

GROUNDSWELL

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Groundswell of Responsibility

Tuesday, October 25, 2011 by jelliott [Responses](#)

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BY VALARIE KAUR AND JESSICA JENKINS

Reposted from the Huffington Post

It is a basic fact of the moral universe that children should not be sold for sexual exploitation. However, every day in America, thousands of minors are regularly manipulated, coerced, and forced in sex for money in the United States. Most are trafficked from within the United States, not far-off foreign lands. Many are as young as eleven or twelve. And many are sold on prominent Web sites such as Backpage.com, owned by Village Voice Media.

This morning, an unexpected coalition of faith and moral leaders – Mainline Protestants, Catholics, Muslims, Jews, Sikhs, Humanists, and Evangelical Christians – [published a full-page ad in the New York Times](#) calling upon Village Voice Media to shut down their adult services section. They amplify the opinion of [fifty-one U.S. Attorneys General](#) that Village Voice Media should follow Craigslist's example and take down the adult services section of Backpage.com because it is used as a prominent commercial platform for sex trafficking of girls and boys.

Today, we have an opportunity to [join the groundswell and ask Village Voice Media to do the right thing](#). As parents, aunts and uncles, brothers and sisters, and caretakers, we share a moral imperative to protect children from exploitation. But there are many children who we fail to protect. They are neglected, abused, abandoned. They grow up in tumultuous, unstable homes, bounce around in the foster care

system, and run away from home. Many of them are abused or cast out because they identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer. Many wind up on the street and seek temporary respite through alcohol and drugs. They become easy prey for greed-seeking adults who lure them into the sex industry with big promises of love, protection, and security, only to endure physical and sexual violence, disease, and isolation. They are robbed of their childhoods.

In nearly any other context, our legal system considers children under eighteen too young to consent to sex – they are treated as victims. But minors forced into sex work are routinely arrested, jailed and convicted by local law enforcement officials, while their pimps and adult customers are rarely punished. Incarceration and prosecution re-traumatizes them. Those who do eventually leave “the life” find themselves stymied by their long rap sheets.

Child sex trafficking is rooted in many other social injustices – poverty, homelessness, homophobia, racism, and violence against girls. The systemic forces perpetuating the exploitation of children are complex, so we need multiple approaches to stop it. We must insist that local, state and federal law enforcement collaborate to better identify victims of trafficking and to offer them safety and support, rather than criminalization, incarceration and further abuse. We must work harder to stop the cycles of abuse, violence and community disintegration that make children vulnerable to exploitation in the first place. And we must support organizations like Girls Educational and Mentoring Service (GEMS), who are already doing amazing work to empower and protect young victims of sex trafficking.

But that is not all we need to do. Web sites like Backpage.com legitimize the sex trafficking of minors by giving a prominent commercial platform to their pimps and adult customers. We need a groundswell to end this practice – a groundswell of people who share moral outrage that this violence is happening in our own backyards. This is not a conservative issue, or a liberal issue. This is about ending an unconscionable practice.

As moral outrage at economic injustice inspires mass protests, people are hungry for direct concrete solutions. In a country where the top one percent have as much income as the bottom 60 percent -- a level of inequality not seen since before the Great Depression – children are the ones who suffer most from gross inequality and social instability. We know we must do much more to end the structural inequalities and abuse at the root of the sex trafficking of minors, and even more to build a moral economy that honors the dignity of all. But through persuading a company that their profit margin is not worth maintaining a prominent platform for trafficking, we can take one significant step toward that goal.

Today, [Groundswell](#) is calling on Village Voice Media to follow the example Craigslist.com set last year by shutting down its adult section, in order to prevent the exploitation and abuse of one more girl or boy via its Web site. [Join us](#). Together, we can send a clear message that putting kids at risk for profit is always immoral. One is too many.

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RESPONSES

Norma Jean Almodovar says:

Your comment is awaiting moderation.

October 27, 2011 at 8:45 pm

If one is too many, how about the over 100 cases of police sexual exploitation of minors in 2011 alone? That's where cops, in trusted positions, violated that trust by raping children- some as young as 3 years of age. Officers like Police Officer Anthony Courage of Quincy, MA, and Kaw City (OKLA) Police Chief Robert Shaw, or the untold number of cops who diddled underage male and female Explorer Scouts... because as the US Government's reports state, 90% of the cases of child sexual exploitation is at the hands of someone the child knows and trusts... like cops, judges, boy scout leaders, preachers, teachers, priests etc. And 68% of child sexual exploitation cases are at the hands of family members; Parents like Keith Scott Brown, father of the famous musical family, The 5 Browns. A staunch Mormon family that no doubt from the outside looked wholesome and pure, but daddy dearest was sexually molesting all his female children for many, many years. He was recently sentenced to 10 years, a comparatively light sentence given the length of time he got away with his crimes.

If 100 cases of cops sexually exploiting children isn't enough to grab your interest and concern, how about 17,000? That's the number of incarcerated juveniles who were raped in 2008 by the staff of the facilities where they were incarcerated. See the May 5th, 2011 report from the Economist "Combating rape in prisons- Little and late- Efforts to stop the sexual abuse of prisoners are

welcome but overdue.”

And what about the adult victims of rape? Do they matter to you or just closing down the adult ads to ‘protect the children’? Because over the past three years, from 2007 to 2010, there were 355,218 reported rapes, of which the police made 72,857 arrests of alleged rapists, but made 243,313 arrests for prostitution- primarily females and all adults.

Of course you should be concerned about even one- but clearly you focus on the wrong target, ignoring the greater sources of risk for child sexual exploitation. Understandably, this is because your goal, like the other prohibitionists, is not to help the children but to abolish all consenting adult commercial sex. If you do mean what you say, then work with backpage.com to ensure that only adults post and answer adult oriented ads, and make the scare and valuable resources available to those who are truly victims. Leave consenting adults alone. Otherwise, your efforts to “protect the children” are a sham and you are moral hypocrites one and all.

[Reply](#)

[Norma Jean Almodovar](#) says:

Your comment is awaiting moderation.

October 27, 2011 at 8:56 pm

Please start using the government’s own statistics on the number of children involved in commercial sex. They spend hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars to find those “thousands of minors” whom you claim are “regularly manipulated, coerced, and forced in sex for money in the United States.” Despite millions spent, they cannot find those thousands, using every available resource they have. If the US Government, with its inane policy to “end the demand” and all the organizations out there that it funds cannot find those “thousands,” who are you to continue to use numbers that cannot be backed up by facts? Or do facts not matter to you?

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