

The Language of “The Life”

Automatic: A term denoting the victim’s “automatic” routine when her pimp is out of town, in jail, or otherwise not in direct contact with those he is prostituting. Victims are expected to comply with the rules and often do so out of fear of punishment or because they have been psychologically manipulated into a sense of loyalty or love. All money generated on “automatic” is turned over to the pimp. This money may be used to support his concession/phone account or to pay his bond if he’s in jail.

Bottom/bottom bitch: A female appointed by the trafficker/pimp to supervise the others and report rule violations. Operating as his “right hand,” the Bottom may help instruct victims, collect money, book hotel rooms, post ads, or inflict punishments on other girls.

Branding: A tattoo or carving on a victim that indicates ownership by a trafficker/pimp/gang.

Brothel (aka cathouse or whorehouse): These establishments may be apartments, houses, trailers, or any facility where sex is sold on the premises. It could be in a rural area or nice neighborhood. Most brothels have security measures to prevent attacks by other criminals or provide a warning if law enforcement are nearby. The security is two sided—to keep the women and children in, as well as robbers out. The places often are guarded (and open) 24 hours a day, but some have closing times in which the victims are locked in from the outside. Victims may be kept in this location for extended periods of time, or rotated to other locations every few days.

Caught a case: A term that refers to when a pimp or victim has been arrested and charged with a crime.

Choosing up: The process by which a different pimp takes “ownership” of a victim. Victims are instructed to keep their eyes on the ground at all times. According to traditional pimping rules, when a victim makes eye contact with another pimp (accidentally or on purpose), she is choosing him to be her pimp. If the original pimp wants the victim back, he must pay a fee to the new pimp. When this occurs, he will force the victim to work harder to replace the money lost in transaction. (See Reckless Eyeballing)

Circuit: A series of cities among which prostituted people are moved. One example would be the West Coast circuit of San Diego, Las Vegas, Portland, and the cities between. The term can also refer to a chain of states such as the “Minnesota pipeline” by which victims are moved through a series of locations from Minnesota to markets in New York.

CSEC (Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children): is a commercial transaction that involves the sexual exploitation of a child, such as the prostitution of children and child pornography. The acronym DMST or Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking was the term previously used to refer to children who were trafficked for sex.

Daddy: The term a pimp will often require his victim to call him.

Date: The exchange when prostitution takes place, or the activity of prostitution. A victim is said to be “with a date” or “dating.”

DMST (Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking): DMST is the commercial sexual exploitation of American children within U.S. borders. It is the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act where the person is a U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident under the age of 18 years.

Escort service: An organization, operating chiefly via cell phone and the internet, which sends a victim to a buyer’s location (an “outcall”) or arranges for the buyer to come to a house or apartment (an “in-call”); this may be the workplace of a single woman or a small brothel. Some escort services are networked with others and can assemble large numbers of women for parties and conventions.

Exit fee: The money a pimp will demand from a victim who is thinking about trying to leave. It will be an exorbitant sum, to discourage her from leaving. Most pimps never let their victims leave freely.

Many of the above terms are from Shared Hope International

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Facilitator: Any business or person allowing or assisting a trafficker to carry out his/her business. These facilitators (taxi drivers, hotel or property owners, etc.) benefit from the proceeds earned through the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

Family/folks: The term used to describe the other individuals under the control of the same pimp. He plays the role of father (or “Daddy”) while the group fulfills the need for a “family.”

Finesse pimp/Romeo pimp: One who prides himself on controlling others primarily through psychological manipulation. Although he may shower his victims with affection and gifts (especially during the recruitment phase), the threat of violence is always present.

Gorilla (or guerilla) pimp: A pimp who controls his victims almost entirely through physical violence and force.

John (aka buyer or trick): An individual who pays for or trades something of value for sexual acts.

Kiddie stroll: An area known for prostitution that features younger victims.

Lot lizard: Derogatory term for a person who is being prostituted at truck stops.

Madam: An older woman who manages a brothel, escort service or other prostitution establishment. She may work alone or in collaboration with other traffickers.

Out of pocket: The phrase describing when a victim is not under control of a pimp but working on a pimp-controlled track, leaving her vulnerable to threats, harassment, and violence in order to make her “choose” a pimp. This may also refer to a victim who is disobeying the pimp’s rules.

Pimp circle: When several pimps encircle a victim to intimidate through verbal and physical threats in order to discipline the victim or force her to choose up.

Quota: A set amount of money that a trafficking victim must make each night before she can come “home.” Quotas are often set between \$300 and \$2000. If the victim returns without meeting the quota, she is typically beaten and sent back out on the street to earn the rest. Quotas vary according to geographic region, local events, etc.

Reckless eyeballing: A term which refers to the act of looking around instead of keeping your eyes on the ground. Eyeballing is against the rules and could lead an untrained victim to “choose up” by mistake.

Renegade: A person involved in prostitution without a pimp. (“Renegade” and “Independent” have the same meaning, but renegade is a negative term used by a pimp and independent is a term used by the child/young adult that he or she would not consider negative).

Seasoning: A combination of psychological manipulation, intimidation, gang rape, sodomy, beatings, deprivation of food or sleep, isolation from friends or family and other sources of support, and threatening or holding hostage of a victim’s children. Seasoning is designed to break down a victim’s resistance and ensure compliance.

Squaring up: Attempting to escape or exit prostitution.

Stable: A group of victims who are under the control of a single pimp.

The game/the life: The subculture of prostitution, complete with rules, a hierarchy of authority, and language.

Referring to the act of pimping as ‘the game’ gives the illusion that it can be a fun and easy way to make money, when the reality is much harsher. Women and girls will say they’ve been “in the life” if they’ve been involved in prostitution for a while.

Track (aka stroll or blade): An area of town known for prostitution activity. This can be the area around a group of strip clubs and pornography stores, or a particular stretch of street.

Trade up/trade down: To move a victim like merchandise between pimps. A pimp may trade one girl for another or trade with some exchange of money.

Trick: Committing an act of prostitution (verb), or the person buying it (noun). A victim is said to be “turning a trick” or “with a trick.”

Turn out: To be forced into prostitution (verb) or a person newly involved in prostitution (noun).

Wifeys/wife-in-law/sister wife: What women and girls under the control of the same pimp call each other.

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