



University
of Victoria

Graduate Studies

Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Master of Arts

of

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BA Hons. (Nipissing University, 2017)

**“Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation:
The Problems and Insufficiencies in North American Policy”**

Department of Political Science

Wednesday, May 15, 2019

1:00 P.M.

David Turpin Building

Room A318

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Simon Glezos, Department of Political Science, University of Victoria (Supervisor)

Dr. Annalee Lepp, Department of Gender Studies, UVic (Outside Member)

External Examiner:

Dr. Steve Garlick, Department of Sociology, UVic

Chair of Oral Examination:

Dr. Nancy Clark, School of Nursing, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies

Abstract

This work is a theoretical exploration that seeks to better understand the grooming process involved in some cases of domestic trafficking for sexual exploitation in North America. It theorizes the grooming process as a relation of power engaged in a strategy of subjection. The analysis points to how micropolitical deployments of disciplinary techniques restrict the fluidity of agency, enable the habituation of behaviour, modify thought processes, and produce consciousness.

This thesis also identifies two political problems in current anti-trafficking legislation and policies in North America. The first is that sex work has become conflated with trafficking for sexual exploitation. This conflation does not serve the interests of sex workers, as it has led to legislation that further criminalizes the sex industry, and to an increase in violence and exploitation within it. It also does not serve the needs of trafficked individuals, as it leads to trafficking being misunderstood, and renders anti-trafficking deployments ineffective as a result.

The second is that binary categorizations of consent (as tied to exploitation) in North American trafficking legislation are problematic and theoretically insufficient. Binary conceptions of consent are *problematic* because: (a) they enable a conflation of sex work and trafficking for sexual exploitation; (b) they force survivors or sex workers to relinquish their agency and identify as “victims” in order to work toward a conviction of their trafficker, or to avoid arrest or deportation; and (c) they emphasize a view of choice/consent that precludes an understanding of how an agent always works within limits that are unique to that individual. They are *theoretically insufficient* because they rely on liberal understandings of autonomy, which my engagement with Butler, Foucault, and affect theory critiques. This thesis makes the argument that there are *varying degrees* to which identity and consent are *constructed* through the *production* of subjectivities and the reorganization of preconscious thought processes. The “self”, consent, and judgment, are —to varying degrees— produced by external signifiers, institutions, and discourses. Thus, this work points to the need for a more nuanced approach to determine agency, one does not rely upon binary and static categorizations.