sex shows for the Internet, the buyers for live strip shows are 90 percent male, 70 percent living in the United States, and 70 percent are between ages 18 and 40 (Rose, December 1997).

Sandler claimed that he was just trying to help himself and Cambodia to get a piece of the multi-billion dollar business in the US and other countries. He claimed his 'Rape Camp' was a way to start a high tech business and move into the mainstream (*Deutsche Presse-Agentur*, 14 October 1999). Building a nascent business on the sexual exploitation of women and children is a common practice of individual Internet entrepreneurs, poor developing countries and the Internet industry in wealthy industrialised countries (Hughes, 2000). Many Internet entrepreneurs first went into business on the Internet through pornographic sites. For 20 years, new types of media technology owe their success to the sex industry, as men bought new technology, such as videocassette recorders (VCRs) in order to access newly delivered forms of pornography.

Part 4. The trade in women and children from men's perspective

'They're selling these women anyway in prostitute houses'

Although prostitution is illegal in Cambodia, it is widely tolerated. Selling women and girls in prostitution is a common practice. Some families sell young women and girls to brothel owners or procurers and traffickers, others believe the traffickers will find jobs for them in the cities. One survey found that 50 percent of women in brothels got there by being sold (UNICEF-Cambodia, February 1994). Of those sold into prostitution, 45 percent were tricked or deceived by pimps and 55 percent were sold by family members (40 percent), boyfriends (10 percent) or friends (5 percent) (Kang and Phally, 1995).

Buying women and girls in prostitution is a common practice among Cambodian men. Several sources report that 60 percent to 80 percent of Cambodian men visit brothels on a regular basis (*Agence France Presse*, 7 November 1999). According to Dy Narong Rith, the vice-president of National AIDS Authority in Cambodia, there are 20,000 to 30,000 men buying women and girls in prostitution each day, and only half of them use condoms (Kea, 9 September 1999). Men who buy women in brothels in Cambodia include government officials, police and military personnel. When Hun Sen, the Prime Minister of Cambodia, was confronted with this information, he replied that he could not control what the officials did when not at work.

Powerful men, such as high-ranking officials, often seek out the most extreme, exotic or transgressive experiences (*South China Post*, 8 March 2000). In Cambodia, a virgin is considered the most expensive commodity. The average price for a virgin girl is US\$300-\$700 (*Hong Kong Standard*, 30 November 1998). Some men justify buying a virgin girl as the best way to avoid AIDS. For the many children in prostitution in Cambodia, being sold as a virgin to be used for a few days or a week is their initiation into prostitution.

Numerous accounts by human rights groups have revealed that many women and

girls are literally enslaved in the sex industry. The men's writings reveal that they know, accept and exploit women and girls held in sexual slavery (Hughes, 1996). Some prostitution tourists come to Cambodia explicitly to buy and rape underage girls. One brothel that was raided was selling virgin girls to wealthy foreign men. Twelve girls, most of them from Vietnam, were rescued from the brothel (*Agence France Presse*, 6 July 2000).

Photographs from the Cambodian Sex Industry Guide were posted on Sandler's web site and included scenes of spanking young women and what appeared to be a scene from a gang rape—multiple men grabbing, holding and spreading the legs of a young woman. Sandler justified his online 'Rape Camp' by pointing out that since women were being bought and sold in brothels, his venture wasn't so different.

Men's internet accounts of their experiences as prostitution tourists

The 'Rape Camp' web site also invited men to visit Cambodia and gave advice for prostitution tourists.

When in Thailand or SE Asia check out Cambodia. We are just across the border and offer so much more. Unlike Thailand, if our prostitutes refuse your advances you can beat them into compliance. And they just cost 5.00 per hour. No rip offs here all beautiful ladies will BAM BAM. Not like Thailand where they are over priced and ALWAYS try to get out of the sex. Just slide your dick in real deep Hold still ... Look deep into her tearing eyes and see if you can feel an internal quiver. If you need a good deal on air tickets to Phnom Penh please e-mail our company here [Link to Dan Sandler's email.]. We will find you the best price available from our consolidation agents. On purchase of ticket(s) we will e-mail you a Cambodian Sex Industry Guide which will recommend brothels and give revealing insights into the institution of indentured prostitution in Cambodia. (Rape Camp Web Site, March 2000)

Internet newsgroups and Web sites became forums for men to report on their experiences buying women and girls in prostitution from all parts of the world. One man prefaced his own report by saying how helpful the information on the Internet had been for his own trip to Cambodia:

Information about Cambodia on the www.paranoia.com site proved very valuable on a recent trip I took there. The very-long 'Southeast Asia diary' of 9/29/96 was especially helpful. I thought I'd give something back by adding to the canon, updating where possible and hopefully making the trip a little easier for the next person. (Anonymous, February 1997)

One man's report on the Internet describes a typical scene in a brothel in Phnom Penh:

Eventually, I get over to Street 63 and start checking out the brothels. Downtown

these look like any other shop except that the metal security curtain that would be drawn and locked at night is closed together with about a two foot opening. When you walk in, it's unlit and you start talking to the mamasan and some of the girls. Others may be upstairs on the overlooking second level loft. (Anonymous, 29 September 1999)

The prostitution tourists who write on the Internet confirm the presence of Vietnamese women and girls in prostitution in Cambodia. The following excerpt is from a man's visit to Angkor Wat, a popular tourist area.

This place is full of taxi girls. The girls here are tops. All night for \$30. You can probably get it cheaper but i [sic] didn't bother. So I took home a beautiful 20 yo [sic] Vietnamese girl and shagged her 3 times and once more in the morning before she left. She was great fun ... Good Value. Plus it's so much fun to show her off in front of the other earnest foreign travelers at the hotel there to see the ruins. You can see the old men drooling and the ugly white girls scowling. Haha. (dazzler, 15 December 1999)

Another man reports from Phnom Penh:

I find mostly Vietnamese girls for sale, and after a couple of stops, settle on one to take back to my hotel a couple of hours for \$10. She's 18 and has a beautiful smooth face, but she's a little fat when I undress her, and has acne marks and scars all over her body. I have her a couple of times, nothing spectacular, before sending her off ... (Anonymous, 29 September 1996)

The following excerpts from prostitution tourists' writings about buying women and girls reveal their attitudes and practices.

It should be \$2-5 for an on-premises short time, depending on the girl's looks, how long she's been there, etc. I got two girls for \$7 once. DON'T PAY IN ADVANCE and don't be bashful about sending her back if she doesn't do as advertised or there's some major attitude shift or other problem. I see that a lot less often in Cambodia than Thailand, though. (Anonymous, February 1997)

After a few minutes ... I give in to their offers and choose one of the younger girls to go inside for a \$3 screw, the cheapest by far I've ever paid for sex. Her face was cute, her eyes round, and her skin brown. I undressed her and her skin was perfectly smooth all over. She had only a few fine hairs on her pussy, and you had to get close to notice them. We were in a partition not much larger than the bed, and beyond undoing my pants, chose not to get undressed. I had her on the bed, and when I finished, withdrew, and she removed my condom, dropping it to the open ground between the floor planks. I buttoned up, paid my \$3, and headed farther up the road. (Anonymous, 29 September 1996)

The men's reports reveal their racist, misogynist attitudes and their cruel treatment of the women and girls they bought on their trips.

As unfortunately seems to often be the case with young, stunningly beautiful girls (that know that they are so) they get very conditional and particular. In this one's case, although she didn't mind taking off her clothes or having the lights on, she didn't want to be kissed, or have her nipples sucked, or just generally be handled. And had a tendency to pout and turn away when you tried. In the end, I had her a couple of times, at night and the next morning. But the longer we were together the more she wanted to leave, and rather than hold her captive (the agreement with her mamasan was I could have her until noon), I let her go at 9:30, by then not caring much for her company either. (Anonymous, 29 September 1996)

The men who buy the women and girls in prostitution in Cambodia know that the women and girls are commodities that have been sold, although it appears to have little effect their decision to buy them, as indicated by this man's comment:

... you should be aware that there is a significant problem with 'selling' and 'buying' of girls for the houses/coffee shops in Cambodia and let that affect your conscious in whatever way it will. (Anonymous, undated)

'I hate American women. I hate those bitches ... they're out of line'

Sandler's misogyny and promotion of violence against women knows no boundaries—national, racial, on or offline. He said he hoped that his 'Rape Camp' bondage and torture service would incite violence against women in the USA. In fact, Asian bondage pornography does promote violence. An anti-pornography activist testified in a public hearing that Asian-American women reported to her that they had been raped after the men told them had used pornography with Asian women (Transcript, 16 March 1992).

In Sander's invitation for men to come to Cambodia as prostitution tourists, he encourages violence against the white women there also.

Cambodia the land of impunity. No stalking laws here. If you see some white bitch doing aid work in the provinces ... it doesn't involve us. It is just a foreign matter. Go for it! In our country a female must serve a man on request. Go to the _____ Bar at _____ street. Most of the foreign aid and NGO ladies are dirt broke. They will except [sic] a drink from anyone. A motto driver told me that for 30 dollars they would slip a chick 10 tabs of Ecstasy and drop the girl off anywhere you like. Rapecamp recommends the trash pits a few kilometers from the _____. There is plenty of bondage and forced encounters. You can make these girls do any disgusting thing you like or want to try. If you want piss in there [sic] mouths. (Sex Tourism Cambodian Style, March 2000)

Part 5. Women's and girls' experience of sexual exploitation and its effects

'They have to have sex with 10 men a day and get AIDS'

According to several reports women and girls in brothels in Cambodia have sex with 7 - 15 men per day (Indradevi Association, January 2000). In these encounters and in the process needed to force the women and girls into those sessions, the women and girls in prostitution are subjected to the most inhumane abuses, such as beatings with wires and sticks, electric shock, torture with acid, confinement in locked rooms, forced intake of drugs, forced sex, even during menstruation or illness, surgical procedures to restore the hymen to recreate 'virginity,' rape by local authorities and male brothel owners, forced household labor when not being used in the brothel, beatings for non-compliance to rules and demands of any sort, and lack of adequate food and rest (Human Rights Task Force on Cambodia, 1995, Cambodian Women's Crisis Center, 1999). The rooms the women and girls live in are narrow, dark, unhygienic, and foul smelling. They usually are not permitted to contact their relatives (Indradevi Association, January 2000).

Physicians for Human Rights conducted a study on the psychological harm to women and girls in prostitution in Cambodia. Wendy Freed, author of report, states that the girls and young women 'endure the most serious violations of human rights and daily face the risk of HIV infection with no means of protection. Their very physical and psychological survival is at risk' (Freed, 1997:1).

The trauma of prostitution is described.

Sexual trauma is unique from other forms of trauma. It is a violation of the most intimate and personal aspect of the self. One's own body becomes the setting in which the atrocities are perpetrated. For the young women living in a brothel, the sexual violations take place inside the tiny cubicle that is their only private living space. There is no safe haven for them. ... When an individual has been beaten into submission, has become passive and accepting of what is done to her because she is a captive, then any sexual encounter she has is a rape. Even if she has worked hard to attract the customer, because she has no right to refuse consent, she is being raped. Women and children ... are rendered helpless, they feel damaged and degraded, their trust is betrayed, and their view of themselves and the world is altered. (Freed, 1997:24)

The women and girls in prostitution suffer the same effects as other survivors of sexual assault and abuse. They feel shame for what was done to them and often blame themselves, as if they are responsible for what others have done to them. The Physicians for Human Rights study found that the women and girls suffered in many ways.

Many of these young women reported depression, hopelessness, inability to sleep, nightmares, poor appetite, and a sense of resignation. Many appeared sad, subdued, withdrawn and ashamed. They suffer grief for many losses: the loss of freedom, of

childhood, of innocence, and of virginity. They have lost a sense of safety, and of trust in the people most important to them. ... Many young women expressed high levels of fear and anxiety. Their greatest fear was of beatings and physical punishment by the brothel owners. The fear of HIV/AIDS was always present. (Freed, 1997, p.27-28)

Pimps, such as Sandler, and perpetrators who buy women and children usually claim the women and girls consent to being in prostitution and even to being tortured and abused. The claim of consent is also featured in arguments for official recognition of the sex industry and legalised prostitution. In her report, Freed describes the effects of captivity on young women and girls and explains the behaviours that comprise what appear to be consenting behaviours.

The young women have been in captivity for a period of weeks to months or years. Initially there is shock and disbelief. Many young women describe not being able to believe that they had been sold. ... Once they realize that in fact they are sold, they fight the brothel owner's demand that they accept customers. Refusal leads to beatings, being locked in a room, and going without food. This persists until the young women give up and realize that indeed they are trapped and have no options. ... At some point in this process, the young woman becomes submissive in order to avoid further beatings and torment; her 'spirit is broken.' She surrenders, becomes resigned and accommodates to the circumstances of captivity. Autonomy, self-agency, control or influence over one's fate are no longer possible. ... As people find the best way to survive, some of the behaviours may raise questions if viewed out of context. For example, the young women's flirtatiousness, seeking out clients, and getting clients to feel pity or love for them represent strategies aimed at enhancing their survival. If they accept customers they will not be beaten. If they bring in more income they may pay off their debt more quickly. If they elicit pity or love from their customers, they will be treated less harshly. (Freed, 1997, p.28-29)

The 'sex' that women and girls have in prostitution is really sexual assault and rape with all the traumatic consequences associated with it. The women and girls trafficked and sold into brothels must find ways to cope with an average of 10 unwanted assaults each day.

Prostitution as a death sentence

In addition to ongoing trauma, for many women and girls, prostitution is a death sentence. According to the World Health Organisation, Cambodia has the worst AIDS epidemic of any country in Asia (*Agence France Presse*, 2 December 1999). The epidemic has only been a decade in the making. Prior to the 1990s, Cambodia was a closed country and prostitution was suppressed. In 1991 the UN Peacekeeping troops arrived, bringing a more open country and HIV. Prime Minister Hun Sen is quoted as saying the UN's longest lasting legacy in Cambodia was AIDS (Richburg, 14 August 1998).

A Cambodian Ministry of Health Survey in 1998 found that 40 percent of women in prostitution—approximately 11,000 women and girls—were HIV positive (*Business News Review—Cambodia*, 14 December 1998). The study also found that 20 percent of women who work in bars--'beer promoters'—who often engage in prostitution are HIV positive. At the end of 1999, an estimated 200,000 people in Cambodia were infected with HIV, and 50 percent of women in prostitution were HIV positive (*Agence France Presse*, 2 December 1999).

The women and girls from Vietnam are especially hard hit by HIV/AIDS. Fifty percent of Vietnamese women being trafficking to Cambodia become infected with HIV. In Vietnam, the spread of HIV is partially attributed to thousands of HIV infected women returning to Vietnam from Cambodia (*Agence France Presse*, 2 December 1999; Thao, 30 December 1999). Giang Province in Vietnam has 13 percent of the country's women in prostitution. Approximately 20 percent of them are infected with HIV, a rate four times higher than other regions. Most of the women in prostitution in this region were formerly in Cambodia (*Asia Intelligence Wire*, 18 January 2000).

As is often the case, women in prostitution are blamed for the spread of HIV. One news article described women in prostitution as 'teeming dirt alleyways and in the bars and brothels of Phnom Penh ... at the forefront of what health care professionals warn is an emerging AIDS catastrophe unlike any seen outside of sub-Saharan Africa' (Richburg, 14 August 1998). Public attention is usually focused on the women as the vectors of HIV/AIDS. Seldom is attention focused on who infects the women or the role men play in spreading the virus.

Sandler accurately stated the situation for women in prostitution in Cambodia, but he seemed to be implying that the women wouldn't get HIV/AIDS from the rape and torture acted out for his pay-per-view broadcasts. As is often the case with pornography and especially pornography on the Internet, there is a sense of suspended reality, as if normal laws of nature don't apply. Sandler said that women could get AIDS from being in a brothel, but implied wouldn't happen if the acts of prostitution were being videoed and broadcast over the Internet.

Part 6. Law Enforcement and Legalisation

'Most foreign nationals held on sex related charges have so far bribed their way to freedom'

Since 1992, Cambodia has had an anti-trafficking law, but it has only been used in limited ways (Indradevi Association, January 2000). Corruption and lack of political will seem to be the largest barriers. Brothel raids frequently find enslaved women and girls (*Business News Review*, 26 April 1999). From 1998 to mid-1999, there were 72 police raids on brothels, in which 57 pimps were arrested, 558 women and 135 girls were rescued, of whom 442 were Cambodian, the rest Vietnamese (*Business News Review-Cambodia*, 12 July 1999). Occasionally, perpetrators are tried under their home country's law, as in 1998, when John Arthur Lee, an Australian, became one of

the first men prosecuted under Australia's anti-child prostitution tourism law. He was accused of having sex with a child in Cambodia and possessing child pornography following his eight-week visit to Cambodia in 1997 (AAP, 22 April 1999).

Corruption of police, military and politicians in Cambodia is a serious problem. Many traffickers and brothels owners pay bribes to officials or officials themselves are the owners of brothels. As a result of corruption, police raids on brothels are often only for public show and the women and girls rescued are returned to the brothel owners or pimps. One woman reported that she was arrested three times by police, but each time the pimp bought her back from the police. She reported, 'When the police arrested me, I didn't get to go to an aid agency. They just extorted money from us' (AAP, 5 March 1998).

Traffickers, pimps and officials seem to be able to buy, sell and even kill women with impunity in Cambodia. In 1998, a powerful trafficker, brothel owner and pimp in Poipet, Banteay Meanchey Province beat a young woman from one of his brothels to death in front of twelve witnesses. After another woman escaped and reported the murder, the owner, Meach Bunrith, was arrested, but three months later was released and charges dropped because of lack of evidence. Human Rights Watch investigated this case and found that Bunrith is one of the biggest traffickers of women to Thailand, with a network of procurers operating throughout Cambodia. He also has powerful military backing and off-duty, but uniformed gendarmes and soldiers work as armed guards at his brothel (Human Rights Watch, 1999). In February 1999, a national police official shot and killed a waitress in a karaoke bar after she refused to have sex with him. Although his identity was widely known, he was not arrested and many expressed the belief that his high-ranking position would protect him (*Deutsche Presse-Agentur*, 10 February 1999).

In September 1999, following the arrest and deportation of over 200 illegal immigrants from China, one high ranking official alleged that other government officials were involved in human smuggling, although he refused to name those involved (*Reuters*, 23 September 1999).

In addition, perpetrators frequently escape arrest or prosecution. In 1999, two men, one from England and another from Switzerland, arrested for the sexual abuse of children bribed their way out of police custody and left the country. Later the same year, Dan Sandler escaped prosecution for trafficking and sexual exploitation charges through assistance from the US embassy. In July 2000 when a brothel where underage virgins were being sold to wealthy foreigners was raided, no arrests were made of the men or the owners of the brothel. And in June 2000, a Swiss man charged with child sexual abuse was granted permission to live at home while awaiting trial (*Agence France Presse*, 6 July 2000).

Under Hun Sen's regime, corruption is reported to be systemic and Cambodia has become a center for criminal activity. The result is pervasive theft, money laundering and increased prostitution and trafficking of women and children to and from Cambodia (Tith, 2 October 1998). Along with the sex industry, human trafficking in Asia is a significant source of money used in money laundering (*Agence France Presse*, 4 February 2000). Cambodia is a favoured transit country for trafficked women because forged identity documents and passports are easier to get and less expensive

than in other countries (Watkin, 3 October 1999).

In addition to lack of police and political will to intervene in trafficking and sexual exploitation of women and girls, a survey conducted by the Cambodian National Council for Children in 1999 found that prevention of trafficking was not on the agendas of most non-governmental organisations. This inattention was attributed to lack of initiative and resources and to the influence of powerful people who controlled the sex industry (*Business News Review-Cambodia*, 12 July 1999).

'We're at the point of discussing legalisation of prostitution as a way of controlling and protecting the rights of women'

In response to the rise in trafficking and the HIV infection rate, there have been calls for the legalisation of prostitution as a way to put into place health regulations, regulate the trade and supposedly prevent the most severe violence. In Cambodia, prostitution is illegal, but corruption and tolerance mean that prostitution and trafficking go unchecked, except for the occasional raid or intervention when an extreme case cannot be ignored. Some officials oppose legalisation, but support tolerance and enforcement of health regulations (Fontaine, 3 August 1999). The main concern is the spread of HIV and protecting the general health of the public.

The rights and well being of the women and girls in prostitution are frequently ignored. There is little evidence that legalisation improves the circumstances for women in prostitution. Most important, legalisation ignores the nature of what prostitution is, what men do to women in prostitution and the consequences for women. There is evidence that legalised prostitution in the Netherlands, Germany and Australia has resulted in increased trafficking of women to meet the increased demand for women in prostitution and an accompanying increase in organised crime (Schloenhardt, 10 November 1999).

Conclusion

As shocking as the 'Rape Camp' was, an examination of numerous aspects of the case reveals that these practices of sexual exploitation are common in Cambodia and on the Internet. The most unusual aspect of this case may be that Sandler was arrested. The cause of his arrest may have been his lack of sophistication and discretion in discussing his activities. He made the mistake of using the pornographic language of the sex industry to describe his venture, instead of the more palatable euphemisms, such as 'adult entertainment,' 'sex worker,' and 'entertainer.' He probably would be operating his 'Rape Camp' right now, if he hadn't bragged about it to a local paper and got more protection from corrupt local officials.

The burgeoning Internet industry owes its success in no small part to the sex industry. Consequently, it praises and protects it whenever needed. The policy of non-interference with the growth of Internet commerce and prevailing uncritical

views on the sex industry are contributing to the escalation of the global sexual exploitation of women and children. What can be done to women and be transmitted over the Internet seems to have no limits. The online sex industry is a negative product of globalisation, resulting from the intersection of free trade, high technology, and the sexual exploitation of women.

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