

# *Pimp-Controlled Prostitution*

*Still an Integral Part of Street Life*

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*Street-level prostitution is comprised of both pimp-controlled prostitution and independent entrepreneurial prostitution. Although much of the more recent research has focused on the latter group, this work reports on a qualitative study designed to understand pimp-related violence to women involved in pimp-controlled prostitution. In addition, this work contributes to the understanding of the relationships between pimps and prostitutes, the roles that each play, and the social rules of the business. Because these women constitute a significant number of those involved in street-level prostitution, more research is called for that focuses on pimp-controlled prostitution.*

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*A pimp is one who controls the actions and lives off the proceeds of one or more women who work the streets. Pimps call themselves "players" and call their profession "the game." The context in which this subculture exists is called "the life" (Milner & Milner, 1972). Social scientists of the 1960s and 1970s devoted a significant amount of research energies toward exposing and understanding pimp-controlled prostitution within street-level prostitution (Goines, 1972; Heard, 1968; Milner & Milner, 1972; Slim, 1967, 1969). Street-level prostitution entails sexual acts for money or for barter that occur on and off the streets and include sexual activities in cars and motels, as dancers in gentlemen's clubs, massage parlor work, truck stops, and crack house work (Williamson, 2000). It represents that segment of the prostitution industry where there is the most violence.*

Current prostitution-related research on women focuses heavily on the independent woman's involvement in prostitution (Alexander, 1987; McKeganey & Barnard, 1996; Miller, 1995; Scambler & Scambler, 1997). Parallel to this undertaking is a body

of works devoted more specifically to the prostitute's present involvement with crack cocaine (see Inciardi, Lockwood, & Pottieger, 1993; Maher, 1996; Maher, & Curtis, 1992; Miller, 1995; Ratner, 1993; Shedlin, 1990). This recent shift toward emphasizing independent prostitution overshadows the continual existence of pimp-controlled prostitution (Williamson, 2000).

Viewing street-level prostitution as a combination of both pimp-controlled prostitution and independent entrepreneurial prostitution is probably more representative of the phenomenon of street work. This work begins to fill the widening gap in the literature by focusing on pimp-controlled prostitution. This study aims to examine pimp-related violence toward women involved in street-level prostitution within the context of pimp-controlled prostitution. To understand contemporary pimp-controlled prostitution and, more specifically, pimp-related violence, it is necessary to examine the type of relationships between pimps and prostitutes, the roles that each play in the business, and the social rules that accompany the lifestyle.

### **PIMP-CONTROLLED PROSTITUTION: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

Despite the steady increase in independent prostitution (Flowers, 1998; Miller, 1993), research indicates that pimp-controlled prostitution is still a reality for some women involved in street-level prostitution (Barry, 1995; Giobbe, 1993; Flowers, 1998; Silbert & Pines, 1982; Williamson, 2000). In a study by Giobbe (1993), 53% of women entered prostitution with a pimp, and more than 80% became involved with pimps over time. Similarly, almost half of the women involved in the Council for Prostitution Alternatives Program in Portland, Oregon, in 1990 reported being involved with pimps (Barry, 1995). Even more recently, 42% of women involved in prostitution in California's Mary Magdelene Project (2001) reported having worked or were working for a pimp.

Most researchers agree that control of prostituted women by pimps involves understanding the "wants" of these women and controlling those wants through the use of threats, intimidation, and violence (Bromfield & Juan, 1994; Hunter, 1994; Milner & Milner, 1972; National Center for Missing & Exploited Children,

1992; Slim, 1969). Although some have noted that customer-related violence is an important risk factor associated with street-level prostitution (Barnard, 1993; Miller, 1993; Miller & Schwartz, 1995; National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, 1992; San Francisco Task Force, 1996; Silbert & Pines, 1982), according to research literature pimp-related violence remains a viable force that negatively affects some women's health and well-being. Those women who continue to involve themselves with pimps can expect to be subjected to controlling practices and suffer violent treatment that has been described as frequent, pervasive, and brutal (Giobbe, 1993; Williamson, 2000). Sixty-six of the 200 women involved in the Silbert and Pines study (1982) reported being abused by pimps. Similar reports of women being assaulted by their pimps have been reported by Barry (1995), Giobbe (1993), Johnson (1992), and Williamson (2000).

Runaways without adequate food, clothing, shelter, or other basic needs are particularly vulnerable to pimp influence (Flowers, 2001; Janus, & Burgess, 1986; Johnson, 1992; McCormack, Janus, & Burgess, 1986; National Center for Missing & Exploited Youth, 1992). However, adult women become involved with pimps for a variety of reasons, ranging from pursuing emotional needs to meeting financial needs (Barry, 1995; Holsopple, 1998; Silbert & Pines, 1982).

## METHOD

Our method used for understanding the traditional pimp-prostitute phenomenon was through qualitative research, specifically, the Glaserian approach to grounded theory methodology (see Glaser, 1978).

Information regarding the traditional pimp-prostitute phenomenon was obtained from a larger study that included both independent and pimp-controlled women. Criteria for inclusion in the study were women 18 years of age or older who were no longer involved in prostitution activities. Participants were selected through a process of purposive, or snowball, sampling by word of mouth. In total, 21 former street prostitutes from the Midwest were interviewed. Respondents ranged in age from 18 to 35. Of the total sample, 13 were Appalachian White women, 7 were African American women, and 1 was a Hispanic woman. The

time spent in prostitution ranged from 3 months to 13 years. From this total sample, 6 of the women had pimps and 13 women worked independently. The small number of women found by the researcher who worked for pimps and were willing to be interviewed may underscore the limited access researchers have to this population and hence the importance of research in this area.

Of the 6 women who are the focus for this report, 5 were Appalachian White and 1 was Hispanic. They ranged in age from 18 to 28. For this subgroup, the time spent in prostitution ranged from 4 to 8 years.

The researcher spent 6 months on the streets, 3 days per week, learning the culture, language, and geographic layout of the streets. The researcher learned where the dope houses were, who the pimps were, and how to identify a customer from a typical passerby.

Subsequently, in-depth, face-to-face interviews were conducted with 6 participants who were involved in pimp-controlled prostitution, and one interview was conducted with a pimp. Each interview lasted approximately 2 hours. Data were analyzed line by line. Codes were developed from the raw data. Codes were collapsed into larger themes. By connecting relevant themes, the researcher was able to develop the theoretical propositions that supported the subsequent theory of the lived experience of pimp-controlled prostitution.

In addition to these interviews, added interviews were conducted with some of the participants for the purpose of member checking, a process of clarification for qualitative methods, and to gather any additional missing data. Interviews were taped and transcribed verbatim. In addition to the member-checking techniques, the researcher engaged a group of social work experts in the area of street prostitution to critique the methodology and to provide guidance toward accurate interpretation of the data. This gathering is known as peer debriefing for the purpose of challenging the researcher's interpretations to increase the accuracy of the study findings. Both member checks and peer debriefing were used to enhance the credibility of the study.

Study participants were asked to respond to one central question, "What has been your experience in prostitution? Tell me stories about what you remember happening. Include your thoughts, feelings, and perceptions, as you remember them.

Continue to describe each experience until you feel it is complete." Additional questions were asked for the purpose of clarification only, not to provide a direction to the interview. Consistent with qualitative methodology, participants guided the interview process.

## FINDINGS

### PIMPING: RULES OF THE GAME

Pimps involved in prostitution activities refer to this sector of the underground economy as "the game." Players, pimps, and macks are those at the top of the pimping game. To these men in power, it is a game in which they control and manipulate the actions of others subordinate to them. Monica, a prostituted woman for 3 years, explains,

It's all about the game. Nothing in the game changes, but the name.  
It's all about getting that money. Some women have pimps that they give the money to, some are just out there on their own.  
(Monica)

A player or pimp has a particular manner or style of playing the game. The pimping game requires strict adherence to the rules. The idea of a game parallels the formal economy in that one can be said to be in a game; for example, he is in the real estate game. Pimps are also said to "have" game. To have game is to possess a certain amount of charisma and smooth-talking, persuasive conversation toward women.

There are several rules that one must be willing to follow to be a successful and professional pimp. Massi, a "bottom bitch"<sup>1</sup> to a pimp who boasts having six women in his stable,<sup>2</sup> outlines the rules for pimping. The most paramount rule in the pimping game is "the pimp must get paid" (Massi). This means there cannot be any "shame in your game" (Massi); one must require and, if necessary, demand the money without shame. Second, any successful pimp will remember that the game is "sold and not told." This means that pimps are expected to sell it to a prospective prostitute that he wants to occupy his stable without revealing his entire game plan. To do this, he has to develop his game or "his rap."

These consist of a series of persuasive conversations similar to poetic and rhythmic scats that are philosophical in nature and ideological about life and making money. For Sonya, it was the combination of his rap and her need to feel loved by someone.

For me, it was wanting to be loved and liked the words that was said. And you know, the nice things you got. I have two beautiful children that I wanted to take care of, and I guess that's the kind of hold they have on you. (Sonya)

Philosophically, pimps believe all capitalistic pursuits are parallel to pimping. According to pimp philosophy, in life there are two types of people, pimps and ho's. It is up to the individual to choose which role to play in the game. A pimp says to a ho, "Hmmm you look nice . . . you gonna make me some money," and he puts her out there on the track the way an owner puts a horse out on a racetrack. When the ho has produced all she can for the pimp, she is discarded and the pimp finds himself a new ho to make him money. To pimps, this is the basic recipe for all money-making ventures, both legal and illegal. With this philosophy in mind, a pimp believes one should either be the best ho she can be and get to a point where she can pimp herself or choose to be a pimp and pimp others.

The third and final ingredient for successful pimping is that a pimp must have a woman or women that want to see him on top. He is looking for dedication. He is looking for someone who wants to see her man in fine clothes and driving fine cars. His success or lack of success is a reflection on her. If her man is not looking his best, then she is not a very successful ho, and this will make for an embarrassing impression. As a prostituted woman, she must work very hard to earn his respect and his love and to keep him achieving the best in material possessions. He in return invites her into his underground social network with the sense of belonging it brings and the promise of material possessions it provides.

You just, you just take control of the tricks. You know what you gotta do to make your man happy. . . . Some prostitutes are out there for a man, for a pimp. We're out there bustin' our ass to get our money for a man. (Sonya)

I worked for months to get my man into a new Cadillac. (Sandra)

The most well-respected pimps are called "macks." They are at the top of their game and employ many hardworking and successful prostitutes. Dominating the pimp scene are "players" who have an average stable of women, are well respected, and make a good living. Lowest in the hierarchy of pimping are tennis shoe pimps. These pimps may have one or possibly two prostitutes on the street. They are seen as least successful in the game, and unlike more successful pimps, they may do drugs and allow their women to do drugs. In this study, 6 of the women previously had pimps ranging from tennis shoe pimps to players.

#### TURNING A WOMAN OUT

A pimp's chance at gaining a woman's attention is by looking good, smelling good, flashing his possessions, and presenting himself as someone who can counter boredom with both adventure and excitement. This is rarely enough, however, to get a woman to prostitute herself. A pimp must be skilled at assessing a woman's needs and vulnerabilities. Understanding how to exploit those vulnerabilities and fulfill those unmet needs will enable him to prostitute her. Reese, a player in Toledo, Ohio, explains how he appeals to what women need:

I tell her "Now, you need to leave them drugs alone" and I get her cleaned up. She may come here, on drugs or not on drugs, with nothing. I mean nothing. Dirty, strung out. Some of them don't even have a social security card or state ID, nothing. I ask 'em if they want something better, you know, you can make some money. I'll set you up right. Let you have a few things in your life. You wanna have nice clothes, some good jewelry, be able to have your own place, maybe a little car to drive around in? (Reese)

A pimp offers hope for the future, and women see this as an opportunity to be financially successful. During the time a prostitute is entering the profession of street-level prostitution, the pimp is said to be "turning her out" or has "turned her out" on the streets to make a profit.

I knew this guy, and he brought me here and turned me out on the streets. He was a pimp. . . . The first day, I was scared, but I got the money. And once I seen the money, I mean, my first day I made \$600 in a 3-hour period. (Sonya)

Women involved with a pimp in this study were typically not engaged in drug abuse. Pimps realize that crack is the competition and frown upon any drug abuse in their stable. However, 2 women involved with tennis shoe pimps indulged in drug use along with their pimp.

Pimp-controlled women in the study were told they were beautiful and that men wanted them—that they desired them so much, they would pay hard-earned money for them. In the words of Massi, the message is conveyed early in the relationship that women are literally “sitting on a gold mine. If they could work the game good enough, the game would work for them.”

Although pimps never guaranteed emotional or financial security, the potential for success inspired women to test the waters in this new life. There was a sense of belonging that women longed for, a sense of exciting hope for the future, an adventure that would take them from their meager existence into a life with a man who told them they had special skills, intelligence, and beauty. In return for his attention, protection, and love, she would be required to work to bring their dream into reality. Reese speaks in terms of “goals” as he works his women:

I have them set little goals for themselves. Say they want to buy something they want; well, we would set a little goal. Say you make this certain amount of money: Keep working and I'll set aside a little at a time and you'll have what you want. Say if she wants a little piece a car, she can work and I'll make sure that she gets that car. So I try to have them set goals for themselves, something they're working for.

Elsie, the product of repeated incest and a child of the foster care system, ran away and at age 15 became involved with Reese.

I was walking, and a guy, a pimp, just pulled up along side of me and told me I was what he was looking for and like he told me some different things that made me feel good. And . . . he asked what I'm interested in and if I'm interested. . . . he'll take care of me and buy me this and whatever I want. And he doesn't ask for much, so I did it. (Elsie)

Over time, as women learn the game and have become proficient in playing, they are known as thoroughbreds. Thoroughbreds are professionals in the prostitution industry and are



responsible for maintaining the market rates in the profession. A thoroughbred is able to handle customers, command money, and conduct business effectively and efficiently to maximize profits.

When you're turned out, you're just out there. You don't know what you're doing. You're just being turned out for a new job. You're being trained for it. And then once you get down the steps, you know, you become a thoroughbred. You don't let the guy take control of you, you take control of it. (Sonya)

### FREE ENTERPRISE AND CHOOSING UP

Pimps understand the meaning of business over personal ventures, that is, marketing a product and investing in your product first so your product can return profits. Thus, there is a honeymoon period or courting time between pimps and prostitutes. This is the time in which the pimp "runs his game." This may last 1 day or several months.

He progressively led up to the fact that that's what he wanted. You know, he didn't come out that night when I met him and tell me, "This is what I am. This is what you need to do" . . . I think they really feel like they have to gain your trust before they can dump something like that on you. We spent a lot of time together. I mean . . . we would go out to eat, go to the movies, and we did, you know, normal couple things. But . . . in my head I'm just thinking it's just normal couple things, but he's thinking that he's winning . . . that he's gonna win and I'm gonna end up doing what he wanted. And he was right. (Tracey)

Pimps understand the meaning of capitalism in that it is a pimp's prerogative to entice any woman away from another pimp. It is viewed as a component of free enterprise. Therefore, other pimps are free to attempt to seduce a woman away from her current pimp and into his stable for his financial gain. He may do this without retaliation from the current pimp, as the street rule is "bros before Ho's" (Massi). The woman being approached is instructed not to respond to the seducing pimp's advances. She is never to make eye contact with another pimp. If she does, then she is "out of pockets," a term referring to a woman who puts a pimp's money at risk, and she is subject to "being broke," meaning physically reprimanded. On the other hand, the seducing pimp may

also choose to “break her” and take all her money. These rules vary in situations where a woman is prohibited from making eye contact with a pimp to situations in which she is not allowed to make eye contact with any African American male.

I mean, most of the time, if they’re a true pimp, they’re not gonna play like that. You know, they’ll harass you and you mainly just turn away and look in the other direction or whatever and try not to come in contact with them, because if you do, then they do what you call “break you,” they take your money. . . . He’s allowed to harass you as much as he wants. But if I don’t talk back to him, then I’m cool. But if I’m “out of pockets” that means you’re doing something that you ain’t suppose to be doing. You know, some pimps will beat you or you go through a lot of stuff. . . . They’re in control. You do what they say. (Sonya)

In the event that a woman is dissatisfied with her current pimp, the appropriate way to switch pimps is to make a definite decision and “choose up.”

You choose up. And if you’re with a pimp and you want to go with another pimp, you have to put the money in the other pimp’s hand and let your man know, you know, you’re leaving and going with somebody else. . . . I’ve been with three. (Elsie)

Reese explains the transaction between pimps when a woman chooses up:

If he comes to me like a man and tells me “That’s my ho now,” and she done gave him the money, then that’s cool. Leave your ho clothes here and go. You can take your regular clothes, the clothes I bought you to go see your family now and then, but you leave the ho clothes. But if she leaves here and is gone and then don’t come back with my money and she been out there making money and giving it to him, “Nigga, that’s *my* money you got.”

#### **PIMP AND PROSTITUTE RELATIONSHIPS IN THE GAME**

Each woman in the study had a pimp who set the rules, controlled their actions, and took their earnings. Most reported they were infatuated with their pimp, but not always. Women involved with a tennis shoe pimp, a man who had only one or two women, were more likely to consider themselves in love and

defined the involvement with their pimp as a relationship. The more corporate the pimp, for instance, a player possessing three or more women, the less likely it was for women to describe their feelings as love or to define their interaction as a relationship. Women's feelings were instead described as ones of infatuation, admiration, and loyalty. The more women involved with a pimp, the less probable it became for each woman to achieve a status that allowed for the comforts of his affections, time, and attention. It was more likely that each became a part of his pimp family or stable that was made up of many women. This type of arrangement between women is known as a "wife-in-law" situation, in which each prostituted woman is a member of the family that works for the benefit of the same pimp. They are known as wife-in-laws to each other. However, some women did not tolerate such arrangements and moved on, whereas others welcomed the prestige of being with a successful pimp and willingly took on the challenge and responsibilities as a prostituted woman under his direction.

Its just like when a pimp goes out and gets another girl and she's in the family. She's whoring for him like you are. Like a wife-in-law is what they call it. Sometimes you just getting tired of it and you know cheating on me and you know the wife-in-law stuff where you know the wife-in-law is another girl that is working for him, and I just couldn't handle all that. (Tonya)

Wife-in-laws may be responsible for ongoing training of recent inductees. However, the availability of wife-in-law training depends on how large the stable and how corporate the pimp. A bottom bitch, or number one lady, may also be required to work but may only use her mouth or hands when working and to save intercourse for her pimp. She may live with her pimp and may be required to train the new women joining his stable. Women may even drop off money to her after work in the event that their pimp is otherwise occupied.

I know about the game because I was [his] bottom bitch. I knew everything about hoeing, tricking, or whatever. I was with [him] for 8 years. He had women out here working their asses off. Wouldn't even ask him for money or nothing, not even \$5, thinking that's making him respect them more. (Massi)

The true talents of a pimp, however, are in his ability to keep his women happy, command money, and portray a deep mysterious and somewhat mean demeanor about him, one that conveys the message that he is not to be crossed. He is then said to be “cold-blooded or icy,” able to turn off any warm feelings and loving affection in exchange for certain emotional cruelty and physical harm. Two famous and successful pimps, Iceberg Slim and Ice Tea, were said to be so cold blooded they called themselves “Ice” to let everyone know their capacity for heartlessness.

He would just snap. Like his whole expression would change. One day, he came to my motel room to beat my ass. And made it clear that he came over to beat on me. He said he had some extra time on his hands, that he didn't have anything to do, so he wanted me to know that he knew I was thinking about doing something stupid. And I was too. I was thinking about leaving him again. The last time I left him, I ended up in Cleveland. . . . He beat me until I blacked out. . . . But he was like that. He could be so much fun one time, silly and playing around, and the next minute, he could be something else, somebody you don't want to fuck with. (Massi)

A pimp's approach is never to cow down to his woman at any time. He cannot let love cloud his judgments concerning business. If he lets these weaknesses show, he will be left vulnerable and runs the risk of being less successful. Although pimps appear to be in control, in a sense every pimp becomes a whore to his prostitutes. The pimp rule is “purse first, ass last” (Massi). He may treat his ho's in loving ways in return for the amount of money he requested she bring him. She must pay for his love with her sheer tenacity to work and bring him the money. She must in turn request little emotionally and financially. Because of his generosity, he gives her what he thinks she needs.

**PIMP-RELATED VIOLENCE:  
PHYSICAL CONTROL OF WOMEN**

The extent to which women felt threatened by a pimp was, in part, a function of her evaluation of the likelihood that he will become violent. This threat had been realized by all of the women in the study. Pimp-related violence was sometimes unpredictable

and took on many forms. However, the most revealing form of pimp-related violence was immediate attack following a violation of the rules. One such violation is leaving the "ho stroll" or designated work area early without making one's daily quota.

Different pimps have different rules. I mean some of 'em set quotas with the girls, you have to make a certain amount of money before you can go home. . . . When I first started, I was bringing in a \$1,000 a day. (Tonya)

After it was found out that Debbie was holding back some money from her pimp, without hesitation she was quickly and brutally assaulted.

He ended up getting mad at me one day and punched me in my chest and cracked my rib. That was cracked, and all I could remember is that I couldn't breathe. I mean, I passed out. I was knocked out all day. I was unconscious. (Debbie)

Some pimps use violence as a means of discouraging freelance work and coercing money from women who work within pimp territory but not for the benefit of any pimp.

There was this guy that kept beatin' me in my head, telling me I was gonna pay him, and everytime he'd see me, if I didn't give him some money, he'd punch me in my forehead. (Cara)

In the instance that a woman is found to be "out of pockets," she is subject to being broke. Carol told of an incident when she took an unauthorized leave without the permission of her pimp.

When he caught me, he was like "I got you now," and he jumped out. We was in the projects. We were high as fuck off crack, me and Tony was. We were like "Oh, fuck." He was like "I got you now." He had a baseball bat, and Tony ran and left me. So, yes, I got the baseball bat, he beat me in my legs and told me "If you fall, bitch, I'm a hit you in your head and kill you." So I didn't fall, I just stood there and screamed and took it. The police came . . . and they asked if I was going to press charges, and I said, "No." My face was swelling, I looked liked a cabbage patch, I was horrible. (Carol)

### **PIMP-RELATED VIOLENCE: EMOTIONAL CONTROL OF WOMEN**

A pimp's success is dependent on arousing love and fear in his women. By giving his attention to more than one woman at the same time, he heightens both the love each woman desires all to herself and the fear that she may lose any part of it. However, the negative consequences of such arrangements may be jealousy and rivalry for his affections.

He had got back with the girl that he had kids by, which she was already a seasoned hooker. She hated me from the jump start. Since they were in that life, he made her deal with me. When she found out that I wanted him for me, she wanted to fight me every time she would see me and we did. . . . She hit me in the head with a beer glass, and I had stitches in my head. (Chris)

Relationships require a level of trust and a degree of vulnerability, and pimp-prostitute relationships are no different. Trust determines how vulnerable the person is willing to be. Without some degree of trust, interactions are limited to explicit contracts (Holmes, 1991), which is what prostitutes have with customers. "Trust involves coming to terms with the negative aspects of a partner, accepting or perhaps tolerating issues by buffering them in the broader context of the lifestyle" (Holmes, 1991, p. 79). Women take abuses from pimps in stride. They learn to cope with this relationship by not focusing on the abusive aspects for what they are but by instead encapsulating those aspects of their pimp that serve their needs for security and protection. Therefore, a pimp-prostitute relationship often lacks cognitive and behavioral consistency. What is believed and desired on the part of the prostitute and what actually happens in the relationship do not correspond and often require repeated leaps of faith on the part of the prostitute.

### **LEAVING PIMP-CONTROLLED PROSTITUTION**

Many factors prevent women from pursuing legal assistance. Often, women are fearful, intimidated by what may happen as a result of reporting, and may love their pimp despite his abuses. It

is likely that she may buy into the rules of the pimping game and blame herself for violating them. Women who have previously experienced the reluctance of law enforcement to take their claims about customer-related violence seriously are reluctant to take such risks where pimps are concerned.

I had this guy pull a gun on me, and he made me do things that I didn't want to do. . . . I ran to a gas station and called the police. The guy who worked at the gas station gave me his jacket to wear. All I had on was a shirt. I called the police and told them. They came. I described the guy to the police and showed them the spot. I told them what kind of car he had, what we was wearing, what he said, what he did, everything. They never even wrote anything down. They ran me for warrants, and when I didn't have any, they left. (Jerri)

Women who are fed up may choose to leave prostitution. The primary means for leaving pimp-controlled prostitution was escape.

I had gotten like four calls that day. And I hadn't seen him, so I had all the money on me and I just took it. I mean, none of my clothes, none of my nothing. I just took a cab to the bus station, and I went into Amtrak police and told them what was going on. He had his own driver, and he knew that when I didn't get in the driver's car, that something was up. I took a regular cab, and I went to Amtrak police and I knew that he was coming, so I told 'em what was going on. . . . And, um, then the Amtrak police . . . paid the cab driver to take me to the airport, and I caught a plane home. (Tracey)

## DISCUSSION

Using the definition of pimping as controlling and living off the proceeds of one or more women, the findings suggest that pimp-controlled prostitution is still an integral part of street-level prostitution for some women and girls. Just how many is difficult to determine, because pimp-controlled women and girls would be those most unlikely to be able to respond to requests for interviews. Pimp-controlled women in the study were reportedly subject to following the rules of the game. The old adage that "nothing in the game changes but the name" may be truer than not when viewing the dynamics of pimp-controlled prostitution. It is

clear that many of the themes identified in this study have appeared in varied form in earlier studies of the 1960s and 1970s (Goines, 1972; Heard, 1968; Milner & Milner, 1972; Slim, 1967, 1969). The important point is that although pimps and prostitutes may differ with the extent to which they apply and adhere to the rules, even allowing for the wide range of situational differences, this code of conduct, termed *pimpology*, is a common practice in this underground society and still exists today (Hughes, Hughes, & Messick, 1999; Milner & Milner, 1972; Owens & Shepard, 1998; Williamson, 2000).

On an interpersonal level, the power and control pimps maintain over women in their stable is akin to that used in abusive relationships. Just as pimps resemble batterers in intimate relationships (Giobbe, 1993), women working in pimp-controlled prostitution seem to be similar to those who are survivors of domestic violence. They often express feelings of love and admiration for the pimp, have their freedom and finances controlled, and may feel they somehow deserve the violence they are dealt. However, there are differences in terms of the cycle of violence. Domestic violence survivors will often express that they knew when the violence was about to occur as evidenced by the building up of tension in their mate before an explosive episode. Beatings and other forms of violence occurring among pimp-controlled women may not follow a familiar pattern and may instead occur by surprise.

Therefore, doing research with pimp-controlled women and girls is critical to our understanding of the dynamics involved in pimp-prostitute associations and to developing the means necessary to enable women to successfully escape pimp-controlled prostitution and perhaps avoid entering into it. This study points to the need for increased research involving women engaged in pimp-controlled prostitution.

In recent years, increases in independent entrepreneurial street-level prostitution have prompted a shift in the literature toward studies devoted to exposing and understanding this type of sex trading on the streets. It is important to remember that despite recent trends in research, women working in street-level prostitution may be either pimp-controlled or independent prostitutes or may vacillate between the two during their involvement in prostitution.



Wahab (1997) suggested a direct relationship between power and protection as it relates to the study of prostitution and who is likely to be placed under the social science microscope. Qualitative researchers typically negotiate access to the group they wish to study. One factor that determines whether the researcher will be blocked from the people he or she wishes to study is the gatekeeper involved and the level of control the gatekeeper has over both the group and the setting (Hammersley, 1992). Aside from the obvious illegality of prostitution and the fear of legal repercussions, pimps often represent that of a cautious gatekeeper. Outside of the presence of a pimp, women working the streets for pimps have limited time, set schedules, and often preset quotas (Milner & Milner, 1972; Williamson, 2000). Therefore, efforts to gain access to pimp-controlled women may present additional barriers not present with independent prostitutes who are on the streets. By not including pimp-controlled prostitutes in present studies, researchers may be misrepresenting the true character and total prevalence of street-level prostitution. This practice may obscure the continued existence of pimp-controlled prostitution and may produce an added shield of invisibility over this already hidden segment of street-level prostitution. The findings of this article challenge researchers to delve further into the often forgotten area of contemporary prostitution research, namely, pimp-controlled prostitution.

## NOTES

1. In a more corporate pimp family, the term *bottom bitch* refers to a woman who is the closest in rank to her pimp.
2. A *stable* is what a pimp calls a group of women that prostitute for him.

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