

**SLAVERY NO MORE 2012 GLOBAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING CONFERENCE**  
**August 10-11 ~ LOS ANGELES, CA**

**A Cry for Help – Harmony Dust**

**Jocelyn White:** You are in for a treat with our next guest. I met her last year and was riveted by her story, read her book. She is an author, and I recommend you stop by the *Treasures* booth to check it out. I am so excited for you all to hear. I'm just going to let her get started, so please join me in welcoming Harmony Dust from *Treasures*.

**Harmony Dust:** Just to warn you, they're giving out espresso and coffee and soup vats at the café, so if I talk too fast blame it on them. I do have a lot that I want to communicate to you in the next 20 minutes, and I'm going to do my best to get it all out there. My name is Harmony Dust, and I'm the founder of a Los Angeles based outreach and support group for women in the sex industry called *Treasures*. What we do is we come alongside the women, reach, restore, and equip them to live healthy and flourishing lives. We do monthly strip club outreaching. We do outreach at porn conventions, and we work with women from all areas of the commercial sex industry. We have a weekly support group that's lead by a therapist, a para mentoring program, and we come alongside and give them the resources that they need to rebuild their lives. I love it, and I think what a lot of people don't realize is that 70% of female trafficking victims are trafficked into the commercial sex industry. So you really can't reach women in the commercial sex industry without working with the victims of trafficking as well.

I think it's kind of ironic this particular session is titled *A Cry for Help*. The reason I think that's sort of ironic is because often times, these women are not crying out for help and aren't very overt with their cries for help. I think sometimes when people get interested in the anti-trafficking movement, they might have this preconceived notion that we're going to be able to go in on white horses and break down the walls of some dungeon and find women and children trapped in there and tied up, and we're going to loosen their chains. Then they'll run into our arms and say thank you we've been waiting for you. Where have you been? And then we'll whisk them off on our white horses, and they're never going to go back.

For anyone who's worked this arena for more than five minutes or anyone who's in law enforcement, you know that's not the case. We've hear a little bit about that earlier today, because so often the women do go right back to their pimps. They go right back to the life they know. They go right back to the streets, right back to the strip club. I can tell you firsthand that when I was working as a stripper if you would come into the strip club, and I hope you didn't, but if you had and you asked me if I liked my job, I would have looked you dead in the eye, and I would have told you yes. I love my job. I make money. I'm putting myself though college. I would have flashed my pearly whites, showed you my blond hair, and you would have just through everything's fine.

The truth is that beyond selling sex, the sex industry is selling fantasy. That's what it's all about. The sex industry is selling fantasy, and the women in the sex industry, as women in

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the sex industry we are trained to sell fantasy. Because of that, we're perpetuating the facade of glamour. We're perpetuating the illusion of choice. We're perpetuating this illusion that we like what we do, because it's fantasy that sells.

I wanted to look a little bit today at why women stay. Why do they stay stuck in these situations? In order to do that I think we need to look at some of the psychological dynamics that are in play when it comes to sex trafficking. We don't have time to go into the long version of my story, but I can tell you very briefly that I come from a violent home and a violent neighborhood. My mother was a cocaine addict, my dad a dealer. I was sexually abused throughout my life by multiple people both men and women, raped, the whole nine yards and then got involved with a boy in my neighborhood at 13. When I had been abandoned by my father at one and then my mother actually ended up leaving me at 13 for three months, and it was during that summer that I became involved with a boy in my neighborhood.

Kim earlier was talking about how these guys will take them to get their hair done, their nails done. I am so sad to tell you all's he had to do was buy me Burger King. Promise. I was hungry, and I thought he was my prince. So that relationship ultimately was what landed me in the sex industry. I was with him for a number of years. The relationship was abusive, and essentially he became my pimp. Every night I came home, gave him all my money. That is one of the reasons I'm so passionate about this work is, because I know what it feels like to feel trapped like that and to not see any other options.

I just want to spend a little bit of time unpacking some of the psychological dynamics that are involved in trafficking. First thing is that pimps prey on vulnerable women and children. They know how to spot them out. They're waiting at bus stops, at train stations. They're waiting for them to get off vulnerable. The statistics show that a large majority of teenage runaways and throwaways are trafficked within 72 hours of being on the streets. The pimps know how to pick them out, and the pimps now how to prey on them. They don't hand them a business card and say hey I'm a trafficker. Would you like to get together with me? They're pretending to be potential love interests, boyfriends. They're pretending to be father figures. I'm going to take care of you. These streets are rough. Why don't you come with me? I have a place you can stay. I have money for you. You're beautiful. I'd like to be your boyfriend.

First of all the pimps themselves have some really manipulative tactics. As a matter of fact at one point, I came across an article that looks at *Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Motivation*, and it's a pimp detailing how you can exploit women and pimp them using *Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs*. Just to recap them. *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs* is basically this fear of motivation where basic human needs are illustrated in the form of a pyramid ranging from our physiological, our most very basic needs, through social and emotional and at the top of the pyramid, the need for self-actualization.

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This pimp goes through and talks about how you can meet the women's need or the child's need at each level of the pyramid with the sole purpose of gaining control over her, manipulating her, and then profiting off of exploiting her sexually. I have a video that we don't have time to share today, but I highly encourage you to go to the treasures website at [www.iamatreasure.com](http://www.iamatreasure.com). In our video, we have one of our male volunteers reading the article that the pimp wrote. I will read you an excerpt of it to give you picture.

*This is what the article says, "If you meet the prostitute's needs at different levels of the pyramid simultaneously, you will make money. Then you will have a devoted woman pulling for you. You will call her your baby girl, your hope to die woman, and once you have that you will enjoy the benefits of being an elevated pimp and know that it's time to expand your empire. Your hope to die woman will help you to recruit new women. She will even think that she is your business partner."*

One of the things happening here is that the tactics that pimps and traffickers are using are very manipulative, very coercive. They're preying on already vulnerable girls. Then there's some other factors that I think lend themselves to this. There are social factors. The fact that often times the women find themselves feeling very isolated, not having a lot of contact with the outside world. I know when I was in the sex industry the only people I had contact with were the guy I was giving all my money to and my other co-workers and my clients at work. There's this sense of isolation.

There's also a sense of shame. I know a lot of women who are terrified at even thought of going out into the workforce and trying how to figure out how to get a new job, knowing especially for those who have been involved in anything online and porn and that sort of thing. You can't take those images back as hard as you try. I wish there was a way to do that magically for them. But knowing their potential employer could easily Google them and suddenly have access to everything they've ever done.

There's also and Kim mentioned this earlier the issue of *Stockholm Syndrome*. This is basically a theory, and it's something that we've actually seen happen in hostage victims in which they actually become bonded to their hostage takers. Some of this has to do they hypothesize with an issue of alignment which basically that there's some kind of innate drive in us that would cause us to want to form an attachment with the most powerful adult to ensure our survival. There's the issue of Stockholm Syndrome. So often time's, women are very bonded to the very people that are holding them captive in these lifestyles and these horrible situations. Personally I experienced that firsthand. I thought that I would absolutely die without my guy, whatever you want to call him.

Often the fact that they come from histories of domestic violence and sexual abuse and histories of trauma like this. There's a sense of familiarity with the dysfunction. I remember when I went into a strip club; I had this false sense of empowerment. As someone who'd been a victim of sexual abuse. I had this feeling that you know what? I finally have the upper hand here. All my life I've been exploited, and now I'm going to exploit for myself. The thing

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that's always been exploited, and I'm going to get paid for it. You have this false sense of empowerment that happens.

Another thing I wanted to share with you is this concept of *Learned Helplessness* that I think is really powerful in helping illustrate why someone would stay in these situations. Basically the theory of *Learned Helplessness* comes from a series of experiments that was done in the 1960's on dogs. I'm going to break it down for you. Basically here's what it is. They're three groups of dogs. All three groups were put in harnesses at one point. Group number one was the control group, so they were placed in a harness. Nothing happened to them, and the harness was put on. The harness was taken off. They were not exposed to any kind of negative stimulus. Group number two was placed in a harness and exposed to electrical shocks so painful stimulus.

Group number two had access to a lever, and when they pressed the lever with their paw, the electrical shock would stop. So group number two learned that there was something that they could do to stop themselves from having this negative experience. Then group number three was placed in a harness and also experienced shock. Whether or not they pressed the lever, they couldn't do anything to control the shocks. For them, the shock happened at random. What they learned is even if they tried to press the lever, no matter what they did nothing was going to stop the shock. It's happening at random.

Then they took these three groups of dogs and placed them in a shuttle box. Basically it was some kind of apparatus that had a very low partition that would have been very easy for them to jump over and escape the shuttle box. They placed the dogs in the shuttle box and exposed each one to electrical shock. Group number one, of course they jumped out as fast as you can imagine, because they knew I can escape this. The partition is way high. I'm jumping out. They're getting out. Group number two, the dog that had learned they could do something to stop the negative experiences from happening also quickly jumped out of the apparatus. However group number three, the dog that learned that this negative experience was happening at random, two-thirds of them just stayed in that shuttle box and laid there helplessly despite the fact that they could have so easily escaped the situation. All they had to do was jump outside the box.

The most important element they decided in learned helplessness is the perceived lack of control over negative circumstances. When I think of women in the sex industry, and people on the outside might be looking in and saying just go. Just walk away, jump out, get out. You've got a detective here, you've got a shelter here, you've got a social worker here and people willing to help and why don't you just walk away? Why don't you just leave? That's why I love the theory of *Learned Helplessness*, because for women who have experienced trauma and painful events throughout their lives, many of these girls like we said up to 90% coming from backgrounds of sexual abuse. Many of them coming out of foster care. Many of them having histories of trauma and abuse and neglect.

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For them and for me, because I was one of them, it just seems the painful events of life happen at random. Really there's nothing you can do to stop it. So I could jump out of this box but for me I thought it doesn't matter. I'm going to jump out of this box, and I'm going to get shocked by the next thing that comes my way. That's part of why for someone on the outside, it looks like it would be so easy, but that's one of the reasons that for women on the inside it is hard to leave.

Of course, there are economic factors. Poverty, lack of education, lack of employable job skills. You take this woman and you place her in the context of a culture A that glamorizes pimp culture. You see this by virtue of the fact that we still have pimp and ho parties on college campuses all throughout the United States. You turn on the radio for five seconds, I literally just turned on the radio the other week. I couldn't believe it. It was a song and the guy was like, "*My daddy was a pimp. That's how I treat 'em.*" Going on and on about how he beats his women. This is like Power 106 and the song ends with "*Beat that B. Beat that B. Beat that B.*" I'm like are we kidding? Our culture glamorizes pimp culture. We celebrate pimp culture. We dance to people rapping about exploiting and abusing and beating women and children.

On top of that in our culture there is a demand for sex. You place this woman who has a history of abuse, maybe lacks a healthy support system and is facing financial hardships, and you place her in the context of a culture in which there is a demand for sex. A culture where in 2006 we spent over \$13 billion on the porn and sex industry which is more than the profits from NFL, NBA, and major league baseball combined. A culture in which in our country, we spend over \$3,000 a second on porn. It's like of course she's going to be trapped in this.

We were unpacking earlier the issue of choice and what is choice really, but even for those who would say they're there by choice, those factors come together. They create walls around her to where she's totally trapped. The sex industry can even seem like the solution to her problems. She thinks I can make money. I can survive this way.

What we're doing at *Treasures* is that we're essentially coming alongside them and handing them the tools that they need to break these barriers around them. Even equally as important helping them to pick up the pieces once they do. You know you're here, because I'm assuming you have a heart for justice and you want to be a part of solutions, so I don't want to leave without giving you a couple of ideas on things that you can do.

One of the things that you can do, and this is so easy is just be committed to being a voice in your sphere of influence. Like I talked about earlier, the sex industry is based on fantasy. The fantasy cannot exist if we are committed to deconstruction and tearing down the façade of glamour that the sex industry is perpetuating. Then that fantasy can't exist. What that looks like is you and I being willing to be a voice in our sphere of influence and talk about the real lives and the real stories and what's really going on behind that façade of glamour.

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I have my story *Stars and Stilettos* available for you at the back if you want to pick that up. We also have this, it's called *the Stiletto Project* which is basically a compilation of stories of women that *Treasures* has worked with. These are not just survivors. These are overcomers. These are women who have gone in to do incredible things with their lives. Have gone on to be a part of the solution for other women and have committed to mentoring them. Get familiar with their stories and be willing to be a voice in your sphere of influence.

I like what was being talked about up here on the panel. There are so many organizations, and there are so many places you can get involved. Sometimes it's as simple as helping with some of the administrative needs and stuffing envelopes and doing things around the office, so the support workers are able and have the time and the freedom to go out and do the work of working with victims. That is absolutely valuable to us.

I'll end with this. Nelson Mandela said this, "*For to be free is not merely to cast off ones chains but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.*" I'm assuming that you're here today, because you believe this. And you're committed to respecting and enhancing the freedom of others, so I personally and behalf of *Treasures* want to thank you for that an thank you for taking time out of your lives to educated and get equipped.

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