

BECOMING A HUMAN TRAFFICKER:
QUALITATIVELY EXAMINING SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY AND SOCIAL
OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURE AMONG BULGARIAN HUMAN TRAFFICKERS

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

Sexual exploitation is a human rights violation sustained by sophisticated organized crime syndicates and a lucrative sex industry. In Europe, research on human traffickers indicates that people choose to become a trafficker due to the juxtaposition of widespread poverty and poor economic opportunity with reliable, well paid employment in the illegitimate economy. Building on this, the primary aim of this dissertation was to expand this existing, one-dimensional (economic) theoretical framework by examining the theorized cognitive and behavioral mechanisms represented by a leading criminology theory (social learning theory) and a more recent concept (social opportunity structure) developed from organized crime theory, as a means to broaden the understanding of why a person becomes a human trafficker. Applying a multiple-case study research design, this aim was achieved by qualitatively examining both theories from the perspective of 16 Bulgarian human traffickers.

Findings indicate that Bulgarian human traffickers were heavily influenced by a high benefits (money) – low cost (prison) dynamic represented by social learning theory's third theoretical component (differential reinforcement). Moreover, this dynamic was further solidified by a general attitude of ambivalence and fatalism directed towards the Bulgarian political, economic, and criminal justice systems. The opportunity to participate in sexual exploitation for profit emerged primarily through peer and work relationships, most of which were not characterized as belonging to the gray economy, thereby offering non-organized crime affiliated individuals to supplement their low, legal economy salaries. Findings have implications for anti-trafficking policy, especially in the area of prevention, as well as for social workers working in the area of sexual exploitation.

**Friendship makes prosperity more shining and lessens adversity
by dividing and sharing it – Cicero**

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ABBREVIATIONS

BHT – Bulgarian human trafficker

EU – European Union

IRB – Institutional Review Board

NCCTHB – National Commission for Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings

NGO – non-governmental organization

RBNSI – Republic of Bulgaria: National Statistical Institute

SLT – Social Learning Theory

SOS – Social Opportunity Structure

TDA – Theory of Differential Association

UIUC – University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

UN – United Nations

UNCATOC – United Nation’s Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime

UNICEF – United Nations Children’s Emergency Fund

UNODC – United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

US – United States

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Sexual exploitation is a human rights violation recognized as disproportionately affecting women and children, particularly those with low economic and social status (Cancedda, De Micheli, Dimitrova, & Slot, 2015; European Commission, 2015). A form of human trafficking, sexual exploitation is caused by multiple, concurrent factors and circumstances resulting in extensive physical and mental health harms (Hawke & Raphael, 2016; Zimmerman et al., 2008; Zimmerman, Hossain, & Watts, 2011). Two key, mutually sustaining mechanisms maintaining sexual exploitation are the surging, lucrative sex industry and the expansion and increasing sophistication of organized crime (Cancedda et al., 2015; European Commission, 2015; Hawke & Raphael, 2016; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2014a). Organized crime most often refers to groups of people engaged in profitable, transnational crimes which are complex and systematic in nature (Kleemans & De Poot, 2008; Van Koppen & De Poot, 2013). Organized crime is inextricably linked to corruption and is estimated to cost the European economy 120 billion euro annually (European Commission, 2014; van Ballegooij & Zandstra, 2016).

A punitive approach remains dominant in terms of slowing organized crime, including the prosecution of human traffickers, who are crucial actors in sexual exploitation and a necessity to organized crime syndicates. However, organized crime's persistent growth and sexual exploitative practices have taken on an intractable nature. This has prompted the European Union (EU) to question the efficacy of relying solely on criminal prosecution to deter people from joining organized crime as human traffickers (European Commission, 2015). Two particular interrelated inadequacies are noted. The first is that robust criminal legislation does

not presume equally strong implementation (UNODC, 2014a). Directly related is the issue of corruption, as successful criminal prosecution is predicated on transparent, uncorrupt actors operating within systems of accountability. This is clearly illustrated in the case of Bulgaria, an EU member state since 2007, which has made a noteworthy effort to adopt EU anti-trafficking policy, but has been plagued by pervasive corruption and is hindered in the prosecution of human traffickers (Council of Europe, 2016; Petrunov, 2011a, 2014; Stoyanova, 2013).

There is an abundance of research describing organized crime and human trafficker *modus operandi*, but a dearth of studies on the criminal behavior and personal dimensions of human traffickers. An exception of the former, and specifically regarding Eastern European human traffickers, is the assertion that a person becomes a human trafficker because of the inherent financial incentive against a backdrop of economic deprivation (Petrunov, 2014; Petrunov, Salcedo-Albaran, Yanev, Velev, & Atanassova, 2013; Rijken, Muraszkievicz, & van de Ven, 2015). This understanding applies to Bulgaria, where organized crime offers profitable, reliable work as a trafficker to a population disappointed and disillusioned by pervasive corruption, limited legal economic opportunity, and widespread poverty (Petrunov, 2014; Petrunov et al., 2013).

While this economic dimension should not be disregarded, in terms of its explanatory power as a theoretical framework, it is on one hand too broad, and on the other too narrow. Concerning the former, criminology reiterates the pivotal role of financial gain in predicting a myriad of criminal behaviors, thus making this current human trafficker understanding inadequate (Copes, 2006; Cromwell & Olson, 2006; Jacobs & Wright, 2006). Regarding the latter, the framework remains narrow in that only economic factors and circumstances are considered. This is in spite of organized crime and sexual exploitation being dependent on social

and relational networks to operate and expand their activities (Donovan et al., 2015; European Commission, 2015; Kleemans & De Poot, 2008; Leman & Janssens, 2008; Rijken et al., 2015; Van Koppen & De Poot, 2013). This exclusion is perhaps in part a reflection of the existing research on organized crime and human trafficking. Such research is more likely to present the decision to sexually exploit a person as a collective, organized criminal act amidst poverty and corruption, and therefore less often as an individual, personal decision (Lampe, 2012).

Yet, in the field of criminology and in terms of other criminal behaviors, there exists robust theories to dissect and analyze the complex, multidimensional process of criminal behavior and decision-making. Social learning theory (SLT), a leading theory in criminology, accents the influence of certain cognitive and behavioral mechanisms in first learning criminal behavior and then ultimately committing an offense (Akers, 1998; Akers & Jennings, 2015). More specifically, SLT explains individual criminal behavior as a result of associating with people engaged in crime (differential association), learning definitions favorable to crime, experiencing certain benefits as a result of committing a crime (differential reinforcement), and modeling (imitation) previously witnessed deviant behavior (Akers, 1998; Burgess & Akers, 1966). Social learning theory continues to be applied to a variety of criminal and deviant behaviors and occupies an established, but relevant position in criminological theory (Akers & Jennings, 2015; Akers & Jensen, 2003; Pratt et al., 2010).

In addition to learning criminal behavior, the opportunity to commit a crime is theorized as critical (Abadinsky, 2010; Kleemans & De Poot, 2008; Van Koppen & De Poot, 2013; Van Koppen, de Poot, & Blokland, 2010). In other words, learned criminal behavior is insufficient if the opportunity to practice such behavior is absent (Baumer & Arnio, 2015). Organized crime theorists Kleemans & De Poot (2008) posit that social opportunity structure (SOS), or a person's

social network, grants access to and initiates a career in organized crime. Developed from the distinctions between organized and traditional crime (theft, robbery), SOS stresses the highly relational and sophisticated (technical) aspects of organized crime in relation to an individual's already established social and professional network (Kleemans & De Poot, 2008; Van Koppen et al., 2010).

The primary aim of this dissertation is to expand the existing, one-dimensional (economic) theoretical framework by examining specific propositions corresponding to the theorized cognitive and behavioral mechanisms represented by SLT and SOS as a means to broaden the understanding of why a person becomes a human trafficker. This was achieved by qualitatively examining SLT and SOS from the perspective of Bulgarian human traffickers (BHT). A multiple-case study research design consisting of 16 BHTs yielded rich data from the perspective of this understudied but crucial population.

Definition of Terms

Human trafficking and human trafficker. This dissertation defines human trafficking according to the internationally recognized definition found in the United Nation's Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (UNCATOC):

...recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. (UNODC, 2004, p. 42)

In line with this definition, the Bulgarian Criminal Code describes a human trafficker as:

An individual who recruits, transports, conceals, or admits particular individuals or groups of people with the purpose of using them for sexual activities, forced labor, removal of bodily organs, or keeping them in forceful subjection, regardless of their consent. (Bulgarian Criminal Code: Article 159a, 2009, p. 62)

This study was focused solely on human traffickers engaged in sexual exploitation, with the terms human trafficker, trafficker, and pimp being interchangeable.

Organized crime. The UNCATOC lacks a specific definition of organized crime, but does outline features of an “organized criminal group” operating transnationally:

‘Organized criminal group’ shall mean a structured group of three or more persons, existing for a period of time and acting in concert with the aim of committing one or more serious crimes or offences established in accordance with this Convention, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit. (UNODC, 2004, p. 5)

Prostitution. Academics, researchers, and society remain divided on a definition of prostitution. Some understand prostitution to be a form of violence, others underscore a woman’s right to sexual expression, and a third discourse emphasizes economic and migratory structures (Agustín, 2005; 2008; Jeffreys, 1997; Oude Breuil, Siegel, van Reenen, Beijer, & Roos, 2011; Siegel, 2012).

For the purposes of this dissertation, prostitution is understood in two ways. The first recognizes the inherent economic transaction and defines prostitution as the exchange of money (or goods/favors) for sex (Lerner, 1986). The second equates prostitution with sexual exploitation understanding prostitution to be intrinsically violent and the result of economic and social inequality (Ekberg, 2004; Jeffreys, 1997; Weitzer, 2009). Such an understanding does not

diminish a person's agency in the decision to sell sex, but instead draws attention to the environment and context in which the agency is exercised. This second definition is specifically adopted in light of the research on prostitution in Bulgaria, which mainly affects economically poor, marginalized women and children (see Literature Review).

Sexual exploitation. Different stakeholders offer nuanced definitions of sexual exploitation, yet this dissertation aligns with the internationally recognized definition found in the UNCATOC:

Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs. (UNODC, 2004, p. 42)

Significance of the Proposed Study

This study is distinctive in its qualitative examination of criminal behavior and organized crime theory among an extremely understudied, but critical population. Collectively, this will expand the existing, economically driven theoretical framework by considering the personal, social (community, relational) dimension through an examination of BHTs' perceptions of how their relationships may or may not have influenced and facilitated their decision to become a trafficker. The existing economic understanding is well substantiated in the literature, but too simple. Much of the Bulgarian population experiences economic strain and the subsequent interest in increasing their personal income, yet not all Bulgarians succumb to the sexual exploitation of others (Zaloznaya, 2012).

Additionally, this study's approach not only incorporates the perspective of a key actor, but the context (environment) in which criminal decision-making takes place. Criminologists in particular note the importance of such evidence regarding SLT, as the more often applied

quantitative approach excludes richer, more descriptive data in terms of perceptions, experiences, and values (beliefs) held by perpetrators (Tittle, Antonaccio, & Botchkovar, 2012).

Also, and in contrast to criminology theorists, organized crime theorists have neglected the study of offender behavior and instead prioritize organizational behavior, such as recruitment and money laundering tactics (Lampe, 2012). Although valuable, behavior deterrence interventions require knowledge of the personal, daily lives of human traffickers, including the local communities and places where behavior is learned and decisions made (Donovan et al., 2015; Rijken et al., 2015). Such research is significantly lacking and this aspect of human traffickers is extremely understudied (Rijken et al., 2015; Troshynski & Blank, 2008). This applies to Bulgaria, where despite being a pivotal actor, BHTs take on a vague, “behind the scenes role” in much of the human trafficking and sexual exploitation literature.

This topic is significant to the field of social work, as it portrays decision-making pathways in sexual exploitation as intricate and heavily influenced by systemic factors in a person’s environment (see Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Decision-making depicted in such a way challenges prostitution’s conceptualization as an exclusively, individual, autonomous act at the expense of numerous overarching political, economic, and cultural factors. This dissertation is injecting the voice of a key actor (trafficker) as a means to exposing broader, macro systems at work in the decision-making of not only traffickers, but of the women they exploit and of whom social workers are called to serve (see Discussion – Implications).

Even though this dissertation geographically targeted Bulgaria, findings will offer insight into several ongoing research discourses, such as community-based anti-trafficking prevention strategies, the applicability of SLT (especially regarding differential reinforcement) in international contexts, and the function of opportunity in criminal behavior practiced in the

organized crime arena of sexual exploitation. Concerning the first, the EU is seeking new, innovative sexual exploitation prevention strategies which target traffickers as a means to complementing the necessary, but woefully insufficient, punitive approach (European Commission, 2015). Findings can assist in shaping initial discussions and the future development of community-based, sexual exploitation prevention strategies (see Discussion – Implications).

Secondly, examining SLT in a non-US context will contribute data to the on-going discourse of international fit, as this body of research is still nascent (Lee, Moak, & Walker, 2016; Miller, Jennings, Alvarez-Rivera, & Miller, 2008; Pratt et al., 2010; Tittle et al., 2012).

Thirdly, the empirical evidence grounding SLT includes a disproportionate number of studies only examining two of the four theoretical tenets (differential association and definitions) despite SLT being distinguished by the concept of differential reinforcement (Pratt et al., 2010). Examining all four SLT concepts will yield findings relevant to the overall explanatory validity of this theory.

Lastly, the inclusion of SOS will contribute findings to an emerging dialogue in the organized crime literature regarding this relatively new construct, in addition to connecting it to SLT behavioral mechanisms.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Learning Theory

Background. Social learning theory hypothesizes that criminal behavior is learned through several specific processes embedded in the interactions and association with deviant individuals and groups (Akers, 1998; Akers & Jennings, 2015). A more nuanced version of the renowned sociological and criminological theory of differential association (TDA), theorists Ronald Akers and Robert Burgess fused the TDA with concepts from psychological behaviorism, particularly operant conditioning. This led to their differential association – reinforcement theory, which was an effort to identify the specific behavioral mechanisms inherent to (relationships) association (Akers & Jennings, 2015; Burgess & Akers, 1966). Later, Akers alone continued to refine SLT and added ideas from cognitive psychology, resulting in the current version with its four components: differential association, definitions (attitudes), differential reinforcement, and (modeling) imitation (Akers, 1998). The overarching casual mechanism generated from the interaction of the four theoretical components is summarized in the following:

The probability that persons will engage in criminal and deviant behavior is increased and the probability of their conforming to the norm is decreased when they differentially associate with others who commit criminal behavior and espouse definitions favorable to it, are relatively more exposed in-person or symbolically to salient criminal/deviant models, define it as desirable or justified in a situation discriminative for the behavior, and have received in the past and anticipate in the current or future situation relatively greater reward than punishment for the behavior. (Akers, 1998, p. 50)

Differential association. Differential association is foundational to SLT as it provides the space and therefore facilitates the interactions necessary to the existence of the other three components (Akers, 1998; Akers & Jennings, 2015; Sellers & Winfree, 2010). Differential association is operationalized as a person's interactions and time spent with people (Akers & Jennings, 2015). Criminal behavior is specifically the result of disproportionate time spent with people engaged in deviant behavior (Akers & Jennings, 2015). Interactions provide the pathway for the transfer and inculcation of definitions and attitudes favorable to crime (second component) and facilitate the opportunity to witness (fourth component) and directly benefit from criminal acts, thus reinforcing (third component) the behavior (Akers & Jennings, 2015).

Akers and Burgess took the concept of differential association from Edwin Sutherland's TDA (Akers, 1998; Burgess & Akers, 1966). The TDA understands criminal behavior to be learned through social interaction with groups (Abadinsky, 2010; Matsueda, 2010). Sutherland specifically understood differential association to consist of two stages, with the first being the establishment of communication patterns and habits with certain deviant groups (Matsueda, 2010). As communication intensifies, the second stage of cultivating specific skills is inaugurated (Abadinsky, 2010; Matsueda, 2010). The successful development of two skills, mainly a technical skill (e.g. technology fraud) and a knowledge framework (attitudes, rationalizations of criminal behavior), produces a person prepared for a life of crime (Abadinsky, 2010; Matsueda, 2010).

Both the TDA and SLT stress not only the presence of interactions, but the degree and concentration of such interactions (Akers, 1998). Greater, more frequent patterns of interaction with those favorable to crime increases the overall likelihood of committing a crime (Akers, 1998; Sellers & Winfree, 2010). More specifically, association is affected by frequency,

duration, priority (e.g. relationships in childhood), and emotional intensity (Sellers & Winfree, 2010). In other words, an individual has relationships both endorsing and discouraging criminal behavior, yet whichever type of relationship is in a greater concentration is theorized as more likely to incline a person to ascribe to that categorization of criminal behavior. Finally, while differential association is understood as stronger in the context of tight, immediate relationships (family, peer groups), Akers notes the increasing significance of cultural interactions through mass media (Akers, 1998).

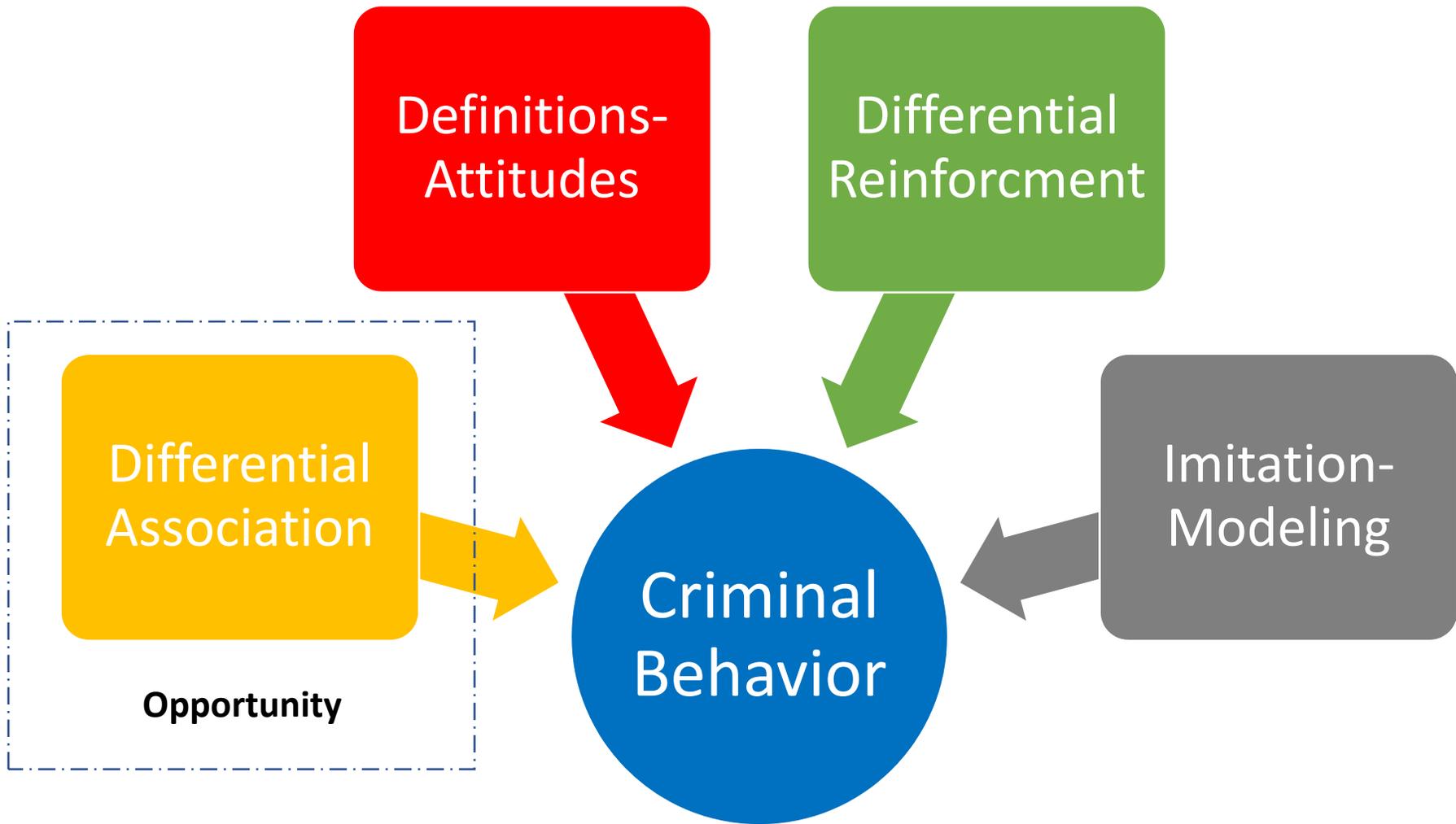
Definitions. This component represents the cognitive aspect of criminal behavior and includes definitions (meanings), attitudes, beliefs, and values (Akers, 1998; Akers & Jennings, 2015). Collectively, definitions are the result of what has been socially learned in collaboration with the other three theoretical components, meaning favorable definitions towards crime are built through interactions with peers and other groups (differential association) and repeated reinforcement and modeling (Akers & Jennings, 2015). Definitions can apply to a certain crime or be general (Akers, 1998). Furthermore, definitions in support of criminal behavior are characterized as either positive (e.g. crime is fun) or neutralizing, such as crime is necessary, but not desired (Akers, 1998; Akers & Jennings, 2015).

A sub-component is the development of skills necessary to commit a crime. As mentioned under differential association, Sutherland viewed the development of skills as the second stage of the TDA (Akers, 1998). Regarding SLT, Akers (1998) included the development of a skill under definitions. Furthermore, Akers (1998) retained the idea that skill development is both simple and complex, meaning that the focus is not exclusively on criminal skill development, but also on “ordinary, everyday abilities” (p. 77).

Differential reinforcement. Social learning theory was first distinguished from the TDA by the addition of differential reinforcement, which features as the first of two learning mechanisms (Burgess & Akers, 1966; Tittle et al., 2012). Based on operant conditioning, this component reflects the assertion that a person attaches value to a behavior which yields a desired reward (Akers & Jennings, 2015; Sellers & Winfree, 2010). The reward can be experienced, perceived, and/or anticipated, but once a person commits a crime and experiences reward, such behavior is theorized to repeat and therefore reinforced (Akers & Jennings, 2015). As with the other components, if reward is experienced more than punishment, a person is more likely to continue committing crimes (Akers, 1998). Finally, the concept of reward is not limited to positive reinforcement, but can also manifest as negative reinforcement and be either tangible (e.g. money) and/or intangible, emotional and social benefits, such as praise from peers (Akers, 1998; Akers & Jennings, 2015).

Imitation. While differential reinforcement is grounded in psychological behaviorism, imitation stems from cognitive psychology and entails emulating an observed and modeled behavior (Akers, 1998). With regard to the second learning mechanism, Akers differed from Sutherland, in that he understood imitation not simply as mimicking behavior, but the process of witnessing and modeling criminal behavior and its ensuing rewards (Akers, 1998). This component resembles vicarious reinforcement, or the process of routinely witnessing an activity and its consequences (rewards and punishments), with repeated exposure to rewarded criminal behavior creating a motivational pull (Bandura, 1977, as cited in Akers, 1998). As with differential association, sources of criminal behavioral models range from familial and peer relationships to media figures (Akers, 1998).

Figure 1. Social Learning Theory and Social Opportunity Structure



Social Opportunity Structure

In contrast to SLT, SOS is a relatively new theoretical concept and originates from research on organized crime offenders. Kleemans and De Poot (2008) introduced SOS to explain how adult organized crime offenders first become involved in crime. Social opportunity structure is a fusion of opportunity theory and social network theory (Burt, 1992, 2005, Clarke & Felson 1993, Morselli, 2005, all as cited in Kleemans & De Poot, 2008). It is defined as “social ties providing access to profitable criminal opportunities” and accents the critical role of social and work relationships in organized crime activities (Kleemans & De Poot, 2008, p. 71).

Kleemans and Van de Bunt (2008) suggest that the intersection of “occupations, work relations and work settings may provide the breeding ground for organized crime activities” (p. 195).

This is illustrated by Kleemans and De Poot (2008), who list three traits of organized crime not represented in traditional crime (see also Van Koppen et al., 2010; Van Koppen, 2013).

- 1) A reliance on trust expressed through extensive social networks in order to advance and develop criminal activity.
- 2) The transnational nature of most organized crime activities is directly supported and therefore dependent on these social networks and relationships.
- 3) Transnational crime is more complex, especially logistically, which necessitates and reaffirms the need for trust and extensive social networks in both the legitimate and illegitimate economies to achieve goals.

In particular, social relationships are theorized to relate to opportunity (i.e. SOS) in three ways (Kleemans & Van de Bunt, 2008):

- 1) Work is a form of social interaction.

- 2) Social and work relations are highly interrelated, in that either can lead to the other, meaning that a person may pursue a job through a social network and/or a person can develop new social relations as a result of securing a certain job.
- 3) This interconnectedness can lead to “effective concealment of illegal activities”, meaning that loyalty and solidarity will deter people from reporting illegal activity (p. 196).

Although SOS is a newer concept, opportunity and its role in criminal behavior is longstanding. For example, the theory of differential opportunity theorizes that just as legitimate opportunity is unequally available, so is illegitimate opportunity (Abadinsky, 2010). In other words, differential opportunity asserts that the process of committing a crime involves not just external, economic strain and being inculcated with a criminal rationale and technical skill, but also being presented with the opportunity to participate in a criminal act (Abadinsky, 2010; Cullen, 2010). Yet, this dissertation is focusing on SOS because it accounts for the unique features of organized crime in terms of the high value placed on, and therefore influential nature of, social and professional relationships.

Literature Review

The literature review is divided into two sections, with the first presenting an empirical overview of SLT and SOS. The review of SLT is more extensive due to its longstanding history, while SOS in its current theorized form is a more recent development. Neither theory appears to have been specifically tested and therefore applied to human-trafficker criminal behavior. Social opportunity structure has been developed from data on organized crime offenders, some of whom were human traffickers, but does not seem to have been formally examined for the purpose of connecting opportunity with human trafficker behavior.

The second section shifts to Bulgaria and begins with a country overview, which is followed by a brief synopsis of sexual exploitation in Bulgaria. This section concludes with the SLT and SOS theoretical framework being applied to the available research on Bulgarian organized crime and BHT criminal behavior and motivations. Lastly, the propositions under examination are presented.

Empirical Overview of the Theoretical Framework

Social learning theory. There exists extensive empirical evidence of SLT concerning a myriad of deviant behavior, however studies typically only assess two or three components, meaning that the entire theory is less often tested (Pratt et al., 2010). Social learning theory is usually tested through a quantitative approach as a means to predicting behavior, but this review will include one qualitative study.¹ The evidence represents more U.S. studies and while the number of international applications is increasing (especially in Asian contexts), a call for further cross-cultural testing remains (Hwang & Akers, 2003; Miller et al., 2008; Pratt et al., 2010). In spite of an abundance of research, there is a recognized dearth of systematic reviews and meta analyses. However, this should not be allowed to reflect poorly on SLT and instead is attributed to the field of criminology, which has a research landscape characterized by high volumes of evidence but limited systemic assessment (Pratt et al., 2010).

One key exception is a meta-analysis conducted by Pratt et al. (2010) which consisted of 133 studies and included 246 statistical models testing either SLT or differential association. Differential association was included as a separate search term since the TDA has a longer history and also because it is the most commonly tested component (Pratt et al., 2010). Results supported the widespread application and explanatory power of differential association, in

¹ This dissertation qualitatively tested SLT in contrast to the overwhelming number of quantitative research. This decision is discussed in the chapter on methodology.

addition to the definition (attitude) component, with both having mean effect sizes similar in strength to other criminological theory (Pratt et al., 2010). While evidence concerning differential reinforcement and imitation were collected, the results were statistically weaker (possibly due to limited statistical data) in comparison with differential association and definitions (Pratt et al., 2010).

In line with this, there is substantial research regarding differential association and the learned definitions and attitudes as reliable predictors of deviant behavior (Akers, 1998; Akers & Jensen, 2003; Gray, Durkin, Call, Evans, & Melton, 2015; Lee et al., 2016). Regarding white collar crime, the corporate culture (space of differential association) is suggested as being highly influential and leading employees to reject the opinions of familial and peer relationships towards crime in favor of the corporate world and committing white collar crime (Piquero, Tibbetts, & Blankenship, 2005). Similarly, findings from an international, qualitative test of differential association posit that bribery occurring at Ukrainian universities is a result of:

...conduct...shaped not by actors' abstract beliefs about bribery but by their concrete experiences in organizational contexts, including informal interactions with peers and colleagues, observation of supervisors and upperclassmen, and exposure to gossip. The stories of university bribery reveal that local cultures of universities largely shape the actors' engagement in their informal economies. (Zaloznaya, 2012, p. 307)

Concerning digital piracy, Gunter (2008) found differential association and definitions as positive predictors, specifically in terms of peer and parent attitudes. A recent South Korean study concerning sexting found that peer pressure was the most pivotal influence, but a personal positive attitude towards sexting was also predictive (Lee et al., 2016).

Differential association and definitions have been tested extensively to predict substance and alcohol abuse. Differential association, specifically time spent with peers using drugs, in addition to perceived support of peers, are decisive predictors of both marijuana and hallucinogen use by adolescents in the US (Gray et al., 2015; Vito, Schafer, Higgins, Marcum, & Ricketts, 2015). Regarding U.S. binge drinking habits, one study found that a college student's drinking habits tend to be similar to the self-identified peer group (Byrd, 2016). A study on substance abuse (cigarette, marijuana, and alcohol) of Puerto Rican adolescents found individual definitions to be pivotal except in the case of alcohol use, in which the effect of perceived peer definitions was statistically stronger (Miller et al., 2008).

Concerning all four SLT components, Kim et al. (2013) found SLT theory to be a strong theoretical framework in terms of predicting alcohol use by South Korean adolescents. Social learning theory has also been applied to more violent crimes, such as dating violence and marital violence and abuse (see Mihalic & Elliott, 1997, as cited in Jennings, Park, Tomsich, Gover, & Akers, 2011). A multi-country (Russia, Ukraine, and Greece) test of SLT among adults concerning several types of criminal behavior (e.g. violent and property crimes) found strong statistical support for the entire theory, but especially in terms of differential reinforcement (Tittle et al., 2012). Finally, differential reinforcement, measured in terms of anticipated rewards and punishments, is thought to influence both positively and negatively (respectively) binge drinking habits on U.S. university campuses (Capece & Lanza-kaduce, 2013).

Social opportunity structure. Social opportunity structure first appeared in the work of Kleemans and De Poot (2008) who analyzed the organized criminal careers of Dutch offenders. A key finding was that older offenders, including those who had no criminal history, were more likely to possess established social relationships and networks valuable to organized crime

syndicates (Kleemans & De Poot, 2008). Similarly, a study comparing organized and traditional crime offenders found that organized crime offenders were likely to join organized crime as a result of specific situational circumstances, such as possessing desired social contacts (Van Koppen et al., 2010). Moreover, this conclusion was supported by data underscoring the lower likelihood of organized crime offenders having extensive (if any) criminal histories characteristic of traditional crime offenders, thereby highlighting the pivotal role of opportunity and social and professional networks in adulthood (Van Koppen et al., 2010).

Building on these studies, Van Koppen and De Poot (2013) found that while adult organized crime offenders may be naïve in regards to the criminal underworld, their social and business networks can be quite valuable to organized crime syndicates. This finding is contested by other research suggesting that after being approached by organized crime, an adult may be more inclined to engage if he/she has first experienced a stressful life event, such as unexpectedly losing a job or a domestic, family issue (Laub & Sampson, 2003; Thornberry & Krohn, 2005, as cited in Van Koppen & De Poot, 2013). However, the findings of Van Koppen and De Poot (2013) suggest that the extensive and well-established professional and social networks of adults (which a younger offender is less likely to possess), including those which may exist entirely in the legal economy, facilitates entrance into organized crime. In other words, SOS represents not simply the act of being approached to commit a crime, but being strategically targeted and in possession of an advantageous business and social network.

Occupation as a gateway into organized crime was analyzed by Kleemans and Van de Bunt (2008), who note several occupational features and trends of suspected organized crime offenders. For example, occupations tend to engage the transportation sector or represent some type of mobility logistics, such as taxi drivers, transport company workers, or employment at a

sea port (Kleemans & Van de Bunt, 2008). A second feature is that offenders may not have salaried positions, which can in turn offer a degree of independence and flexibility, with examples being directors of businesses, lawyers, or accountants (Kleemans & Van de Bunt, 2008). Building on these characteristics, Kleemans and Van de Bunt (2008) point to the social aspect of many of the above noted occupations, meaning that an employee is interacting with a consistent, diverse flow of people. These characteristics match the previously outlined organized crime traits which reiterates the value of social and professional networks.

Overview of Sexual Exploitation in Bulgaria

The existing knowledge base concerning BHTs remains extremely nascent, especially concerning the personal, behavioral dimension and overall demography. Information about BHTs is primarily limited to organized crime *modus operandi* studies, in which BHTs' movements and tactics are documented. The result is a dearth of knowledge corresponding to SLT and SOS. Nevertheless, this section will begin by introducing the economic and social context of Bulgaria, including a brief synopsis of sexual exploitation in Bulgaria. This will be followed by a review of the existing research concerning BHTs and Bulgarian organized crime as it relates to SLT and SOS.

Current economic and social overview. Bulgaria, located in Eastern Europe, is roughly the size of Virginia with an estimated population of 7.2 million (Eurostat Population, 2015). It shares borders with Turkey, Greece, The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia, and Romania (See Appendix A for map). The Bulgarian state was established in 680, but in 1396 fell to the Turkish Ottoman Empire and politically disappeared for about five hundred years (Crampton, 2007). Soon after overthrowing the Ottoman yoke in 1878, Bulgaria became engaged in a series of military conflicts, including both Balkan wars (1912-1913), World War I,

and World War II (Crampton, 2007). All were costly in terms of human casualties, resources, and international relations (Crampton, 2007). At the close of World War II and after a Soviet Union invasion in September of 1944, the communists rose to power and remained in control until November 1989 (Crampton, 2007).

Bulgaria was admitted to the EU in 2007, but remains characterized as a country of inequality, poverty, low wages, and a growing gray economy due to widespread corruption and organized crime (Petrunov et al., 2013). In 2013, the EU reported that 48% of Bulgarians were at risk for poverty and social exclusion, which was double the EU average and solidified Bulgaria's classification as the poorest EU country (Eurostat People at Risk for Poverty, 2014). In November 2015, Bulgaria reported an unemployment rate of only 8.8%, but unemployment among people under 25 years was 20.7% (Eurostat Statistics Explained, 2015). Also in 2015, the minimum wage monthly income was 184€ (\$200), the smallest figure of all 28 EU member states (Eurostat: Minimum Wages, 2015). The average monthly salary was 955 (\$544) Bulgarian leva (Republic of Bulgaria: National Statistical Institute [RBNSI], 2015).

Scope of sexual exploitation. In Bulgaria, sexual exploitation is the most common form of human trafficking and affects primarily women (Petrunov, 2011a, 2014; UNODCb, 2014). From 2010-2013 the number of female victims far exceeded that of both men and children, accounting for 76% of the total documented cases (UNODCb, 2014). In 2013 alone, women represented almost 80% of the total number of victims, while men accounted for 8% (UNODCb, 2014). Regarding Bulgarian children, data from 2010-2013 showed 269 reported cases of child trafficking, of which 230 (85%) affected girls (UNODCb, 2014). Although the Bulgarian government only reported a total of 39 cases of the trafficking of boys, recent research from the NGO sector indicates an increase in the trafficking of boys for the purposes of sexual

exploitation (Dimitrova & Alexandrova, 2015; UNODCb, 2014). Also, interviews with Bulgarian experts and social workers point to a growing trend of Roma boys entering prostitution as minors and then transitioning to transgender prostitution in late adolescence and early adulthood (Dimitrova & Alexandrova, 2015).

Explaining sexual exploitation. An examination of the research links sexual exploitation with economic forces exemplified in the demand of the Western European sex industry and the supply of economically and socially vulnerable women and children.

Supply and demand. Europe's flourishing sex industry is a key sex tourism destination, with women and children from Central and Eastern Europe meeting the increasing demand (Hawke & Raphael, 2016). Although Petrunov (2011a) admits that his calculations are not exact, he estimates that Bulgarian organized crime's profits from human trafficking, which is primarily sexual exploitation, could have accounted for 1.5-3% of Bulgaria's 2008 gross domestic product, which was estimated to 900 million – 1.3 billion Euro (p. 169).

Vulnerable economic and social status. The combination of a lack or limited economic opportunities and the need to care for one's family positions women to be especially susceptible to prostitution and the recruitment tactics of traffickers (Petrunov et al., 2013). Siegel (2012) notes that Bulgarian women often originate from poor areas, but even those who are well-educated turn to prostitution after failing to secure quality, profitable employment. Some women first resort to prostitution within Bulgaria, but then realize the greater financial prospects of Western Europe, and therefore volunteer to relocate with the help of organized crime (Siegel, 2012).

As with women, children from low socioeconomic families are at risk for sexual exploitation. In a United Nations Children's Emergency Fund ([UNICEF], 2013) report on child

enrollment and completion of education in Bulgaria, the researchers noted that poverty was a key barrier with some families struggling to find food. Children from such families are more likely to be sent out to work, with prostitution being one option (UNICEF, 2013). Traffickers are aware of this economic desperation and target such children, offering them clothes and other material items in order to manipulate and ultimately sexually exploit them (UNICEF, 2013). Finally, research continues to underscore the plight of Bulgarian Roma children, who come from communities plagued by material poverty, low levels of educational attainment, and sporadic and low-paying jobs (Dimitrova & Alexandrova, 2015; UNICEF, 2013).

Bulgarian anti-trafficking policy framework. The Bulgarian Criminal Code defines the trafficking of people as a criminal offense (Bulgarian Criminal Code: Article 159a, 2009). Trafficking an adult is punishable by imprisonment of two to eight years and a fine of 3,000 – 12,000 (\$1,600 – \$6,700) Bulgarian leva (Bulgarian Criminal Code: Article 159a, 2009). The trafficking of minors has slightly stricter penalties with imprisonment of three to ten years and a fine of 10,000 – 20,000 (\$5,500 - \$11,100) Bulgarian leva (Bulgarian Criminal Code: Article 159a, 2009).

Two distinct features of the criminal legislation are a disregard for consent as a means to easing the prosecution of traffickers and also a specific provision of harsher penalties when trafficking is carried out by an individual working for or with “an organized criminal group” (Bulgarian Criminal Code: Article 159d, 2009, p. 63). Concerning the latter, only six other EU member states include such a penalty (European Commission, 2015).

Bulgarian legislation towards prostitution. In Bulgaria, prostitution is described as occupying a “legal gray area” due to its absence in the criminal code and lack of explicit

protection through legalization (Kulish, 2007, p. A6; Minkov, 2010). Prostitution policy is traced through four stages (Minkov, 2010; Petrunov, 2011b):

- 1) Regulation: 1878-1918
- 2) Abolition with Silent Permission: 1918-1944
- 3) Prohibition: 1944-1990
- 4) Liberalism: 1990 to the present

Currently, policy measures against prostitutes are justified by Chapter Ten (Crimes Against the Public Order and Peace) of the criminal code, which was introduced in 1968 (Bulgarian Criminal Code: Chapter Ten). Specifically, Article 329(1) outlines punishment (probation or a maximum of two years in prison) for those who are physically capable of working, but instead choose to earn an income in an “illegal or immoral way” (Bulgarian Criminal Code: Chapter Ten). Since 1990, there have been periodic calls to legalize prostitution, however all such attempts have failed (Kulish, 2007; Minkov, 2010). These failures are often linked to the general public’s noteworthy disdain for prostitution. For example, a study in 2010 reported that 56% of respondents viewed prostitution as immoral and 18% as a crime (Petrunov, 2011b).

Profile of a human trafficker. The demography of human traffickers, including BHTs, is a growing research focus (Rijken et al., 2015). The primary sources of data grounding the current human trafficker typology are court case documents and interviews with experts (government, police, NGO workers) and victims, meaning that interviews directly conducted with human traffickers occur only sparingly (Petrunov, 2011a; 2014; Rijken et al., 2015).

One exception is an EU study presenting rare, aggregate data gathered from 160 police and court proceedings from four European countries which uncovered information on 233 human

traffickers (Rijken et al., 2015). Additionally, 101 traffickers were either interviewed or returned a questionnaire (Rijken et al., 2015). Included in this study were 32 BHTs: 13 offenders described in court proceedings and 19 other traffickers, 15 who completed questionnaires and 4 who were interviewed (Rijken et al., 2015). The table depicts the collected demographic data from both samples (Rijken et al., 2015).

Table 1. Aggregate Data on Bulgarian Human Traffickers

	Data from Court Files (n=13)	Data from Interviews (4) /Questionnaires (15) (n=19)
Type of Trafficking	All sexual exploitation	5 cases of sexual exploitation 13 cases unknown
Gender	12 M; 1 F	15 M; 4 F
Age	26-35: 1 36>: 12	19-25: 2 26-35: 3 36>: 12 Unknown: 2
Education²	Primary: 2 Secondary Low: 10 Vocational: 1	Primary: 3 Secondary Low: 7 Secondary Completed: 5 None: 3 Unknown: 1
Employment Status	-----	Employed: 9 Unemployed: 7 Unknown: 3
Marital Status	Single: 1 Married: 8 Divorced: 4	Single: 2 Married: 16 In a Relationship: 1
Children	Yes: 2	Yes: 18

² Breakdown of Education Levels Applied by the Project: Primary school refers to schooling between ages 6 -12/13; Secondary lower education refers to schooling between ages 12/13 – 16; Secondary higher education refers to schooling between ages 16 – 18 (see Rijken et al., 2015, p. 14).

Table 1 (cont.)

	Unknown: 11	No: 1
Criminal Background	Previous Convictions: 5 None: 8	Previous Convictions: 11 None: 8
Admission of Guilt (Plea)	Yes: 11 Unknown: 2	-----
How He/She Became Involved in Human Trafficking	-----	Friends: 5 (Ex)Partner: 2 Self: 1 Unknown: 11

One observation is the overall low levels of educational attainment, which likely contributes to BHTs being mainly employed in areas such as “agriculture, construction and the garment industry...[with] other occupations included [being a] barber, bartender, driver and security guard” (Rijken et al., 2015, p. 39). A second observation concerns family life, in that the majority are over the age thirty-six and married with children. This suggests one type of trafficker, mainly a man with a family, but with limited opportunities for higher skilled, and therefore paid, employment. Finally, an observation not represented in the table but noted by the researchers, was their surprise that a very low percentage of Bulgarians reported coming from dysfunctional families (Rijken et al, 2015). This in comparison with traffickers from the Netherlands who reported considerable family abuse and violence (Rijken et al., 2015). In contrast, Bulgarians shared positive feelings towards their families and denied being raised in abusive and violent homes (Rijken et al., 2015).

Existing research on Bulgarian human trafficker behavior and motivations

The current research on Bulgarian organized crime, sexual exploitation, and BHT motivations exists mainly within an economic dimension. Widespread poverty, low wages, corruption, and a feeble justice system juxtaposed with organized crime’s reliable profits in

sexual exploitation, in addition to other crimes, is theorized to encourage Bulgarians to pursue work as a human trafficker (Petrunov et al., 2013; Rijken et al., 2015). In terms of SLT and SOS, there is research indicating the highly familial, social nature of Bulgarian organized crime, especially regarding sexual exploitation. But, it appears that research has yet to explicate the social and behavioral processes expressed in SLT, as well as to explicitly position opportunity in this process.

Economic dimension. From the perspective of organized crime, the political and economic transition out of communism was extremely advantageous. Even though organized crime and prostitution existed during communism, the transition in the early 1990s led to its significant growth, as described by Petrunov et al. (2013):

The first half of the 1990s is marked by an institutional chaos and total lack of government control over the situation in the country; this is a time of shady privatization deals and denationalization of state-owned resources which went straight into the hands of people linked with the former communist elite. The institutional chaos is a fertile ground for the emerging large oligarchic structures and violent crime groups...Bribing high-level government officials, the representatives of the economic groupings manage to take over the state resources, transforming them into their private property. (p. 11)

Corruption remains widespread and is frequently bemoaned, with even a BHT reportedly complaining about the lack of justice and abundance of corruption (Petrunov, 2011a; Petrunov et al., 2013; Rijken et al., 2015).

While Bulgarians employed in the legal economy may only attain limited financial prosperity, organized crime has a diverse portfolio of legal and illegal enterprises generating significant profits (Petrunov, 2011a, 2014; Petrunov et al., 2013). In addition to human

trafficking, organized crime is active in drug trafficking, including heroin and cocaine, and a variety of financial fraud, such as credit card scams and skimming (Petrunov et al., 2013). It is relatively easy for organized crime recruiters to flaunt the highly profitable nature of the gray economy among those currently employed in low-wage positions or those who are unemployed (Petrunov et al., 2013; UNICEF, 2013). Petrunov et al. (2013) state that the difference between salaries in the legitimate and illegitimate economies is so striking that people lose the motivation to remain in the legitimate economy:

...it [low wages] demotivates the unemployed to look for jobs – they prefer to stay on welfare and work in the gray economy, rather than take an official job with wages that are not sufficient to provide basic necessities for themselves and their families. (p. 8)

This abysmal, legal economic climate prompts Bulgarians to seek alternative ways to meet their financial needs, including opportunities offered by organized crime. Financial incentive is undoubtedly the most frequently referenced factor associated with organized crime participation (Leman & Janssens, 2010; Petrunov, 2011a, 2014; Rijken et al., 2015). Although individual trafficker perceptions of financial incentive are vague, it is clear that becoming a trafficker is understood to improve one's socioeconomic status (Rijken et al., 2015). For example, some traffickers state a desire to earn a lot of money quickly, while others note economic survival and a lack of other options (Rijken et al., 2015). Regardless, BHTs are thought to be able to secure a relatively high standard of living (Petrunov, 2011a). Earnings can be invested in a variety of business opportunities, with some BHTs establishing clubs and restaurants, while others invest in new and expensive items with the goal of recruiting future victims (Petrunov, 2011a). Regarding the latter, there is a strong incentive to expand and recruit,

as with multiple people a BHT can potentially increase his/her earnings to between 1000 - 1500 (\$570 - \$855)Bulgarian leva a day (Rijken et al., 2015, p. 36).³

Social and opportunity factors. Since SLT and SOS have not been specifically examined, the existing research is presented collectively and not according to the specific SLT and SOS concepts, yet the mechanisms represented in this theoretical framework are tacitly implied.

Overall, research indicates the highly familial, social aspects of Bulgarian organized crime groups, which function both as normalizing forces and extends an opportunity to join (Leman & Janssens, 2008, 2010; Petrunov et al., 2013). In a social network analysis of transnational crime in Bulgaria, Petrunov et al. (2013) found “family relations” to be an influential factor in the perpetuation and operation of criminal activities, including human trafficking (p. 64). In a separate study, Petrunov (2011a) noted that male traffickers are known for exploiting and managing female relatives (Petrunov, 2011a). Furthermore, some Bulgarian families are not only aware of family members (including children) working abroad in the sex industry, but actually support their decision to sell sex (Siegel, 2012).

This familial dimension can extend beyond biological relations and be applied to entire neighborhoods, communities, and regions. An analysis of court case documents and dossiers by Leman and Janssens (2008), which included BHTs, found that traffickers tended to work in their home town/city among women with whom they already had established relationships. A study examining the sexual exploitation market in Poland noted that BHTs often originate and are recruited from the same region (Rijken et al., 2015). Leman and Janssens (2010) observed that,

³ In 2015, an average monthly salary for a Bulgarian was around \$544.

In the Bulgarian city of Sliven [located in central eastern Bulgaria], it is not regarded as abnormal that girls will work as sex workers and the boys become pimps. The Bulgarian girls can be seen as “circular sex workers”, who return to Bulgaria every three months... (p. 15)

This observation coincides with other reports concerning the city of Sliven, which describe average citizens working as prostitutes and traffickers in complete harmony, with both living peacefully side by side as neighbors and members of the broader community (Agency Mediana, 2009).

Summary of the Knowledge Base

Social learning theory and SOS provides a strong conceptual framework for representing both longstanding and recent concepts theorized as influential in the process of criminal decision-making and ultimately committing a crime. The existing framework for understanding why Bulgarians become human traffickers exists mainly in an economic dimension. Yet, this framework overlooks the highly influential role of relationships on individual behavior, in addition to the broader community in which relationships are forged and exist. Moreover, the availability and function of opportunity within relationships and the broader community remains understudied. This dissertation is responding to this gap by qualitatively examining SLT and SOS among BHTs in order to expand the current BHT theoretical framework by elucidating the cognitive and behavioral mechanisms theorized as present and influential in the process of learning criminal behavior.

Propositions

This dissertation examined several propositions corresponding to SLT and SOS and are collectively summarized in the following statement:

A Bulgarian considers, learns, and ultimately decides to become a human trafficker engaged in sexual exploitation when (a) he/she associates more with people either actively or with a past history of sexual exploitation, (b) is more saturated in the positive and/or neutralizing definitions and attitudes expressed and learned through association, (c) experiences the rewards and a lack of punishment for participating in sexual exploitation, and (d) witnesses and is therefore exposed repeatedly to human traffickers (modeling). The opportunity to become a human trafficker is presented through differential association represented by family and peer relationships and thereby less likely to be the result of organized crime recruitment strategy, consisting of targeting individuals with potentially valuable/advantageous professional networks.

This hypothesized mechanism can be broken down conceptually into the following propositional statements:

- 1) Social learning theory:
 - a. Differential Association: Bulgarian human traffickers consistently spend time with family and peers active and/or with past experience in sexual exploitation.
 - b. Definitions - Attitudes: Bulgarian human traffickers initially acquire and ultimately adopt favorable definitions and attitudes to sexual exploitation through interactions inherent to differential association.
 - c. Differential Reinforcement: Bulgarian human traffickers experience greater rewards, both positive and negative, and less punishment through repeated involvement in sexual exploitation.

- d. Imitation (Modeling): Bulgarian human traffickers are exposed to active and/or ex-human traffickers (models), some of whom are family and/or close peer relationships.
- 2) Social opportunity structure: The opportunity to become a human trafficker is facilitated by a family member(s) and/or a peer(s) (i.e. a social network), meaning that organized crime recruitment, consisting of targeting individuals based on his/her valuable/advantageous social/professional network, undertakes a lesser role.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Research Design

This dissertation undertook an explanatory, multiple-case study design consisting of 16 BHTs in order to examine propositions and thereby grow theory on human trafficker behavior (Schwandt & Gates, 2017; Yin, 2014). Yin (2014) argues that multiple cases (BHTs) should be understood as multiple experiments following a “replication logic” (p. 57). As with scientific experiments seeking to replicate previous findings, the use of multiple-cases allows for a set of propositions to be repeatedly tested and examined (Yin, 2014). In terms of data analysis, each case was analyzed on individual and aggregate levels (Yin, 2014).

This research design was considered an appropriate fit for the research goal, propositions, and target population. The case study approach can address “how” and “why” questions with the goal of building theory by examining propositions and formulating “analytic generalizations” (Schwandt & Gates, 2017; Yin, 2014, p. 21). Furthermore, it allows for the qualitative examination of SLT, instead of the more common quantitative, behavior prediction approach. The former was necessary in light of the clandestine, illegal, and stigmatizing nature of the target population and their activities, meaning that fewer cases (participants) were available, accessible, and willing to give an interview. Finally, case studies can provide more robust contextual information relating to how and why a process functions, which would otherwise not be captured through quantitative evidence (see Kim et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2016; Yin, 2014).

Data Collection

The methods used for data collection were: interviews, participant observation, memos, and a short demographic survey.

Site. All data collection took place in Bulgaria and occurred between October 29 – November 22, 2016. Bulgaria is administratively broken down into 28 provinces (област) and 264 (община) municipalities (Eurostat Manuals and Guidelines, 2015). Interviews were conducted in the capital of Sofia and the province of Plovdiv. A demographic and economic overview of both are depicted in the table below.

Table 2. Sofia and Plovdiv Statistics⁴

	Sofia	Plovdiv
Estimated Population (2014)	1,316,557	675,586
Unemployment Percentage	6.3%	13.1%
Percentage of Businesses Employing a Maximum of 9 Employees	92%	91.9%
Annual Salary with a Contract	13,542 leva (\$7,311) [monthly average: 1,129 leva (\$609)]	8,504 leva (\$4,812) [monthly average: 708 leva (\$401)]
Percentage of People Age 25-64 with a High School Education	48%	55%
Percentage of People Age 25-64 with a Middle School or lower level of Education	3%	20%
Percentage of Households with Internet Access	70%	60%

⁴See RBNSI (2014) Regional statistics for both Sofia and Plovdiv in the references.

Research team. The researcher and the gatekeeper implemented the data collection strategy. The researcher is an American woman with professional and student experience in Bulgaria. She lived in Bulgaria from 2008-2011 and returned for a minimum of one month between 2012-2014. Much of the groundwork for this dissertation was laid during 2015-2016 while she was in Bulgaria on a fellowship.

The researcher met the gatekeeper in 2012 and worked with her on two other, non-related academic projects. She holds a lecturer position at a large university in Bulgaria and has a doctorate in sociology. Due to her academic position, ethics approval was secured from her university, in addition to the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign ([UIUC], see Institutional Review Board [IRB]). The gatekeeper not only facilitated access to the participants, but also served as the point of contact between potential and confirmed participants, thus eliminating the researcher from a direct role in the recruitment process.

Access. A significant challenge was securing access to a hidden population which has no clear reason, nor obvious motivation, to engage with a foreigner on the topic of how he became involved in an illegal activity. Access challenges, including participant motivation, were overcome by the highly-trusted gatekeeper, who was known to six of the participants prior to this study.

Criminologists suggest several reasons why offenders may choose to participate in research. Copes and Hochstetler (2006) suggest that beyond the financial remuneration for giving an interview, offenders are motivated to disclose to researchers because the underground, secretive nature of criminal activity limits or completely eliminates the opportunity to converse with outsiders. Also, being interviewed places the offender in the position of the teacher and allows him/her to instruct the researcher on daily life realities and challenges, which may not be

acknowledged and validated by others (Copes & Hochstetler, 2006). Finally, some offenders appreciate the opportunity to be helpful, which is especially the case if they feel guilty about past decisions, and therefore see interviews as an altruistic opportunity to compensate for past behavior (Copes & Hochstetler, 2006).

Participants were not directly queried on their motivations for participation, yet it would seem that the opportunity to teach an American woman on sexual exploitation likely played a role in some of the participants' consent (see Reflexivity and Limitations). During interviews, most participants deviated from the interview protocol to instruct the research team on the art of benefiting from prostitution.

Interviews. Interview data was the primary source of evidence and was collected from BHTs between October – November 2016.

Inclusion criteria. In order to participate in this study, interview participants had to:

- 1) be a Bulgarian citizen
- 2) speak the Bulgarian language
- 3) be over the age of eighteen
- 4) either be currently working or have worked in the past, as a human trafficker exclusively in the area of sexual exploitation, with the activities ascribed to being a human trafficker operationalized as extending beyond the list of more violent descriptors found in the UN protocol and the Bulgarian Criminal Code to include the following actions: managing/supervising people providing sex without the means or use of violence.

Recruitment of cases. The researcher was not directly involved in the recruitment process in any way. Instead, the gatekeeper employed snowball sampling beginning with the six

participants already known to her. The result of this snowballing sampling procedure was an additional five interviews. The remaining five interviews were secured on the advice of a previous participant who had recommended approaching taxi drivers.⁵

On two separate afternoons the research team employed this strategy in an area of a large city renowned for prostitution, especially in the evening. On the first afternoon, the gatekeeper directly approached two taxi drivers while the researcher waited at a distance. Each was approached separately and both consented. On the second afternoon, the gatekeeper approached a third taxi driver, who consented and provided an interview. This third taxi driver, with no prompting from the research team, then proceeded to recruit two other taxi driver colleagues. These last two taxi drivers were also encouraged to participate by one of the two taxi drivers who had been previously interviewed on the first afternoon and who had unexpectedly appeared and recognized the research team on the street. No additional taxi drivers were invited to participate and all five who were approached consented.

In addition to the collected 16 cases, the gatekeeper invited an additional seven individuals to participate:⁶

- 1) Male – hotel receptionist
- 2) Male – owner of a hotel
- 3) Female – works at the hotel owned by male #2
- 4) Male – pimp, who directly manages people selling sex
- 5) Male – pimp, who directly manages people selling sex
- 6) Male – pimp, who directly manages people selling sex

⁵ The five taxi drivers: Kalofer, Lashko, Minko, Nuri, and Orlin

⁶ The locations of these individuals was known to the research team, but have been excluded to protect confidentiality, as the gatekeeper knows some of them.

7) Male – pimp, who directly manages people selling sex

Case sample size. The process of deciding how many cases to select remains a debated case study methodological issue, which is in part due to varied definitions of the term “case” (Creswell, 2013; Schwandt & Gates, 2017; Yin, 2014). For example, Creswell (2013) states that most researchers tend to select no more than five cases, while Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that more than 15 cases can prove to be “unwieldy” (p. 30). Yin (2014) notes that pursuing more than five cases could indicate the researcher’s determination to counter threats to the overall certainty of findings. More specifically, Yin (2014) states that determining the total number of cases in a multiple-case design should take into account the degree of certainty desired in light of the type of theory being tested (examined) and the existence and strength of any known rival explanations. For this dissertation, a minimum of 15 cases was sought in light of the highly nuanced SLT/SOS framework representing four behavioral and cognitive mechanisms interacting with a myriad of other factors (Yin, 2014).

This minimum case threshold was also selected in light of the research goal of this dissertation, mainly to inject an understudied population’s view of a widely tested criminological theory. Such a goal is not striving for statistical generalization to a broader and much larger population, but instead is seeking to “shed empirical light about some theoretical concepts or principles” and from the perspective of an understudied, but critical population (Yin, 2014, p. 40). This process leads to what Yin (2014) calls “analytic generalizations”, which he contrasts with statistical generalizations. For the purposes of this dissertation, cases (BHTs) were selected to share their insights, perceptions, and experiences as it corresponds to the SLT/SOS framework. In other words, the quantitative, statistical, and predictive power of the SLT is not under consideration, but rather whether and how BHTs understand their process of becoming a

trafficker in light of the SLT/SOS framework. The valuable, unique nature of such data is discussed in the sections concerning Significance and Implications of the findings.

Interview procedures. Participants who agreed to an interview were informed of the parameters, including the topics and questions to be covered, as well as the anonymity and confidentiality secured for each participant. Besides consenting to the interview, participants were asked a second time to consent to the demographic survey and also shown the survey (if interested), so as to assure participants that no personal, identifiable information was being gathered.

Regarding location, participants could share where he preferred to give the interview. Overall, most of the interviews took place in public locations, such as cafés, restaurants, and on the street, however a few participants requested that the research team (or just the gatekeeper) visit them at their home. In total, six participants were interviewed in the province of Plovdiv and 10 in Sofia (see Table 2 for location comparison). All interviews were individual, with the exception of two participants who were present at the same location and engaged the research team together, however one became distracted with another activity and subsequently was interviewed individually.⁷

The research team conducted 12 interviews together and the gatekeeper completed four alone. Of these four, two of the participants specifically stated a willingness to give an interview, but could not risk exposure by the presence of the researcher.⁸ A third was eager to speak with the researcher, but at the scheduled interview time, his wife unexpectedly returned home and he informed the gatekeeper that he could not risk his wife overhearing the interview

⁷ Refers to the interviews of Gergo and Dimoslav

⁸ Refers to Zoro and Ilcho

(see Findings – Narrative Analysis for a more detailed description of this case).⁹ Additionally, he stated it would be awkward for him to explain an American, female visitor. Finally, the last participant agreed to a phone interview, but due to scheduling constraints and the fact that the gatekeeper did not have a longstanding relationship with him, the gatekeeper decided it was best to interview him in the moment versus attempting to reschedule a time when the researcher could join the call.¹⁰

Interviews were semi-structured, adhering to a protocol with questions directly pertaining to the SLT/SOS theoretical framework (Kvale, 1996). As shown in the protocol, interviews included a short demographic survey and an open-ended, introductory question with the goal of capturing the participant's experience (see Appendices B & C). Throughout the course of the interview, the research team asked follow-up, probing, direct, and indirect questions to clarify meaning (Kvale, 1996).

Questions were first constructed in English and were derived directly from the theoretical concepts under examination. All questions were translated into Bulgarian by the researcher and then read and verified by a Bulgarian native speaker. As clearly stated in the information sheet, no questions delved into those providing sexual services, nor into how the trafficker operates in his role, meaning questions regarding profit management (distribution), details concerning other traffickers and/or organized crime figures, and recruitment strategies. Interviews were conducted in Bulgarian. In light of confidentiality and privacy concerns, interviews were not recorded (audio/video) in any way.

The research team followed these procedures with one exception. After the completion of the first 10 interviews, the snowball sampling method began to slow. The gatekeeper decided

⁹ Refers to Vulko

¹⁰ Refers to Peter

to implement a suggested strategy, mainly recruiting taxi drivers in an area characterized by more visible prostitution (see Methods – Recruitment).¹¹ This shift in recruitment strategy altered the environment and nature of the relationship between the research team and the participants. Concerning the environment, interviews exclusively took place on a busy street while the taxi drivers awaited their next fares. This more chaotic context precluded notetaking in two of the five interviews, as the research team did not want to attract attention. The remaining three interviews were collected on the street, but in the taxi of the participant, which allowed the researcher to discretely take notes.¹²

A second challenge to this alternative recruitment method was building a relationship in a short period of time with an individual not known to the research team. Aware of the time constraints, especially the threat of a taxi driver receiving a fare during the interview, the research team dropped the second question from the interview protocol pertaining to the participant's childhood and his friendships. At this point in the data collection process, the research team had noticed that participants willing to provide more descriptive responses were better known to the gatekeeper. Therefore, faced with limited time and the need to build trust quickly, the research team decided to eliminate this question.

Documentation. The documentation of interviews entailed certain procedures and drew upon other data collections methods, specifically participant observation and memo writing. Demographic data was also collected during the interviews.

Concerning procedures, at the close of each interview, the researcher typed up the handwritten notes into a Word document and then destroyed the handwritten notes. The

¹¹ This strategy was recommended by a participant: Gergo.

¹² The three interviews collected in the taxi of the participant: Lashko, Nuri, and Orlin

researcher took notes during 10 interviews.¹³ The gatekeeper took notes during the four interviews she conducted and then shared the notes with the researcher.¹⁴ The remaining two interviews were constructed from memory by the research team within 30 minutes of completion, as they were collected on the street (see above).¹⁵ From the notes, the researcher composed narrative summaries, which included direct quotations, as well as impressions and observations from the research team. Each narrative summary was reduced into profiles. Practically, writing profiles provides an accessible way for readers to learn the key ideas in each case, while also providing a shorter narrative for data analysis (Wolcott, 1994, as cited in Seidman, 1998). The researcher assigned pseudonyms to each participant.

Prolonged, direct participant observation was precluded by the combination of the sensitive nature of the topic and in a few cases, the possible offender status of the participants. However, the researcher undertook an observer-as-participant role, a method used for gathering supplemental information to complement interviews as time and interactions with the target group were limited (Gold, 1958; Grigsby, 2001). For example, interview notes included documentation of the observed participant's facial expressions and body language. The researcher also collected insights and observations from the gatekeeper and were included in the interview summaries. The researcher's ability to undertake this role was aided by her experience in Bulgaria (see Research Team).

In addition to the 16 case narratives, the researcher also wrote memos in order to chart the analytic process (Charmaz, 2014). Memo writing created an "interactive space" where the researcher could process issues concerning codes, interview questions, and other methodological

¹³ Asen, Boris, Gergo, Dimoslav, Evtim, Zhadomir, Yosif, Lashko, Nuri, and Orlin

¹⁴ Vulko, Zoro, Ilcho, and Peter

¹⁵ Kalofer and Minko

challenges (Charmaz, 2014, p. 162-163). Memos differed from the narrative summaries in that they were more analytical in nature, focusing more on themes, comparisons, and observations from the perspective of both the researcher and the gatekeeper, while the narrative summaries primarily document the information shared in the interview. In total, the researcher wrote 11 memos. Memos were also a tool for processing reflexivity issues (see Methods – Reflexivity).

Non-identifying, demographic data was collected and included: gender, age range, marital status, children, highest level of educational attainment, and current employment status (see Appendix B and Table 4). The purpose of obtaining demographic data was to better depict sample characteristics, as well as to contribute to the evolving BHT typology found in the literature. Participants were not queried on any identifying information, such as specific job information and family life details (e.g. specific number and ages of children).

Interview features. The table below depicts all 16 cases and the length and type of interview. Interviews averaged 35 minutes, with the longest interview being 90 minutes and the shortest 15 minutes. No follow up interviews were conducted.

Table 3. Interview Features

Name (Pseudonym)	Type	Length – Interviewer
Asen	Face to Face	1.5 hours, but had an additional 2 hours with him – R. Team
Boris	Face to Face	1 hour – R. Team
Vulko	Face to Face	1 hour – Gatekeeper
Gergo	Face to Face	30 minutes (but Anna had an additional 30 minutes with him) – R. Team
Dimoslav	Face to Face	30 minutes of direct questioning over the span of 1 hour ¹⁶ - R. Team
Evtim	Face to Face	30 minutes – R. Team

¹⁶ Interview took place right after interview with Gergo, as Dimoslav is a colleague and was present at the beginning of Gergo’s interview.

Table 3 (cont.)

Zhadomir	Face to Face	45 minutes – R. Team
Zoro	Face to Face	45 minutes – Gatekeeper
Ilcho	Face to Face	45 minutes – Gatekeeper
Yosif	Face to Face	45 minutes – R. Team
Kalofer	Face to Face	15 minutes – R. Team
Lashko	Face to Face	15 minutes – R. Team
Minko	Face to Face	15 minutes – R. Team
Nuri	Face to Face	15 minutes – R. Team
Orlin	Face to Face	15 minutes – R. Team
Peter	Phone	20-25 minutes – Gatekeeper

Description of the cases. The table below depicts the participants' characteristics in the aggregate. All participants agreed to complete the survey and all questions were answered, meaning that no demographic data is missing. Several participants offered more specific data, such as the gender and specific number and ages of their children, however this data was purposefully omitted in order to protect participant confidentiality.

All the participants were male. Almost half the participants were between the age of 40-50, while a quarter were between 18-28. Half the participants reported being married and more than half had at least one child. All the participants had at least completed middle school (8th grade), while a quarter were either studying at the university or had graduated.

Table 4. Demographics

Age	Number (Percentage)
18 – 28	4 (25)
29 – 39	2 (12)
40 – 50	7 (44)
51 – 61	1 (6)
62 – older	2 (13)

Table 4 (cont.)

Marital Status¹⁷	
Yes	8 (50)
No	5 (31)
Divorced	3 (19)
Child/Children	
Yes	10 (62)
No	6 (38)
Highest Level of Educational Completed	
None	0
First – Fourth grade	0
Fifth – Eighth grade	3 (19)
High School	9 (56)
University (current and graduated)	4 (25)
Employment Status	
Currently Employed in the Legal Sector	11 (69)
Currently Working in the Illegal Sector	3 (19)
Unemployed	2 (12)
Ethnicity¹⁸	
Bulgarian	12 (75)
Roma	4 (25)

Human Subjects Considerations

Due to the sensitive nature of this study, ethical issues were considered at length during the process of developing the research design, implementation, and will remain a focus in any future publications. The researcher worked closely with the IRB and the study did not begin

¹⁷ Participants were not originally offered the category of divorced, however as several participants volunteered this information, this category has been added.

¹⁸ This information was not intentionally gathered in the survey, as it was expected that participants would all be Bulgarian, however after a Roma participant offered to provide an interview, ethnicity was noted.

until IRB approval was obtained.¹⁹ As part of the IRB process, ethics approval was also obtained from the university in Bulgaria where the gatekeeper is a lecturer allowing for adherence to be monitored by both the UIUC IRB and a Bulgarian university.

Waiver of documentation of informed consent. This study requested a waiver of documentation of informed consent in order to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants. At the beginning of each interview, all participants were thoroughly informed as to the purpose and scope of the interview, in addition to the steps taken to assure confidentiality. In several cases, participants were informed first by the gatekeeper and then a second time by the research team. Moreover, the voluntary participation of participants was assured through a verbal informed consent process conducted together by the research team.

Data security. Handwritten notes were taken by the researcher during or right after all interviews. After each interview, the researcher typed up all handwritten notes. The handwritten notes were then destroyed. The remaining electronic versions were password protected and stored on the researcher's laptop, which was also password protected. Moreover, all electronic copies were stored on the researcher's Dropbox account, which was also password protected, meaning that all copies were protected by three layers of passwords.

Confidentiality and privacy. This study took several measures to assure the confidentiality of participants. First, data collection did not include the gathering of any personal, identifying information. Furthermore, participants were asked to not share their full name and instead, the researcher assigned a pre-selected pseudonym. In all future reproductions of this study, such as reports and publications, participants will only be referred to by the pseudonym. Interviews were conducted in spaces featuring secluded areas where other people

¹⁹ UIUC IRB Project #17049

could not overhear. Regarding interviews conducted on the street, the research team assured that bystanders were not in proximity. Finally, the geographic location of each interview has been intentionally omitted.

Risks. No participants reported experiencing any psychological and/or emotional distress as a result of participation. This study did not place participants at any risk beyond those of everyday life. No interviews were stopped by the participant, nor did any participant refuse to answer any of the questions posed by the research team.

Remuneration. All participants who answered at least one question were offered a remuneration of 15 Bulgarian leva (\$8.50). Additionally, most participants were invited to enjoy a beverage during the course of the interview (e.g. coffee, tea, bottled water, soda). A common Bulgarian cultural practice, beverages were offered to participants who had shared an interest in meeting in a café or restaurant. The U.S. dollar value for these items ranges between .55 cents - \$1.50. Drinks were offered prior to the start of the interview and kept the entire time by the participants.

Data Analysis

Interview and participant observation data. Data analysis was an iterative process, employing strategies to both categorize and connect evidence. Concerning the former, a deductive qualitative analysis approach applied *a priori* codes from the SLT/SOS theoretical framework (Gilgun, 2014). All coding was completed by hand and not with the use of computer software.

Prior to data collection, the researcher anticipated a second coding stage, mainly open (inductive) coding in order to account for data that did not ascribe to the SLT/SOS theoretical

framework. Yet during data analysis, it became apparent that the SLT/SOS theoretical framework, particularly the specific SLT mechanisms, encompassed the findings.

Regarding connecting evidence, both the longer and shorter profiles were subjected to a narrative analysis (Maxwell, 2012). These two strategies were applied to each case individually and then a cross-case synthesis was conducted in order to identify themes and patterns (Yin, 2014). Finally, SOS was reported on through the narrative accounts, as the participant described how he first engaged in prostitution.

Categorizing. The codes for deductive analysis were derived directly from a chapter written by Akers describing the broader SLT process, including all four components, and the related mechanisms.²⁰ The codes are shown in the table below (see Table 5). Since SLT is a process, the codes represent both verbs and nouns. Moreover, the codes do not represent fixed categories and can simultaneously represent multiple SLT components. For example, the people with whom a participant spends time (differential association) can also model (imitation) and reinforce (differential reinforcement) behavior, as well as transmit general attitudes and beliefs (definitions). In other words, a participant's interactions with one person can result in data pertaining to all four SLT components.

Also, it is important to note that participant accounts vary in the degree and depth of detail pertaining to the SLT components. This is in part attributed to the recruitment and data collection strategies (see Methods – Recruitment and Procedures). Nevertheless, all narrative summaries were coded using this same coding scheme.

²⁰ Akers, R. (1998). The Social Learning Theory of Criminal and Deviant Behavior (p. 60-89). In *Social Learning and Social Structure: A General Theory of Crime and Deviance*. Northeastern University Press: Boston, MA.

Table 5. Deductive Analysis Codes

SLT Theory Component	Codes
Differential Association	<p><u>People/Group</u>: family member, relative, friend, any specific person or group of people, co-worker, colleague, larger group of people of which the person considers himself a member or associated with (school, university, church), society (community, neighborhood)</p> <p><u>Related Words</u>: relationship, time, concentration, interaction; descriptors for the 4 dimensions of relationships: frequency, duration, priority, and intensity</p>
Definitions-Attitudes	<p>Learned skill (technique) that is criminal or otherwise, rationalization (ex. "I am poor"), positive/negative understanding attitude towards the behavior, context of when/from whom the understanding (definition, attitude) of the behavior was learned, neutralizing attitudes (ex. "Everyone does it"), group norms and values, social/cultural norms, learning a behavior can be rewarded (see differential reinforcement), label placed on a behavior</p>
Differential Reinforcement	<p>Reward (tangible: money, food, house, sex; intangible: excitement, status, prestige, thrill, acceptance), consequence (understood by the person as negative), risk, schedule of reinforcement (frequency, amount), punishment, descriptions of rewards (positives) increasing, while negatives (consequences) decrease, rewards and consequences can be acknowledged past, present, and future</p>
Imitation (Modeling)	<p>Observation, watching, model, example of person and/or group (see differential association), characteristics of the person, value placed on the person, having the reward and/or consequence of a behavior modeled (see differential reinforcement)</p>

Connecting. The narrative summaries were reduced to interview profiles following the procedures outlined by Seidman (1998). These profiles represent key ideas and opinions of the cases and include direct quotations from each participant as a means to representing and preserving participant meaning. In addition to being coded for SLT, the narrative summaries were also used to report on SOS. Fifteen participants provided specific details as to how he first engaged in prostitution and had the opportunity to profit. This information was tabulated and is reported (see Findings – Tables 7 and 8).

Procedures. Cases were analyzed according to the assigned pseudonyms which correspond to the Bulgarian alphabet. The following is the exact order of data analysis: Asen, Boris, Vulko, Gergo, Dimoslav, Evtim, Zhadomir, Zoro, Ilcho, Yosif, Kalofer, Lashko, Minko, Nuri, Orlin, and Peter.²¹

The researcher applied the following steps to each case. The gatekeeper was not involved in data analysis, however in order to triangulate findings, she did review both Findings chapters (see Methodology – Trustworthiness). These steps were applied to each case individually before any cross-case analyses were performed.

1. The narrative summary is read in its entirety. No coding is conducted.
2. Social opportunity structure is noted and then documented in an Excel spreadsheet.
3. The narrative summary is read through four additional times in order to code for each of the four SLT components.
4. After deductive analysis, each narrative summary is skimmed in order to identify any data that does not match the pre-identified codes (see Table 5).²²

²¹ Асен, Борис, Вълко, Герго, Димослав, Евтим, Жадомир, Зоро, Илчо, Йосиф, Калофер, Лашко, Минко, Нури, Орлин, и Петър

²² No such data was identified in any of the cases.

5. Each deductive, pre-identified code and its corresponding statement or word from the data is inserted into an Excel spreadsheet.
6. With the narrative summary coded, a short interview profile is written to include the key ideas, thoughts, and opinions of the case.

The researcher engaged in cross-case analysis by comparing data tabulated in the Excel spreadsheet. This representation of the data highlighted codes receiving increased attention by participants, as well as codes, and even entire cases, which deviated (negative cases).

Memo data. Throughout the data analysis process, the researcher consulted the 11 memos written during data collection. Memos were not coded, nor transformed into summaries. Instead, the researcher used memos as contextual reminders of initial thoughts and impressions, which were then applied during data analysis.

Demographic data. All non-identifying, demographic data is presented in the aggregate (see Table 4) in order to protect confidentiality.

Trustworthiness

Reflexivity. A distinguishing feature of qualitative research is recognition of the researcher as an active contributor in the research process (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013). In other words, the researcher-participant relationship is not a one-dimensional channel through which information flows unfiltered from the participant to the researcher. Instead, the researcher has complex, evolving relationships with participants (Maxwell, 2013). The interview represents a collision of biases, perspectives, and worldviews which intricately interact with gender, age, privilege, ethnicity, nationality, and socioeconomic status (Schwandt, 2007).

Throughout the research design and implementation of this dissertation, the researcher took two measures to acknowledge and remain aware of her status and worldview in relation to

the participants, as well as to prostitution. This was essential as the researcher anticipated that her demographic characteristics would not be represented in the final sample. This proved accurate as the sample is entirely Bulgarian and Roma men likely to be over the age of 40 and only one quarter have either attended or graduated from a university. In contrast, the researcher had to build short term relationships as a Caucasian, female American under the age of 40 pursuing a graduate degree.

The first measure taken was agreeing to work with a gatekeeper who was known well to her and with whom she already had a strong professional relationship. Such a relationship facilitated opportunities for open, honest discussion regarding research design, data collection, and the participants themselves. Furthermore, it created a safe space in which the researcher could speak honestly and share views that may not be intended to offend, but in fact do not sufficiently take into account linguistic, social, and cultural factors and perspectives.

The second measure, which is directly related to the first, is memo writing. Although the memos were not coded, they were reviewed and referenced throughout the iterative data analysis process. The researcher engaged in memo writing in order to process and document her conversations with the gatekeeper. Memos became a second space where the researcher could process and reflect on her own understandings of data, in addition to that of the gatekeeper and the participants.

This was perhaps most noteworthy in regards to the topic of prostitution. More specifically, the researcher could document the range of perspectives reflective of not only the research team, but also the participants. This process of documentation allowed the researcher to be repeatedly reminded that her background and characteristics have precluded a conceptualization of prostitution in purely economic terms. In other words, the researcher has

been insulated and therefore kept from economic desperation. Quite the opposite, the researcher's privilege and status have afforded her the opportunity to examine prostitution through primarily a gender and human rights lens.

Such a lens injects questions of equality and justice alongside the prevailing economic mechanisms fueling prostitution. This allows the discourse to move beyond topics such as financial betterment and "last resort" prostitution to other considerations, such as the role of gender and its relationship to educational and professional opportunity. Additionally, this lens incorporates systems and other agents addressing prostitution, such as social workers, law enforcement, and NGOs. While sellers of sex were not the focus of this dissertation, the researcher's decision to engage the perpetrator was predicated on extensive exposure, practice, and relationships with this population, as well as those seeking to support, protect, and serve them.

This shift and pursuit of those who profit allowed the researcher to explore the personal lives and experiences of a crucial, vilified agent in prostitution. The researcher recognized the inherent challenge, mainly to intentionally engage the people perpetuating an activity recognized as harmful to sellers. Yet, as data collection progressed, the researcher noticed that more than half the participants echoed the refrains of economic desperation. As will be discussed in subsequent chapters, the majority of the participants have not acquired great wealth, but instead used this supplemental income as a way to better provide for their families (see Findings). Some even chose to leave legal jobs facilitating their access to profit in exchange for a different position within the legal sector. Moreover, very few participants expressed overtly negative, abusive ideas and beliefs about women, but instead pointed to corruption and massive political, economic, and judicial failure as the primary culprits.

With some traffickers pointing to their shared socioeconomic status with sellers, gender became another point of consideration. Sexual exploitation in Bulgaria is highly gendered in that women more often sell, while men consume and control. From a criminal justice perspective, a human trafficker is punished for committing a crime, yet prior to embarking on this study, the researcher was aware that this decision-making process occurs within broader social and cultural systems which propagate the sexual appeal and allure of women while simultaneously ascribing responsibility in terms of family caregiving (Ghodsee, 2007; Ibroscheva 2007, 2013; Stoilova, 2010). This statement is not offered as a justification for perpetrators, but more as a reminder that the participants also exist in these cultural systems. Therefore, the researcher's foreknowledge and impressions throughout data collection solidified the significance of this dissertation, mainly the opportunity to interact with BHTs as individuals and then tether their worldviews to these overarching cultural and social systems in addition to prostitution.

Validity. In line with a case study, qualitative research design, this dissertation understands validity as relating “to the accounts or conclusions reached by using a particular method in a particular context for a particular purpose, not to the method itself” (Maxwell, 2012, p. 130). This is not a rejection of the importance of methods, but an attempt to accent the need to assess validity in relation to the methods applied in light of the purpose of the study and the resulting conclusions (Maxwell, 2012). Maxwell (2012) suggests that qualitative researchers should be concerned with three types of understanding found in gathered accounts which correspond to a validity typology, mainly descriptive, interpretative, and theoretical validity.²³ Each type represents a core concern and a set of possible threats.

²³ Maxwell (2012) notes key influences in the construction of this typology, specifically: Cook & Campbell (1979), Erikson (1986), Kirk and Miller (1986), Seale (1999), Runciman (1983), and Kaplan (1964).

Descriptive validity. Descriptive validity relates to the factual accuracy of the evidence and includes information that is physically experienced (e.g. seen, heard) and also that which is not directly observed, but can be inferred from other data (e.g. an event occurs but was not seen by the researcher) (Maxwell, 2012). The researcher sought to protect descriptive validity through a detailed, copious documentation process incorporating the gatekeeper.

The priority placed on assuring confidentiality and privacy precluded recording interviews, and thereby having verbatim transcripts. Yet, an accurate reporting, in addition to a rich collection, of the shared accounts was sought through the application of several sequential steps. First, the researcher took copious, handwritten notes either throughout the interview or in a few cases, immediately at the conclusion of the interview.²⁴ Second, after the completion of each interview, triangulation was sought by the researcher and gatekeeper conferring in regards to the shared account in order to check for accuracy in documentation. This was crucial and greatly enhanced the richness, quality, and accuracy of data gathered, as the gatekeeper added not only her own observations, but information missed or not ascribed with special importance by the researcher. Third, the researcher transformed notes into detailed, typed narrative statements, which included direct quotations from participants and the impressions of the research team (participant observation). Fourth, the gatekeeper read the rough drafts of both Findings chapters (Chapters Four and Five) in order to check for accuracy and make any necessary additions or redactions.

Additionally, descriptive validity was sought through the use of negative case analysis in that all written documentation will be presented, including evidence not immediately ascribing to

²⁴ In a few cases, interviews were completed in places where the researcher taking notes would have attracted attention, so in order to protect the participant, the decision was made to write all notes immediately after the interview had been completed.

the theoretical framework and the posed questions (Maxwell 2012, 2013). Finally, the rich data collected from extensive interviews was triangulated with participant observation from both the researcher and the gatekeeper. Prior to beginning data collection, the researcher intended to engage in member checking, however after the second interview it became clear that locating participants a second time was not feasible. Therefore, the research team decided to try and repeat comments and answers made during the interview in order to offer the participant the opportunity to correct, validate, and/or add to their statements. This modified version of member checking was done in order to preserve emic meaning and present the most accurate representation of such meaning as possible (Maxwell, 2013).

Interpretive validity. Moving beyond observation, interpretative validity pertains to ascribing the meanings held by participants (emic meaning) to the collected descriptive accounts (Maxwell, 2012).

The challenge posed by preserving and presenting emic meaning was sought through rigorous descriptive validity procedures and a data analysis strategy that includes categorizing and connecting (narrative analysis) approaches. Deductive analysis constructed an evidence base according to the theoretical framework. Yet, since coding (categorizing) involves dismantling evidence in order to see themes and patterns, a narrative analysis on complete accounts was also conducted (Maxwell, 2012). This second analysis strategy preserves context and the overall flow and thought process of the participant (Maxwell, 2012). While the researcher is still filtering and interpreting the evidence, both data analysis strategies are designed to preserve and represent emic meaning and understandings to the fullest extent possible.

Theoretical validity. Theoretical validity involves connecting descriptive accounts and its meanings to the abstract levels and the theoretical framework held by the researcher with the

goal of building or contributing to an overarching casual, explanatory framework or theory (Maxwell, 2012). In other words, the researcher now applies theoretical constructs to data as a means to building an explanation of the phenomenon being studied, thereby moving beyond mere description.

This type of validity was sought through a thorough deductive analysis process, which applied the SLT/SOS framework to the evidence. Both theories, but particularly SLT, have a solid knowledge base, meaning that terms and constructs have been subjected to extensive testing, including as a collective, causal process (see Literature Review). Finally, the multiple-case study approach allowed for extensive analysis both within the individual case and across cases. The use of cross case-analysis, in addition to negative case analysis, on rich accounts accents variability while also uncovering patterns and themes regarding theorized relationships between the constructs represented in the SLT/SOS theoretical framework.

CHAPTER FOUR

DEDUCTIVE DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis consisted of two stages. The first stage categorized data through deductive coding. Findings are organized according to the SLT/SOS framework.

Social Learning Theory

This dissertation examined the following proposition concerning SLT and its four theoretical components: differential association, definitions (attitudes), differential reinforcement, and imitation (modeling).

A Bulgarian considers, learns, and ultimately decides to become a human trafficker engaged in sexual exploitation when (a) he/she associates more with people (family and peers) either actively or with a past history of sexual exploitation, (b) is more saturated in the positive and/or neutralizing definitions and attitudes expressed and learned through association, (c) experiences the rewards and a lack of punishment for participating in sexual exploitation, and (d) witnesses and is therefore exposed repeatedly to human traffickers (modeling).

Differential association. Differential association provides the space and therefore facilitates the interactions necessary to the existence of the other three components (Akers, 1998; Akers & Jennings, 2015; Sellers & Winfree, 2010). Disproportionate time spent with people already engaged in crime is theorized as leading to criminal behavior (Akers & Jennings, 2015).

The proposition concerning this component was:

Bulgarian human traffickers consistently spend (spent) time with family and peers active and/or with past experience in sexual exploitation.

Work colleagues. Fellow employees and work colleagues were specifically mentioned by six participants (Asen, Evtim, Yosif, Lashko, Minko, and Peter). Additionally, two sub-groups of participants demonstrated trusting, close relationships. In all the following instances, the context of these relationships was the legal sector.

The first sub-group consisted of Asen, Evtim, and Yosif. All three worked at a hotel in a large city and called escort agencies on behalf of guests. Yosif recruited Asen for an open position and later Asen recruited Evtim. Even though Asen worked with both of them, he was friends with them prior to accepting a position at the hotel. Yosif and Asen in particular were noted as having a closer relationship. Asen encouraged both Evtim and Yosif to give an interview. The nature of the relationship between Yosif and Evtim was not known.

Regarding their work environment, Asen and Evtim characterized the boss of the hotel as being intoxicated and always with prostitutes.

Asen: He is drunk all the time and I don't like to deal with him

Also, Asen implied disapproval of the informal nature of the hotel stating that, "They didn't even really interview me...they just hired me". All three profited from prostitution by working themselves into the financial arrangement between the prostitute and/or pimp and the hotel guest. Asen reported that Yosif taught him how to do this and then Asen taught Evtim. Only Asen openly admitted this in the interview.

The second sub-group was four taxi drivers working in a large city, in an area renowned for prostitution: Kalofer, Minko, Nuri, and Orlin. Minko was the only one who specifically mentioned his colleagues' role in prostitution in conjunction with his own.

Minko: ...but there are more here [working in an area noted for prostitution] besides me...my colleagues are here [were standing nearby]

Yet, their mutual trust was seen in regards to interview recruitment. Kalofer and Minko were strategic in encouraging Nuri and Orlin to give interviews. Minko even introduced Nuri and Orlin to the research team a few minutes after his own interview. All four worked in an area with a high concentration of street prostitution and each had extensive work experience as a taxi driver (collectively they averaged 23.5 years in this job).

Lashko was employed by a taxi company which had intentionally positioned itself to work in the sex industry by driving primarily clients and prostitutes. Peter worked in the sex industry (strip club) in a large city. His promotion to assistant manager was a direct result of building a close relationship with his boss. This relationship was initially framed as a work relationship, however he explained that prior to his promotion the relationship had evolved into a close friendship.

Family. Participants made general, as well as specific statements directed towards certain members: parents, spouse, and children.

Regarding parents, five participants commented on the views of their parents towards prostitution, as well as involvement in the illegal sector. Asen, Evtim, and Yosif all stated that their parents did not approve of prostitution. Ilcho admitted that his parents were greatly saddened by his decision to work in the illegal sector. Peter stated that his parents knew he worked at a strip club, but he added that he did not discuss anything specific with them and thereby implied a certain amount of disapproval (he contrasted his parents with his friends who did approve, see Friends).

Five different participants referenced their wives during the interview (a total of eight reported being married, see Table 4). Vulko stated that his wife did not approve of his involvement in prostitution, which included both as a client and as a taxi driver. This was also

evident in that he refused to give an interview in her presence. Zoro admitted that his relationship with his wife was greatly strained by his decision to work in the illegal sector. Specifically, she urged him to leave this type of work, but with the exception of a brief three-year period in the legal business world, he returned and remained active in the illegal sector. Kalofer and Nuri shared that their wives did not approve of prostitution, while Lashko shared that he did not tell his wife that he had been with a prostitute.

Kalofer: I am very close and honest with my wife...she does not approve of it

Nuri: We...me and my wife...we do not approve...

Concerning spouses, the only exception was Ilcho, who stated that his wife fully supported his involvement in the illegal sector.

Children were commented on less directly in the interview. In total, four participants referenced their child/children in regards to their work in prostitution, including the illegal sector.²⁵ Vulko admitted his relationship(s) with his child/children was strained. Gergo stated that if he had had a daughter, he would have never slept with a prostitute, nor continued to work in prostitution.

Gergo: This is how I think...if I had a girl, I would not tolerate it

In contrast, Zoro was debating whether to involve his child/children in his illegal enterprises. Lastly, Ilcho was intentionally working to shield his child/children from his work in the illegal sector.

Several participants made overarching, general statements about their families. Asen commented that “the most important thing is family” and he said that he faithfully returned home every weekend. He was recognized by the gatekeeper as coming from a family with high moral

²⁵ In order to protect participant confidentiality, statements which referred to specific number, gender, and ages of children have been altered and are reported as “child/children”.

standards. In regards to prostitution and his involvement, Boris stated that his family did not care, nor have an opinion. In contrast, Gergo, Zhadomir, and Zoro all were ostracized by at least some family members. Both Zhadomir and Zoro reported that no one in their families had ever been involved in the illegal sector. Zhadomir did not verbalize any remorse, while Zoro did admit some regret.

Friends. As with references to family, participants made specific and general comments towards friends.

Only two participants specifically referenced childhood friends. Asen commented that as a child he remembered dividing his time evenly between family and friends. Zoro admitted the critical role that his friends played in his life, especially as a teenager. He joined a group of “troublemakers” who were already active in a variety of illegal, lesser crimes which culminated in all of them being incarcerated together. Boris indicated that the proposition to get involved in prostitution came from friends from “a long time ago”, which suggests that perhaps they knew each other as teenagers. Although Ilcho did not share this in his interview, he had a reputation as a child for being a bully and a ringleader.

Specifically regarding relationships at the university, Asen recalled a story about Bulgarian male colleagues being approached by Bulgarian girls offering them sex in return for money or material items.

Asen: I'm 90% sure that a girl from my university, that she sells sex or at least that she acts like an escort for guys and they usually give her money...she speaks English and Spanish...and she is 20 years old [at the time when this story happened]

Asen admitted he could not attest to the veracity of this story and while Evtim substantiated this perception, he also admitted that he has only heard university colleagues speak of this and therefore also had no personal experience with it.

A majority of participants made general comments in regards to their friends' views of prostitution. Boris, Lashko, and Peter directly stated that their friends approved of prostitution.

Boris: ...my friends do not have an opinion...they absolutely do not have an opinion

Others indicated this indirectly, such as Vulko, who stated that he was frequently spending time with friends in high-class bars frequented by pimps and prostitutes. Zhadomir reported that a person he knew gave him a girl to sleep with and he had friends still working in prostitution. Lashko reported that his friends once "treated" him to a prostitute. Dimoslav confessed he had friends who had been with prostitutes and Evtim admitted that his friends joked about calling for prostitutes for each other.

Indifference or normalization was also expressed.

Yosif: My friends, they think like I do...they are indifferent

Kalofer: We are really used to it because it is everywhere...but we also do not talk about it

In addition to indicating a certain normalization, Kalofer added that he and his friends had never been with a prostitute. Finally, Zoro estimated that 70% of his friends were in prison and both he and Ilcho admitted to building friendships in prison.

Community. The broader social environment is also included under differential association, as it provides the context for relationships. Several participants commented on their communities and society in regards to a variety of topics, including prostitution, corruption, and

the illegal sector. Asen thought that most people were against prostitution, but especially the generation of his parents.

Asen: They [his parents] are from a different generation...Most people say that it [prostitution] is not ok

Yosif affirmed this regarding his parents and Boris stated that overall this generation viewed prostitution as immoral. In contrast, both Boris and Yosif felt that the younger generation was more open and accepting of prostitution.

Four participants either presently or in the past had worked at a hotel where they were taught and instructed to call escort agencies for guests. Seven participants either presently or in the past had worked as a taxi driver and had driven prostitutes, clients, and/or pimps. Within this group of drivers, Gergo commented that his work allowed him to witness the result of bribing and corruption between the police and pimps. Kalofer also testified to the bribing of the police, while Lashko complained that corruption was Bulgaria's most pressing problem. Boris stated that he knew a pimp with 10-15 girls working for him in a large city who had to pay the police in order to operate, "but usually this goes well".

The widespread nature of prostitution was attested to by Kalofer, blamed on unemployment for Roma women by Orlin, and also confirmed by Yosif, who specifically mentioned memories of seeing prostitutes on the side of the road when he was younger. Similarly, Evtim mentioned growing up seeing prostitution in his family's hotel.

The reality of corruption was particularly apparent in the accounts of Zhadomir and Peter who admitted to bribing police and/or government officials. Boris ascribed corruption to a recent Bulgarian prime minister.

Boris: See our country – [Boiko] Borisov is corrupt, but he has become our prime minister

Regarding communities, Boris stated that everyone in the community knew those involved in prostitution, meaning that if a Bulgarian girl wanted to prostitute, she knew who to approach.

Boris: Everyone [in the community] knows these people [the people involved in prostitution] and how to get involved

Vulko, Zoro, and Ilcho lived in areas where their wealth generated from the illegal sector distinguished them. Nuri mentioned being involved in a local Protestant church, which he linked to the reason why he disapproved of prostitution. Although Peter did not admit to engaging with specific actors, he did state that the sex industry was a prized market for criminal groups.

People working in the gray economy. Within the community, some participants made specific references to actors in the sexual exploitation process. These references vary in terms of the nature of the relationship, meaning that comments ranged from repeated exposure to a tight, trusting relationship.

Asen, Dimoslav, Evtim, and Yosif had repeated exposure to the girls being brought to the hotel, while both Asen and Dimoslav commented on seeing pimps escort girls to the hotel. Asen shared his views on pimps based on his conversations with them (see Definitions). Gergo was exposed to girls and pimps when girls are brought to a hotel (where Dimoslav was employed) near his place of employment. Furthermore, when he worked as a taxi driver, he reported seeing and interacting with pimps and their girls, as well as buying and receiving sex from prostitutes in exchange for rides. Vulko also admitted buying sex from prostitutes.

Similar to Gergo and Vulko, the remaining taxi drivers all alluded to watching and, in some cases, driving pimps and prostitutes. Lashko was the most specific, indicating that he had definite relationships with pimps in which he financially profited. Nuri commented on the rise and fall of the sex industry as reflected in the level of street prostitution.

Nuri: 2 years ago there were a lot more girls and I was driving them almost every night...there is no money, so there are less girls

Boris, Zhadomir, and Zoro all reported knowing and in some cases, working with different actors. Zhadomir stated that he was periodically recruited by friends working in sexual exploitation (see Friends). Boris admitted he knew one to two pimps. Zoro's position within the group in which he worked involved managing pimps. Regarding the illegal sector, Zhadomir interacted with other offenders multiple times prior to entering prostitution, as he had been in and out of prison several times. Zoro and Ilcho admitted to networking and developing relationships while in prison. Zoro and Ilcho specifically connected their time in prison with their decision to enter the business of prostitution. Additionally, Ilcho stated that while working as a pimp, he was part of a group and was obligated to give a portion of his earnings to a person above him.

Definitions and attitudes. This component represents the cognitive aspect of criminal behavior and includes definitions (meanings), attitudes, beliefs, and values (Akers, 1998; Akers & Jennings, 2015). The proposition concerning this component was:

Bulgarian human traffickers initially acquire and ultimately adopt(ed) favorable definitions and attitudes to sexual exploitation through interactions inherent to differential association.

A sub-component is developing (learning) a skill necessary to realizing criminal behavior and/or already having the everyday knowledge and skills to commit a crime (Akers, 1998). This section

is subdivided into definitions concerning prostitution, pimps, profiting from prostitution, and skill development.

Prostitution. The perspectives shared concern both those selling and buying sex. Views on prostitution are categorized as: positive, negative, neutralizing, rationalizing (justifying), and non-committal. The perspectives reflect both the participants' personal views of their own behavior and decision-making, as well as their views towards other actors and processes.

Several participants held positive understandings of prostitution and characterized it as normal and in some instances, a good opportunity, including for women.

Boris: But if you ask the younger generation, like those in their 20s, they will laugh when you mention it [prostitution], but they know that in fact it is normal work

Lashko: [Prostitution is] easy money [for the girls]it doesn't bother me at all...[prostitution] is absolutely not a moral issue

Both Vulko and Peter stated that prostitution was normal. Zoro and Ilcho described prostitution in terms of money, meaning that it was a profitable opportunity.

However, others held quite negative views of prostitution.

Asen: I know men who buy sex which is stupid because these men have families... my value system tells me that it [prostitution] is wrong

Gergo: How can a girl at the age of 15-16 years old be selling sex?

Yosif: Owners of the hotels are concerned about prostitution because it may give the hotel a bad reputation

Kalofer: How can a young girl be on the street [selling sex?]

Nuri: Prostitution is a big sin

Asen, Kalofer, Minko, and Orlin all indicated that prostitution was not a good opportunity for the girls. Nuri described prostitution as an “undesirable” option. Evtim reported that he, like his family, did not approve of prostitution. Finally, while Boris admitted he held a favorable view of prostitution, he also stated that prostitution manifested differently in Roma communities. He retold his experiences of seeing Roma women who had been deceived, tricked, and treated abusively. He described the picture of prostitution in Roma communities as “scary”.

Several participants phrased their views in neutralizing terms. For example, Gergo commented that he would never have gotten involved in prostitution if he had had a daughter. Boris commented that “In Bulgaria no one is interested (no one cares)”. Although Evtim shared his disapproval, he immediately qualified his view in economic terms and stated that prostitution did, however, mean money. Zhadomir responded that men were not the only ones interested in sex and that while he was a pimp, he split the earnings 50/50 with the girl, which of course was something he was not obligated to do.

Similarly, opinions were shared in the form of a justification or rationalization. This was commonly expressed by the taxi drivers who worked in areas of street prostitution. For example, Nuri stated that economic desperation forced girls to prostitute.

Minko: They [the girls] do it because they have no other options...90% of them do not have any other options

Orlin: The girls do it for the money....there is a lot of unemployment here...there is no work for [the] Roma...the girls are desperate

A few participants shared indifferent, non-committal opinions.

Dimoslav: I don't have an opinion...I don't think about it

Yosif: My friends, they think like I do...they are indifferent

Similarly, Boris understood prostitution as “not black and white [but] gray” since while he believed Bulgarian women had great opportunities in prostitution, Roma women face disproportionate amounts of exploitation and abuse. Asen, who had already shared his disapproval of prostitution, later admitted “but I'm not sure what I really think”. Finally, when asked what he thought of prostitution, Kalofer stated “we [he and his friends] are really used to it because it is everywhere”.

Pimps. Similar to prostitution, comments were characterized as positive, negative, and neutralizing.

In terms of positive opinions, two of the self-identified pimps held a positive view. Zhadomir admitted that if he could go back in time, he would still choose to be a pimp and Ilcho was pleased that he could make good money in this capacity. Zoro, who managed pimps, admitted to forming solid, trusting relationships with them. Lashko’s positive view was connected to his ability to form relationships with pimps and then profit by driving his (the pimp’s) girls and clients.

Several participants made negative, critical comments.

Asen: The pimp that comes is really stupid, he can't count...and [they] do almost nothing [but profit]

Boris stated that Roma pimps are cruel and abuse and deceive Roma women. Similar to Asen, Gergo mocked the pimps and even demonstrated how they strut into the hotel and try to look very “mafia”. Additionally, Gergo did not see pimps as very educated or articulate. Zoro shared that pimps can be risky for his business if they decided to talk to the police (see Differential Reinforcement – Risks). Kalofer expressed slight resentment in that pimps often face very little

risks and consequences, resulting in greater sums of money, yet they were engaged in something quite illegal.

Only Dimoslav shared a more justifying opinion concerning pimps: “They do it because they have no other way to make money—they are not educated and have no options”.

Profiting from prostitution. Participants shared opinions regarding profiting from prostitution in general, as well as from the illegal sector. Views are characterized as either neutralizing or rationalizing (justifying). Also, views reflect that of the participants’ own personal experiences, as well as other actors and society.

Asen stated that “everyone does this”, referring to his experience profiting while he worked at the hotel. In line with this, Minko reminded the researchers that he was not the only taxi driver transporting prostitutes and directed attention to his colleagues (Kalofer, Nuri, and Orlin). Boris insisted that when he was involved in transporting girls, they “wanted to go”. He elaborated that the girls he worked with were all informed and aware that they were going to be selling sex in a certain Western European country. Also according to Boris, the cases of Bulgarian girls being tricked and deceived were extremely rare, which undermined the themes of many of the human trafficking films. Finally, Boris provided an example from the UK, where according to him, prostitutes were working indoors, but no one in the UK cared, nor did anything to counter these businesses.

Boris: [In the UK] there are massage parlors...everyone knows what that means

Boris also provided a rationalization for engagement in prostitution, mainly poverty.

Boris: We are a poor country...everyone is looking for bread

In connection to his decision to profit from prostitution, Asen complained about his small salary and the fact that he was a student at the time. Similarly, Evtim stated two times that while he and

his family disapproved of prostitution, the reality was that prostitution meant money, which they needed.

Learned skill. This sub-component refers not only to being taught a criminal skill, but having the physical ability to carry out a crime (Akers, 1998). Several participants were taught specific skills in order to profit from prostitution.

The most explicit case was that of Asen, Evtim, and Yosif. Asen reported that Yosif taught him how to profit on the financial arrangement between the prostitute (pimp/escort agency) and the guest at the hotel. Later, Asen taught Evtim. It was unknown how Yosif learned this skill. Although not a highly technical skill, these three participants and Dimoslav were taught at the hotel how to select an escort agency and call for a girl when a hotel guest requested sex.

Zhadomir reported that he was very innovative while a pimp in that he learned mainly through practice how to best manage and exploit women. In other words, he did not attribute his knowledge development to someone, but to a system of “trial and error”. Both Zoro and Ilcho were involved in other illegal enterprises and both admitted to learning and building profitable relationships with different people in prison. Finally, Peter began his job at the strip club in a food service-related position, but his responsibilities increased and became more specialized under the guidance of his boss who managed the club.

Differential reinforcement. The first of two learning mechanisms, this component reflects Akers’s assertion that a person attaches value to a behavior which yields a desired reward (Akers & Jennings, 2015; Burgess & Akers, 1966). The reward can be experienced, perceived, and/or anticipated, but once a person commits a crime and experiences reward, such behavior is theorized to repeat and is therefore reinforced (Akers & Jennings, 2015). Reward is

compared with punishment (negative consequence) the person attaches to the behavior or act (Akers, 1998). The proposition concerning this component was:

Bulgarian human traffickers repeatedly experience(d) greater rewards (tangible/intangible), both positive and negative, and less punishment as a result of involvement in sexual exploitation.

Findings pertaining to rewards are presented first and followed by negative consequences.

Money. All 16 participants referenced money as the primary reward for actors in sexual exploitation. Views include personal experiences, as well as experiences with other actors.

Most participants made general comments describing the significant sums of money that can be made in prostitution.

Boris: Always it is money—for nothing else...whatever anyone says...it is for money

Vulko: You can make a lot of money

Dimoslav: They [pimps] make tons of money

Evtim: The pimps get involved in prostitution because it is so profitable

Yosif: They [pimps and prostitutes] make a lot of money

Kalofer: The money they [Bulgarian girls working in a club in a large city] make in one hour would take me two days to earn

Lashko: Girls [Bulgarian, working in a club in a large city] can make 500-600 leva [\$270-325] a night

Nuri: Everything...it's all about the money

In line with this, Zhadomir stated that he got engaged with prostitution because of the money, as he learned the profitability of taking a girl to a country with a good market. Zoro and Ilcho admitted to making great money in the illegal sector, which for both included prostitution.

Peter stated that his job as an assistant manager in a strip club meant he could have all the material things that he wanted. He emphasized this by stating that his income was so good that he had no intentions of ever leaving the sex industry.

Some participants gave more specific examples. For example, Asen explained how a pimp with 10 girls could easily make around 10,000 Bulgarian leva (\$5400) in one night, however this figure would be reduced if the girls received a portion (unknown) and if a bribe was paid to the appropriate police. He also added that “girls continue to prostitute because of the money”. Lashko shared that prostitution meant “easy money” for girls. Also regarding the girls working on the street, Minko stated that they “make 100-120 leva [\$54-64] a night...which means maybe 20 or 30 leva (\$10 or \$16) for sex”. Orlin agreed that “the girls do it for money”.

Of the 16 participants, 15 had or were currently profiting from prostitution, however not all 15 explicitly stated this as some chose to instead describe how they profit. The only participant to admit a role in prostitution, but not to be personally profiting, was Dimoslav. Evtim and Yosif did not admit to profiting, but Asen confirmed that both had done so (as Asen worked with both at the hotel). The table below summarizes the current status (self-reported by the participant) and role of each participant in regards to profiting from prostitution. At the time of the interviews, nine participants reported being actively engaged in prostitution, while seven stated they were no longer active.

Table 6. Profiting from Prostitution

Pseudonym	Status	Description of Role in Profiting
Asen	Not currently profiting or engaged in prostitution	Acted as a middleman between the hotel guest and the prostitute and/or pimp by deceiving the guest into paying more and then collecting the

Table 6 (cont.)

		difference; the profit can be 40 leva (\$21) for each guest
Boris	Assumed to be working in the illegal sector, but stated that he no longer works in prostitution	Transported Bulgarian girls from Bulgaria to a Western European country; at times stayed with girls in the country for undisclosed periods of time
Vulko	Not currently profiting or engaged in prostitution	Drove girls around a large city; reported that in the mid-1990s he could make 10-15 Bulgarian leva per girl; also received sex in exchange for rides
Gergo	Not currently profiting or engaged in prostitution	Drove girls and their pimps around a large city; accepted money and sex in exchange for rides
Dimoslav	Never has profited or engaged in prostitution	Works in a hotel and calls escort agencies when a hotel guest requests sex.
Evtim	Not currently profiting or engaged in prostitution	Acted as a middleman between the hotel guest and the prostitute and/or pimp by deceiving the guest into paying more and then collecting the difference; the profit can be 40 leva (\$21) made for each guest [as reported by Asen]
Zhadomir	Not currently profiting or engaged in prostitution	Was a pimp who chose to usually only manage one girl at a time; stated that outside Bulgaria he could make 300€ (\$316) a day, but also claimed he split 50/50 with the girl
Zoro	Working in the illegal sector, which includes prostitution	Manages a group of pimps and takes 20% of each pimp's earnings
Ilcho	Working in the illegal sector, but unknown if this currently involves prostitution	At one time, worked as a pimp with 15 girls working for him

Table 6 (cont.)

Yosif	Not currently profiting or engaged in prostitution	Acted as a middleman between the hotel guest and the prostitute and/or pimp by deceiving the guest into paying more and then collecting the difference; the profit can be 40 leva (\$21) made for each guest [as reported by Asen]
Kalofer	Currently profiting and engaged in the process of prostitution	Drives girls in a large city
Lashko	Currently profiting and engaged in the process of prostitution	Drives girls and clients in a large city; has a specific arrangement with pimps to make 10% of the total sum, meaning that if the sex costs 60 leva (\$32), he receives 10 leva (\$5)
Minko	Currently profiting and engaged in the process of prostitution	Drives girls around a large city
Nuri	Currently profiting and engaged in the process of prostitution	Drives girls around a large city
Orlin	Currently profiting and engaged in the process of prostitution	Drives girls and pimps around a large city
Peter	Currently profiting and engaged in the process of prostitution	His salary at a strip club in a large city is directly tied to the amount of money made from sex sold at the club

Status. One intangible reward was status. Several participants had acquired wealth that differentiated them within their communities. The gatekeeper’s community knowledge, as well as the opportunity to see the visible signs of wealth of participants further supported this category, in addition to the participants’ linking of money with prostitution. The accumulation of wealth and the resulting status was visible regarding Boris, Vulko, Zoro, and Ilcho. Of these

four participants, Vulko was the most direct in acknowledging his status in the community. He described growing up poor and decided early in his life that he wanted to improve his socioeconomic status. His time working in prostitution enabled him to buy the newest and latest products, which was noticed in the community. In addition to community status, Zoro explained his elevated position within the group of which he was a member.

Sex. Three participants admitted to receiving sex while working in prostitution. Vulko and Gergo accepted sex in exchange for rides and Zhadomir repeatedly mentioned the sex he had with different girls.

Being a provider. Two participants shared that by working in prostitution they had enough resources to be a good provider for their families. Vulko shared that he was able to provide especially for his child/children in that he paid for extra educational and professional opportunities. Ilcho stated that because of his income in the illegal sector his wife did not need to work and he could care for their child/children.

Power over women. Zhadomir was the only participant to spend time in his interview intricately describing his treatment of women. The following statements reflect his pride in abusing and deceiving women, as well as his authority over them.

-They gave me a girl and I fucked her...and then she asked me to work with her

-I took the first one [girl] to [Balkan country] and the second one, her mother gave her to me because she [the mother] was also a prostitute, I took her to [Western European country]

-The girls have to be in love with you...I have to tell them that I love them all the time''

-I have been with Bulgarian girls, Roma girls, and even a Turkish girl

-If they [girls] try to hide money from me [not split 50/50], then I beat them [he makes the movement with his hands]

-I am fucking a 16-year-old right now

-I was the first one in [city] to actually keep multiple girls in my own house...no one else was doing that

Only two other participants specifically quantified the number of women that worked for them. Vulko shared that he “often worked with the same five women” and Ilcho stated that one time he had 15 women working for him in a Bulgarian coastal city.

Freedom. Both Zhadomir and Zoro stated that working in the illegal sector meant being your own boss. This was juxtaposed with the legal economy, which was characterized by demanding and controlling bosses.

Zhadomir: I just want to do what I want to do... I don't want a boss on my back

Zoro: [The] fact you don't have to work for a boss

Criminal justice system. Money was the most repeated reward associated with engaging in prostitution. In terms of potential consequences, the most frequently cited was the complete lack of negative consequences from the criminal justice system, which was almost exclusively represented by the police. Fifteen participants shared their perspectives on this theme.

Several comments indicated that pimps were granted the freedom to operate by bribing corrupt police officers.

Asen: They [pimps] can pay them [police]

Gergo: If they [pimps] pay the police—then it lowers the risk a lot...for many years I was a taxi driver [in a large city] and I saw, not physically, but it was obvious that they [pimps] were out there on the streets and that they are paying them [police]

Zhadomir admitted to bribing the police in order to continue pimping women. Zoro implied that, in general, you could remain in the illegal sector as long as you managed the police carefully. Yosif could not identify any risks from the criminal justice system facing pimps. Kalofer also commented that the police were bribed and therefore had no concerns. Peter admitted to periodically needing to bribe the appropriate authorities in relation to the strip club and inspections.

A few participants shared more specific opinions which concerned the treatment of women. For example, Boris shared that a person would never face negative repercussions for accusations of violence towards women.

Boris: The girls know in [Western European country] that if I even touch them [he barely touches the gatekeeper on the arm] and they go to the police and tell them that I hit them, I will go to prison like that [claps his hands] ...something like this would never happen in Bulgaria

Nuri shared that in his experience, girls were too afraid to go to the police, which in turn further protected the pimps.

Nuri: If the girls go to the police and tell them about the pimp, but they are scared...they are afraid to do this and in most cases this never happens

This view was connected to an understanding that a pimp and a prostitute often had a relationship prior to engaging in prostitution. This relationship was reported to be either familial or a friendship. Orlin retold a story of driving a pimp and a woman who knew each other in his taxi. Additionally, Minko asserted that this relationship functioned as a safeguard for the pimps in regards to being reported to the authorities.

Minko: There are no risks usually because they know each other... family members and friends are the pimps

Although the majority of the participants did not consider the police a threat to engaging in prostitution, three participants did admit to experiencing negative consequences for working in the illegal sector. Although not actively working in prostitution, Zhadomir had been in and out of prison multiple times for a variety of offenses, but a more recent sentence occurred outside of Bulgaria. He attributed this particular stint in prison with his decision to leave the illegal sector. Zoro had been to prison once and was currently interested in managing his illegal activities carefully to avoid future prison time. Ilcho had served two prison sentences and was hoping to avoid a third conviction and return to prison.

Clients. Several participants thought pimps face certain risks and possible exposure from clients.

Evtim: Yes, there are risks. You (the pimps) work with all these crazy clients

Orlin: How could there not be a risk?....At night a risk are the clients because they want more...they want sex without a condom

Gergo believed that working with foreign clients posed a risk, but did not elaborate. Lashko thought pimps faced challenges with violent clients. Both Minko and Peter commented on the risks of intoxicated clients. Peter added that sometimes security was forced to remove clients from the strip club which could cause other complications. Evtim provided the most examples in his interview of the erratic, odd, and violent behavior of clients. Two examples were a client who called for a girl every hour and a second who called for a girl, but then after her arrival, broke all the furniture in the room.

Loss of relationships. A final consequence was the loss of relationships, however whether this loss was considered negative depended on the participant. Four participants stated that they had been ostracized and lost relationships with family members directly in response to their decision to work in the illegal sector. Vulko noted that his wife struggled greatly with his decision to work in prostitution, however he did not validate her feelings, nor extend any concern. Zhadomir reported that he had no contact, nor any relationship with any family members, however he did not share any negative feelings or remorse. Zoro reported that the relationship with this wife was greatly strained and he expressed some disappointment that his decision to work in the illegal sector had cost him some additional relationships. Ilcho stated he had been cut off by some immediate family members, but did not verbally attack or share any negative feelings or thoughts in regards to this loss.

Imitation. This component entails emulating an observed and modeled behavior. This includes the process of routinely witnessing an activity and its consequences (rewards and punishments), with repeated exposure to rewarded criminal behavior creating a motivational pull (Bandura, 1977, as cited in Akers, 1998). The proposition concerning this component was:

Bulgarian human traffickers are (were) exposed to active and/or ex-human traffickers (models), of whom a greater amount are (were) family and/or close peer relationships. Categories of models follow the outline presented in differential association, as most models were individuals with whom the participants had particular relationships.

Work colleagues. Modeling the profitability of prostitution was especially evident in the two sub-groups of participants mentioned previously (see Differential Association – Work Colleagues). The first group was Asen, Evtim, and Yosif. Yosif taught Asen how to profit from prostitution and then Asen taught Evtim. The second sub-group consisted of four taxi drivers:

Kalofer, Minko, Nuri, and Orlin. All four worked predominately in the same area in a large city renowned for prostitution, especially street prostitution. During their interviews and through observation, they demonstrated having mutual, trusting relationships. All four profited from prostitution. Lastly, both Lashko and Peter were employed by legal companies that work directly in the sex industry. Also, in the case of Peter, his strip-club boss was instrumental in developing his professional capacity to ultimately be promoted to assistant manager of a different strip club.

Family. Only one participant (Ilcho) indicated having a family member who was both aware of his involvement in the illegal sector and verbalized support. A second participant (Boris) shared that his family had no interest in how he earned money. In all other cases, no participants shared instances in which immediate or extended family members approved of prostitution, profited from prostitution, or worked in the illegal sector. Instead, more participants indicated ostracism and voiced rejection and/or disapproval from parents, spouses, and other relatives. Such was the case with Vulko, Gergo, Zhadomir, Zoro, Ilcho, and Peter. Some participants did not report ostracism, but still shared of their family's disapproval of prostitution and the illegal sector. This was expressed by Asen, Evtim, Yosif, Kalofer, Lashko, Minko, and Nuri.

Friends. Most participants shared accounts of friends already engaged in prostitution for profit and/or who held favorable views of prostitution. Such was the case for Asen and Evtim (see Imitation – Work Colleagues). Boris was approached by “long-time friends” and informed that transporting girls to Western European was a profitable enterprise. Vulko spent time with friends in bars frequented by pimps and prostitutes prior to first becoming a client and then a

driver of prostitutes. Dimoslav did not comment on whether he or his friends had profited from prostitution, but he did state that his friends had been with prostitutes.

Zhadomir had a person known to him (nature of the friendship is unknown) give him a prostitute. Zoro had friends engaged in illegal activities as a teenager and later as young adults they were collectively apprehended and sentenced to prison. Ilcho developed a reputation as a child for being a bully and a ringleader, with the latter implying he had friends who at least silently condoned his behavior. Lashko did not comment on whether his friends profited from prostitution, but he did share that his friends approved of prostitution and one of them even treated him to a prostitute. Peter shared that his friends approved of his work at the strip club, but he did not indicate whether they had profited from prostitution.

This theme slightly deviated in two cases. Yosif claimed that his friends were indifferent to prostitution and he did not indicate whether they had profited. Kalofer insisted that he and his friends were not only opposed to prostitution, but did not “use” girls. He did not indicate whether they had followed his example and profited from prostitution.

People working in the gray economy. As seen in regards to differential association, all the participants were in environments that modeled the lucrative nature of prostitution. Hotel workers (Asen, Dimoslav, Evtim, and Yosif) interacted to varying degrees with pimps and prostitutes, of which the former was particularly noted for making impressive sums of money. Those transporting girls (Boris, Vulko, Gergo, Kalofer, Lashko, Minko, Nuri, and Orlin) not only visibly witnessed the profitability of prostitution, but interacted and, in some cases developed relationships with pimps and prostitutes alike. Zhadomir, Zoro, Ilcho, and Peter had direct, repeated relationships with people engaged in organized criminal activities.

Community. No participants stated that others in the community directly modeled engagement in prostitution. Yet, several participants did comment on the pervasive, intractable nature of corruption in Bulgaria, which was directly connected to the police. For example, Boris commented that a recent prime minister of Bulgaria was corrupt, but yet had risen to the top in the government. Gergo shared that he witnessed the results of a relationship based on bribery between pimps and police officers. Kalofer noted that corruption was widespread, as did Lashko who added that corruption was in fact Bulgaria's "biggest problem". The only community entity referenced was a local Protestant church, which Nuri stated he and his wife attended.

Social Opportunity Structure

Social opportunity structure examines the role of opportunity in connection with social and professional networks in adulthood (Van Koppen et al., 2010). An adult lacking a criminal history is theorized to join an organized criminal group as a result of recruitment because of his advantageous social and/or professional networks (Kleemans & De Poot, 2008). These networks can exist in the legal sector, as many legal enterprises (especially in the area of transportation) play a key role in organized crime activities (Van Koppen & De Poot, 2013). This dissertation examined the following proposition related to SOS:

The opportunity to become a human trafficker is presented through differential association represented by family and peer relationships and thereby less likely to be the result of organized crime recruitment strategy, consisting of targeting individuals with potentially valuable/advantageous professional networks.

Each participant, to varying degrees, shared how he first engaged with prostitution. Some described what appeared to be a very linear process, while others described a longer, more intricate process. In their moment of opportunity, only four participants profited in a position in

the illegal economy, while the remaining 12 participants had legitimate jobs in the legal economy. The table below summarizes the key individuals and the context in which opportunity was first presented. A more detailed narrative is provided in the next chapters (see Chapter Five - Narrative Analysis).

Table 7. Social Opportunity Structure

Pseudonym	Context – Legal/Illegal	Individual(s)
Asen (Not Active)	Hotel – Legal	Friend (Yosif)
Boris (Active, Illegal Sector)	Had been employed in the legal sector, but was actively seeking a different job	Friends
Vulko (Not Active)	Taxi Driver – Legal	Prostitute
Gergo (Not Active)	Taxi Driver – Legal	Pimp
Dimoslav (Not active)	-----	-----
Evtim (Not Active)	Hotel – Legal	Friend (Asen)
Zhadomir (Not Active)	Was already involved in several illegal economy activities – Illegal	Prostitute
Zoro (Active, Illegal Sector)	Was already involved in several illegal economy activities – Illegal	Friends met while in prison
Ilcho (Active, Illegal Sector)	Was already involved in several illegal economy activities – Illegal	Friends met while in prison
Yosif (Not Active)	Hotel – Legal	-----

Table 7 (cont.)

Kalofer (Active)	Taxi Driver – Legal	Approached to drive a prostitute/pimp
Lashko (Active)	Taxi Driver – Legal	Approached to drive a prostitute/pimp
Minko (Active)	Taxi Driver – Legal	Approached to drive a prostitute/pimp
Nuri (Active)	Taxi Driver – Legal	Approached to drive a prostitute/pimp
Orlin (Active)	Taxi Driver – Legal	Approached to drive a prostitute/pimp
Peter (Active)	Assistant Manager of a Strip Club – Legal	-----

No participants indicated being steered into prostitution as a result of formal recruitment from organized crime. However, three (Zhadomir, Zoro, and Ilcho) were exposed repeatedly to offenders because of time in prison and two (Zoro and Ilcho) directly connected their time in prison with their entrance into prostitution. Yet, both Zoro and Ilcho referred to these offenders as “friends”. Boris mentioned “long-time friends”, but these friends may have had links to organized crime or at least informal networks engaged in prostitution. Similarly, Peter described the transformation of his relationship with his boss from that of employee-employer to a close friendship, but did not share his original reason for pursuing a position at the strip club.

All seven taxi drivers reported being submersed in prostitution and at one point being approached to drive an actor, most often a girl. Vulko directly stated he was approached by a girl, while Gergo was approached by a pimp. The only two friendships which existed prior to engagement with prostitution was Asen’s friendship with Yosif and Evtim.

Summary of Deductive Analysis

This chapter has presented the findings from deductive analysis in which the *a priori* codes represented by the SLT framework were applied. The descriptors pertaining to SOS were also tabulated and presented.

The following table summarizes the presence of the SLT/SOS for each case. Differential association reports the views of the relationships (people) concerning prostitution and in some cases, profiting from prostitution and the illegal sector. It also indicates the presence of certain actors in prostitution with whom the participant had repeated exposure and interactions. Next, the participant's own view (definition) of prostitution and profiting from prostitution is shown. This is followed by the experience of rewards and consequences. The type of relationship or individual who modeled participation in sexual exploitation is indicated (if known), which often includes the person who modeled the experienced rewards. Finally, whether the opportunity emerged while the participant was in the legal or illegal economy, as well as who supplied the opportunity (if known), is presented.

Table 8. Social Learning Theory and Social Opportunity Structure: Component Case Summaries

Abbreviations

Fa – family	Fr – friend	Wk – work colleagues	P – positive	N – negative
Pr – prostitute	Pi – pimp	Cl – client	CPo – corrupt police	A – approval
N/O – no opinion	I – indifferent	D – disapproval	Y – yes	N – no

Pseudonym (Status)	SLT: Differential Association		SLT: Definitions (Attitudes)		SLT: Differential Reinforcement		SLT: Imitation (Modeling)	SOS
	Relationships	Environment	Pros	Profit	Rewards	Conseq.		
Asen (Not Active)	N(Fa) P(Fr, Wk)	Pr, Pi, Cl	D	A	Y	N	Fr, Wk	Legal – Fr/Wk
Boris (Active, Illegal Sector)	P(Fa, Fr)	Pr, Pi	A	A	Y	N	Fr	Illegal – Fr
Vulko (Not Active)	N(Fa), P(Fr)	Pr, Pi, Cl	A	A	Y	N	Pi	Legal – Pr
Gergo (Not Active)	N(Fa)	Pr, Pi, CPo	D	A	Y	N	Pi, CPo	Legal – Pi
Dimoslav (Not Active)	P(Fr)	Pr, Pi, Cl	N/O	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Evtim (Not Active)	N(Fa) P(Fr, Wk)	Pr, Pi, Cl	D	A	Y	N	Fr, Wk	Legal – Fr/Wk
Zhadomir (Not Active)	N(Fa) P(Fr)	Pr, Pi, Cl, CPo	A	A	Y	Y	Fr	Illegal – Fr
Zoro (Active, Illegal Sector)	N(Fa) P(Fr)	Pi, CPo	A	A	Y	Y	Fr	Illegal – Fr

Table 8 (cont.)

Ilcho (Active, Illegal Sector)	N,P(Fa) P(Fr)	Pr, Pi, Cl	A	A	Y	Y	Fr	Illegal – Fr
Yosif (Not Active)	N(Fa) P(Fr, Wk)	Pr, Pi, Cl	I	A	Y	N	Fr, Wk	Legal
Kalofer (Active)	N(Fa, Fr) P(Wk)	Pr, Pi, Cl, CPo	D	A	Y	N	Wk	Legal
Lashko (Active)	N(Fa) P(Fr, Wk)	Pr, Pi, Cl, CPo	A	A	Y	N	Wk	Legal
Minko (Active)	P(Wk)	Pr, Pi, Cl	D	A	Y	N	Wk	Legal
Nuri (Active)	N(Fa) P(Wk)	Pr, Pi, Cl	D	A	Y	N	Wk	Legal
Orlin (Active)	P(Wk)	Pr, Pi, Cl	D	A	Y	N	Wk	Legal
Peter (Active)	N(Fa) P(Fr, Wk)	Pr, Cl, CPo	A	A	Y	N	Wk	Legal

CHAPTER FIVE

NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

The process and intersection of relationships concerning SLT and SOS is now presented for each case. This process reflects the four theoretical components (differential association, definitions, differential reinforcement, and imitation) and opportunity alongside contextual data in order to provide more depth to each participant's perspective.

Asen

Asen made the decision to profit from prostitution while working in a hotel surrounded by work colleagues, some of whom were friends (Yosif and Evtim). He shared that Yosif specifically taught him how to profit from prostitution. In addition to modeling the rewards of such behavior, these relationships also demonstrated that little to no risk would be met through profiting. He rationalized his decision to participate through a comparison of his meager income to that of the pimps and also by noting that "everyone does this". Yet, despite admitting to profiting, he insisted that he and his family are opposed to prostitution. He profited temporarily and now works in the legal sector in an unrelated position.

During the interview he was articulate, often slow to speak, and calm. His case suggests the influential nature of friends and witnessing the rewards and lack of consequences related to profiting from prostitution. He decided to profit in spite of being raised in a family that he presented as being staunchly opposed to prostitution. He espoused this opinion, however at one point did admit that he was not completely sure what he thought. He expressed a great love for his family and appeared to be very devoted to them ("The most important thing is family").

During the course of the interview he made several comments which illustrate a worldview characterized by an attempt to reconcile his value of rules and fairness with the reality

that in Bulgaria such qualities are experienced and witnessed sparingly. This was evidenced in several instances in which he steered the conversation towards different topics. For example, he asked about car ownership in the US, specifically whether a driver could receive compensation from the government for damages to the car caused by the quality of the road. He was also interested in, overall, how much it costs to have a car (in the US), including government taxes. Again within the theme of cars, he complained about Bulgarian drivers on two occasions (“this is typical Bulgarian”). Finally, he became agitated when he saw a young child (around two years old) playing in a small village street with no adult present. He was quite upset that the parent was absent and described the parent as negligent and careless.

Regarding prostitution, he verbalized his family’s opposition and stated “my value system tells me it [prostitution] is wrong”. He offered several judgmental statements regarding pimps, prostitutes, and clients. He implied that pimps were lazy and sometimes stupid (“he can’t count”) and also questioned whether girls really had no opportunities or if instead, they resorted to prostitution because they desire a quick way to make money.

-What does it mean to not have opportunities...maybe they [the girls] just don't desire the opportunities in front of them

-I know men who buy sex which is stupid because these men have families

Additionally, he made two comments describing his thoughts on friends and relationships as a child and later as a teenager.

-You can usually tell after a month whether a person is doing good or bad things

-I see what happens to them [friends] who start using drugs...

-Everyone is out to get their own [said in the context of describing his friends]

In spite of his strong opinions, he tended to frame prostitution in economic, transactional terms in which each actor was generating money, including the women, but he admitted their portion was minimal. Regarding his role, he was succinct, but descriptive.

-My job was to call for a girl when a client wanted a girl...we have stacks of business cards for the escort agencies...if they had a girl available, she comes...they [pimps] bring the girls, the price is arranged, when she comes down [leaves], I get my part, and she has hers

-There is no 'getting ahead' in reality [with prostitution]...for example they [the girls] may take away 120 leva [\$64]...but very little of this money do they keep

-A girl may go for 90 [leva] [\$49], but then I tell the client that it is 130 [leva] [\$70]...everyone does this

Differential reinforcement is evident in the opportunity to make 40 Bulgarian leva (\$21) and appeared to be a strong, motivating factor, as well as the fact that he did not report experiencing any negative consequences. He positioned his opportunity to make extra money within his broader context, including his student status (which he held at the time), poor income, and the reality that pimps were generating exorbitant amounts of money and face little to no repercussions.

-There are no advantages for the girls, but for the pimps there are great benefits, but they may have to pay the police a little, but of course they receive a lot of money and do almost nothing

-For example, if he [pimp] has 10 girls and they work usually from 10 at night until 8 in the morning and if they each work [the entire time] 1 hour then each girl earns maybe 1000 leva [\$540]...and then some may not even work a whole hour...so there may be

opportunities to earn even more” [meaning that girls could have multiple paying clients in one hour]

Finally, his occupation with money (reward) was also made apparent through a conversation with the gatekeeper for which the researcher was present. After he left his position at the hotel, he found a job in the legal sector. Bearing in mind the context of this newly acquired position, he spent several minutes describing an instance when he treated himself at lunch to a piece of chicken and fries only because it was on sale, but he complained it still cost him four Bulgarian leva (\$2.16).

Boris

Boris made the decision to profit from prostitution by driving Bulgarian girls to a Western European country after he was approached by longtime friends in the exact moment he was seeking a new job. He had had a bad experience in the legal sector and was interested in pursuing a different line of work. Since his friends and family were indifferent to how he chose to provide for his family, he accepted his friends’ offer. He neutralized his role by reiterating that the women he drove were not forced in any way and wanted to work in prostitution in Western Europe. Moreover, since Bulgaria was poor and everyone was looking for ways to make money, no one could judge someone else for the path a person chose. He was assumed to be working in the illegal sector, but claimed to no longer be involved in prostitution.

In spite of a lengthy career in prostitution and possible continued (current) involvement in the gray economy, he did not report experiencing any negative consequences from his involvement, such as prison. Nor did he exhibit any concerns regarding the topic or giving an interview. Instead, he maintained a chatty, cheerful-type demeanor and even showed a sense of humor without being crude. Towards the end of the interview he engaged in a conversation

regarding his family with the gatekeeper (for which the researcher was present) in which he explained measures he took to protect his child/children in regards to driver safety. At another point in the conversation and related to a different family topic, he admitted he was not the easiest person with whom to live.

His experience seems to suggest the influential nature of friends who presumably were already involved in prostitution. About 15 years earlier, they came to him with an offer.

-Some friends from a long time [ago] came to me and said I could make a lot of money taking girls to [Western European country]

When asked, he did not describe these friends as being close, but he did choose to accept their offer.

Much of the interview consisted of animated explanations of what prostitution is in the context of Bulgaria and the resulting rationalizations for why he chose to profit from prostitution. His comments reflected Bulgaria's poor economic outlook which he connected to the desperation Bulgarians experience, while corrupt Bulgarians were rewarded with political office.

-In Bulgaria no one is interested [in prostitution] – the only thing Bulgarians are interested in is how to get a lev

-See our country – [Boiko] Borisov is corrupt, but he has become our prime minister

-We are a poor country...everyone is trying to look for bread

-A person can make money any way that he wants

In addition to justifications, he neutralized his role in prostitution by underscoring the lack of violence inflicted on the women. Additionally, he reminded that they had volunteered and elected to sell sex in Western Europe as, like him, they recognized that prostitution was a good opportunity for them. He strengthened his argument by juxtaposing the situation of

Bulgarian and Roma women, with the latter experiencing abuse and violence, and then by restating that not only did he not transport Roma women, he did not have any relationships to any Roma communities. It is possible that the violence intrinsic to Roma communities was the reason he designated prostitution as “gray” and not “white”.

-Let me tell you, it [prostitution] is not black and white, it's gray

-Bulgarian girls are tricky and they use people like me as a trampoline because they go abroad and then the smart ones run away....they wait until they have enough clients and the clients start to call them directly and then they run away....the dumb ones run away but work on the street and then they are found again

-All the girls I was with wanted to go...I know there are cases where a girl is tricked or forced, but this happens only rarely, except with the Roma...that is a scary picture...but that is a completely different culture

He shared his dislike and scoffed at the misrepresentation of prostitution in films on human trafficking (“it’s not like that here [Bulgaria]”). Overall, this theme of rationalization and defining prostitution within the context of Bulgaria was dominant, with the first quote listed above concerning the gray status of prostitution being his leading statement in the entire interview.

Although financial reward was not a dominant theme, there is still strong evidence in support of the decisive role of differential reinforcement. He visibly flaunted his wealth generated, presumably, in the gray economy. Moreover, he did not admit to experiencing any negative consequences, such as prison. This is especially interesting as some in the community asserted that he was currently an associate of Zoro and Ilcho, however the validity, as well as the

nature, of these possible connections was unverified and not admitted to by Boris.²⁶ Independent of this, Boris first entered prostitution while seeking a new job, after a conversation with friends believed to already have profited from prostitution, and was surrounded by people who had no opinion about prostitution and believed that a person had a right to earn an income any way he/she chose.

Vulko

Vulko made the decision to profit from prostitution in the role of a taxi driver after asked by a prostitute (from whom he had already purchased sex) to drive her to a client. Yet, prior to this instance, he reported spending extensive time with friends in exclusive bars frequented by pimps and prostitutes. He did not comment on the wealth of pimps, but he did state that his own wealth (which he made outside of Bulgaria) afforded him access to the types of bars he spent time in and also that as a child he recognized and understood that he and his family were poor.

Despite several decades in prostitution and similar to Boris, he appeared eager to share his story. Unfortunately, since his wife had not embraced his life in prostitution, he could not risk having the researcher, who is a foreigner, enter his home. This could have forced him to create a reason why this foreigner wanted to speak with him, not to mention the risk of her overhearing the interview. A further complicating factor was that he was not physically able to leave his home at the time the interview was scheduled. As a result, the gatekeeper had to conduct this interview alone and at a different time when his wife was not present.

His childhood occurred entirely during communism. His generation was characterized by other participants as understanding prostitution in terms of morality (immoral) and espousing varying degrees of disapproval.²⁷ He shared feeling poor as a child, however prior to engaging

²⁶ Reported by the gatekeeper.

²⁷ This understanding was shared by Asen, Boris, Evtim, and Yosif and furthered affirmed by the gatekeeper.

in prostitution, he was able to spend an undisclosed period of time outside of Bulgaria. The dollars he earned outside of Bulgaria (during communism) gave him access to the exclusive bars frequented by pimps and prostitutes. He was a client of prostitutes prior to becoming their driver.

He connected his opportunity to make money with his own ingenuity. He started to get requests from other prostitutes (with whom he had bought sex) and realized he could fix the meter and generate more money. This idea became even more profitable after communism ended and cities began to expand creating new residential areas. The greater distances relative to city expansion allowed him to earn more money. After communism, he began to work with clients by not only driving them to certain hotels, but also recommending girls.

Differential reinforcement is reflected in his reputation as always having the newest, latest item. Prostitution was not only “normal”, but an excellent way to make money and have sex, which occurred in the cases in which the girls did not have money to pay him. Although he no longer worked in prostitution at the time of the interview, the financial benefits of his time were evidenced by the fact that he could choose whether he wanted to be employed. His focus on money was also substantiated in a comment in which he stated that he knew (prior to engaging in prostitution) that working in the legal sector would not lead to prosperity. In short, compensating for a childhood of poverty was made possible through his work in prostitution, which he felt would not have been possible in the legal sector. Finally, he did not report experiencing any negative consequences, such as issues with the criminal justice system.

The strength of differential reinforcement is bolstered through his description of his family and their response to his work in prostitution. He grew up in and part of an era that viewed prostitution with great disdain. His wife was opposed to prostitution and had never

approved of his decision to work in that sector. His relationships with other women and involvement in prostitution had greatly strained their relationship. When their child/children discovered that Vulko was working in prostitution, their responses varied from complete rejection to tacit acceptance in exchange for financial assistance. Vulko stated that his wealth had enabled him to provide extra educational and professional training and related opportunities for his child/children. His case suggests that his focus on the rewards and inexperience with negative consequences prevailed over relationships and a worldview that condemns prostitution.

Gergo

Gergo made the decision to profit from prostitution in his role as a taxi driver when he was offered sex in exchange for driving a Bulgarian guy and his “girlfriend” to a certain location. His agreement birthed a ten-year partnership in which Gergo drove the pimp and the girls working for him. Yet prior to this, Gergo had witnessed the world of prostitution from his taxi. He had seen the flourishing business of pimps completely unhindered by the local, corrupt police. In spite of expressing strong disapproval of prostitution, he could not dismiss an opportunity to supplement his income and receive free sex.

As will be shown, he exhibited a certain degree of guilt (shame) at the beginning of the interview, however this quickly was replaced by an enthusiasm to assist the research team. Moreover, he shared what appeared to be honest, personal opinions, which was striking as he was recruited by the snowballing method and therefore did not have a prior, established relationship with the gatekeeper. He encouraged Dimoslav to participate and also assisted the gatekeeper by suggesting that taxi drivers in a certain part of a large city known for prostitution could be helpful. His idea was implemented after the snowball method began to slow and resulted in the interviews with Kalofer, Lashko, Minko, Nuri, and Orlin (see Methodology).

Several of his statements suggest possible feelings of guilt and/or shame in connection with his time in prostitution.

-Well, I can tell you honestly that I have been with a prostitute – so I can tell you how it works...I'm sorry to say this, but [shrugs]...

He also added that he was no longer profiting from prostitution, as eight years ago he left his job as a taxi driver. In line with this, he stated that he had not been with a prostitute in a long time and therefore, everything he mentioned had not happened recently.

In spite of lacking recent engagement, Gergo was a wealth of information on the inner workings of prostitution and volunteered a variety of information pertaining to all actors (prostitutes, pimps, and clients). At the time of the interview, he worked near the hotel where Dimoslav was employed. Although he did not work at this hotel, he was familiar with how prostitution operates there and sometimes got involved if there were “problems”.

-The pimps come and bring business cards and say that we have girls...its costs maybe 100 leva [\$54] for a [Bulgarian] girl, but a foreign girl who is not Bulgarian [and not Roma] costs a lot more...maybe sometimes 500, 600 leva [\$270, \$324]

-[Some] foreigners have different things they want and are worried...but the clients that are asking have used before and are used to it

Despite profiting for ten years, he had a very strong view of prostitution, as did his wife who did not approve of prostitution. He admitted that his family did not approve of his involvement.

-It's a crime...this is how I think...if I had a girl, I would not tolerate it...how can a girl at the age of 15-16 years old be selling sex?

He was the only participant to label prostitution as a crime. In his response he was very definite and absolute. He mocked the pimps in their appearance and intellect stating that they were uneducated, which was a conclusion he had based on how they talk.

-They [pimps] usually walk in [to the hotel] like this [demonstrates a tough guy/mafia style Bulgarian walk]

The behavioral mechanisms of differential reinforcement and imitation are evident in his time as taxi driver in which he watched pimps profit and bribe police officers.

-If they [pimps] pay the police – then it lowers the risk a lot...for many years I was a taxi driver [in a large city] and I saw, not physically, but it was obvious that they [pimps with girls] were out there on the streets and that they are paying them [police]

He did not share experiencing any negative consequences, such as prison, nor did he state why he chose to change professions and therefore end his involvement in prostitution.

Yet, independent of this, he did not verbally state, nor visibly appear to be a person who had amassed great wealth from prostitution. Although he never shared any figure estimating his financial gain from prostitution, he was the first participant to express pleasure with the idea of making 15 Bulgarian leva (\$8) for giving an interview. He shared this with Dimoslav in an effort to encourage him to give an interview.

-[Talking to Dimoslav] Well, I'm right here – its fine...we get 15 leva [\$8]

Dimoslav

Dimoslav never admitted to profiting from prostitution, but he did admit a role as a hotel employee. He appeared uncomfortable with the topic in spite of Gergo's urging to give an interview. In spite of his reluctance, he did verbally agree to give an interview, was very agreeable to answer the demographic questions, and by the end of the interview seemed more

calm. Although he did not admit to profiting, his case demonstrates a young university student who is saturated in relationships (friends and work colleagues) which either explicitly or tacitly approve of prostitution. He also acknowledged the pivotal role of financial reward in prostitution.

During most of the interview he was reserved, appeared uncomfortable, and had poor eye contact. Gergo originally invited Dimoslav to join him in giving an interview with the idea that they could do this together. However, this would have meant that Dimoslav would not have been able to sit at the front desk (“but I’m supposed to be working at the desk”) and he was concerned about getting in trouble if the manager reviewed the tape from the camera positioned over the desk. Independent of this, he was present for the first few minutes of Gergo’s interview and then quietly moved back to the front desk, which was about ten feet away.

His trust was earned through conversation and sharing more of the goals and intentions of this dissertation. The researcher shared information regarding her university and what she was studying as a means to building rapport and gain trust. He resonated with the researcher’s student status and goal of graduating soon.

-I’m a student like you... I also hope to graduate soon

He also shared with the researcher that she could speak with him in English if it would be “easier”. After thanking him, the researcher engaged with him a little in English, but since he chose to respond in Bulgarian, the researcher switched back to Bulgarian.

He was concise in describing his role. He shared the process of prostitution at the hotel and his role at the beginning of the interview with Gergo and before he retreated to the front desk.

-I don't know if I have anything that is helpful...we have cards and we call them and they [escort agencies] bring the girl – but that's it

Regarding the pimps, he reiterated much of the factual information Gergo shared concerning how pimps operate and go about their work, but instead of mocking them or judging them, he provided a rationalization for their involvement.

-They [pimps] do it because they have no other way to make money – they are not educated and have no options

This comment was striking primarily because he was the only participant to offer a more sympathetic justification for why pimps get involved with prostitution.

From Dimoslav's perspective, differential reinforcement in connection with becoming a pimp was grounded in financial rewards.

-They make tons of money – not just with women, but with drugs...but I assume it is like this everywhere

His comment that pimps profited everywhere from prostitution seemed to come in defense of Bulgaria, as he cited the examples of prostitution in Denmark, Germany, and even the US. However, when the researcher discussed the legal status of prostitution in some of the countries he listed, he admitted that he was not very knowledgeable on prostitution policy and legislation.

When asked to offer an opinion on prostitution, his response was again succinct.

-I don't have an opinion...I don't think about it [limited eye contact]

Later in the interview he admitted he had friends who had been with prostitutes, but then immediately followed up this statement with concern that the researcher was going to ask him to confess his own experience with prostitutes.

-I have friends who have been with prostitutes...are you trying to ask me if I have been with a prostitute?

In spite of his hesitancy, Dimoslav demonstrated his assertiveness at the end of the interview. First, he criticized the researcher for not enlisting a guy to assist in identifying potential research participants. He made this comment after two young men came down the stairs behind him and the researcher and left the hotel.

-[As the 2 young men are leaving the hotel] You need to get a boy to help you...I could have stopped those 2 boys for you – they are Bulgarian

The second occasion involved the remuneration offered to each participant. After thanking him for his time, the researcher offered him 15 Bulgarian leva (\$8). His response was the most assertive and definite comment made throughout the entire interview.

-I don't take something for nothing

The researcher had to explain that special funds had been set aside to compensate participants for their time. After questioning the researcher on the exact amount provided, he then agreed to accept the money.

Evtim

Evtim made the decision to profit from prostitution while working at a hotel with Asen, who was a friend and recommended him for an open position. His family owned a hotel in a different city, so he grew up assisting with his family's hotel. He and his family did not approve of prostitution, but admitted they must make money. At the time of the interview, he no longer worked at the hotel and seemed to have profited only during his employment. His case illustrates his simultaneous acceptance of prostitution as an unfortunate reality and a reliable source of income.

Similar to Asen, he was relaxed, articulate, and thoughtful, meaning that he did not exhibit any obvious concerns regarding an interview focused on prostitution and his role. That said, he never explicitly stated he had profited from prostitution and in a few instances, he seemed embarrassed when directly queried about prostitution. His primary justification for involvement was money, however he did not offer any excuses or blame (associate) his decision to profit on anyone. He was one of only a few participants to provide more detail about clients and his concerns regarding their behavior (hotel guests). He retold two accounts, the first which described a guest who called for a girl and then proceeded to break all the furniture in the room. The second guest “called for a girl every hour”.

He was also open in regards to sharing about his family and their experiences with prostitution.

-Around the time of the economic crisis, like around 2007, there were all these girls that came to [his city]...from all over Bulgaria

-The Greeks come and buy girls and even now they buy, but they are different because they will buy Roma girls...Bulgarians usually want Bulgarian girls or foreign girls

A dominant theme in his interview was money and the reality of prostitution, thus making differential reinforcement represented primarily by money. He did not share any negative consequences experienced by his involvement. He admitted that although his family was very opposed to prostitution (as he was), the reality was that prostitution meant money. He extended the financial rewards not only to his family in the form of hotel guests, but also to pimps.

-The pimps get involved in prostitution because it is so profitable

-[After sharing his disapproval]...but what can I do – it's money

-My family is completely against it – but what to do – it's money

He later added that his family found prostitution “worrying”. Interestingly, while he admitted that prostitution was money, he did not directly state that he personally profited at the hotel. The knowledge that he in fact did profit came from Asen. Asen admitted that he taught Evtim how to deceive the client (hotel guest) regarding the financial arrangement between the guest and the prostitute (pimp/escort agency).

Differential reinforcement and imitation are represented in Evtim’s interview, however the information shared also underscored the significance of differential association and definitions. For example, even though Evtim verbalized disapproval of prostitution, in the exact moment of his opportunity, he was saturated in an environment that tacitly approved of prostitution as a means to making money. In line with Asen, Evtim reported that the boss of the hotel was often drunk and with prostitutes. Secondly, he was taught by a friend he trusted (Asen) how to profit (learned skill). The trusting nature of their friendship was also evidenced in that Evtim was encouraged to give an interview at the request of Asen. Third and again relating to Asen, Evtim stated that as a university student, he had also heard from other friends about Bulgarian girls offering sex to guys in exchange for money or gifts. Finally, he admitted that his friends often joked with each other about buying prostitutes for each other, but he denied ever being with a prostitute.

Zhadomir

Zhadomir made the decision to profit from prostitution after a prostitute he had sex with approached him with an offer to work together. He referred to his entrance into prostitution as “an accident”. This invitation initiated intermittent, but consistent engagement in prostitution for about 20 years. Prior and throughout his work in prostitution, he was involved in a myriad of

illegal activities. Early in life he decided he wanted a life of freedom, which he defined as the ability to do as he pleases. He was cut off from his family and seemed to be a “black sheep”. He reported that he left the illegal sector five years ago and had refused invitations to again work in prostitution.

At the beginning of the interview, he appeared reserved and exhibited a flat affect. The researcher, already aware of his extensive time in the gray economy, was concerned he would be suspicious and therefore hesitant to share his opinion and experience. Upon the arrival of the research team, a friend was sitting next to him, however in less than one minute this friend snuffed out a new cigarette and quickly disappeared without introducing herself. She was not seen again. After this, the researcher’s previous concerns were set aside as he immediately set the tone of the interview with his first response.

-I'll tell you how it started...they gave me a girl and I fucked her...and then she asked me to work with her...that was about 20 years ago, but I only worked [in prostitution]off and on

Of all the participants, Zhadomir provided the most detailed information regarding his relationships and treatment of women. His good mood and upbeat nature coupled with a captive audience seemed to transform him into a storyteller, or at least mitigate his initial uncertainty. He related numerous accounts and provided related descriptive information on how he perfected the art of being a pimp. One of his distinguishing features was his insistence that managing several girls was too much work and overall a poor return on investment.

-I took the first one (girl) to [Balkan country] and the second one, her mother gave her to me because she [the mother] was also a prostitute, I took her to [Western European country]

-There are many difficulties with having more than one girl...I have had to pay fines to get them out of jail...they run away...it is difficult to have a lot of girls – that is why I prefer to just have one...and I find them on my own

-The girls have to be in love with you...I have to tell them that I love them all the time”

-If they [the girls] try to hide money from me [not split 50/50], then I beat them [he makes the movement with his hands]

-I was the first one in [city] to actually keep multiple girls in my own house...no one else was doing that

-[regarding sex] ...both women and we want it

In addition to being proud of his achievements in the area of prostitution, he happily shared examples of success in his sexual life.

-I have been with Bulgarian girls, Roma girls, and even a Turkish girl

-I am fucking a 16-year-old right now [said proudly and bluntly with good eye contact]

Regarding differential reinforcement, his interview suggests that intangible rewards have had equal, if not greater, influence than often reported tangible rewards, such as money. His comments above regarding women and his sex life support this, as well as his commitment to leading a life characterized primarily by doing whatever pleases him. Regarding the former, his treatment of women and pride in how he operated as a pimp suggest this role gave him a sense of power. Concerning the latter, he connected his interest in being free with working for himself (being your own boss).

-I just want to do what I want to do and...[shrugs]

-I don't want a boss on my back [points to his back]

-Guess, how old do you think I am?...[researcher underestimated his age and then he stretches out his hand to shake hands with the researcher] ...just add about 10 years to that...my laziness has kept my health

Yet, the tangible rewards of prostitution are a factor. He acknowledged that money was a motivation and gave an example of being able to make 300€ (\$316) in one day working with one girl outside of Bulgaria. He admitted to working with girls in Bulgaria, but was motivated to go where “there is a market”.

Differential association is represented by mutual rejection between him and his family and his friends modeling the rewards of working in the gray economy. As a child, he developed a reputation for being a hooligan. As an adult and prior to becoming involved in prostitution, he had already been in and out of prison multiples times for lesser crimes. In contrast, he had no family members who had worked in the gray economy. Moreover, his family had both voiced their disapproval and rejected him. Zhadomir stated that “they [his family] say that I am a bandit”, but he expressed no remorse and shared that he had only ever wanted to live in the way he wanted.

Although the dominant theme of his interview was his accomplishments as a pimp, he juxtaposed this with his current status, mainly that he was no longer involved in the gray economy, including prostitution. He repeated that he had left this life, even though he was still being recruited by friends to again work in prostitution. Interestingly, he made the decision to leave the gray economy after spending several years in prison outside of Bulgaria.

-But I completely stopped five years ago [makes the universal stop sign signal with his arms]

-I have friends working in [Western European country] right now who have asked me to drive girls there...but I have stopped...I am a believer [does the Orthodox cross signal on his chest; no eye contact when he said and did this]

Zoro

Zoro's decision to profit from prostitution was a result of social networking while serving a prison sentence for a different crime. As a teenager, he had friends who were engaged in criminal behavior. He viewed these friendships as solidifying his path into the illegal economy. He understood prostitution primarily as a way to generate money. His preference for money, specifically the ability to earn larger sums of money, could only be facilitated by the gray economy. Although logical and accurate, his financial priorities and reasoning were not well-received by certain family members, resulting in strained relationships.

He agreed to give an interview, but only in the presence of the gatekeeper. His position in the criminal group in which he worked depended on confidentiality and was preserved by trust. During the interview he was somewhat reserved and tended to not show a lot of emotion, but this was reported by the gatekeeper as his typical demeanor. Nevertheless, he shared more detail concerning his childhood, which was a topic not frequently commented on by other participants.

His case illustrates the theorized relationship between differential association, which was primarily represented by friends, and differential reinforcement (desire for money). He understood his decision to get involved in prostitution as a multi-stage, incremental process. He acknowledged an awareness regarding his friends and their proclivity towards criminal behavior, meaning that he chose a life in the illegal economy prior to specifically working in prostitution. Zoro began his story by stating that when he was 16 years old, he had to move and this meant

changing schools. At this new school, he made friends with people already involved in a variety of illegal activities. His relationships with these friends endured an absence while he served a mandatory military service (required during communism). As a young adult, he served a prison sentence with these same friends, which in turn led to more friendships and the position he held (managing pimps) in a criminal group.

He attributed more positive influence to his friends than his family. He expressed some disappointment and regret that his life in the illegal economy had strained his relationship with his immediate family. They had disapproved and, at one point, even pleaded with him to leave the illegal economy. In an effort to appease his family, he tried for a few years to work in the legal economy, but his income was so minimal (according to him), that he chose to return to the gray economy. Interestingly, while admitting this strain, he stated he was trying to decide whether to bring his child/children into his business, of which prostitution was just one part.

Differential reinforcement is clearly seen in significant rewards with little negative consequences. He had experienced this dynamic, as had his friends and associates. Also, he stated that he had enjoyed being his own boss and not having to work for someone else, which suggests the intangible benefit of freedom and having more direct control over his life. A possible second intangible reward is trust. Zoro did not explicitly (verbally) connect trust as a benefit of participating in prostitution, but his emphasis on his friends and business associates and his relationships with them suggests that he values trust and loyalty.

The concept of trust was also seen in his agreement to give an interview with the gatekeeper despite his current, active status in a criminal network. That said, trust and loyalty are a necessity for survival, meaning that his focus on trust was not entirely altruistic. For example, he shared that one risk related to his work was if a pimp quits and then later discloses

information. He worked to counter this risk by developing loyal, trusting relationships with his pimps, as well as with other associates. This was a key tactic in his strategy to avoiding a second prison sentence.

Ilcho

Ilcho made the decision to get involved with prostitution at the recommendation of new friends he met while serving a prison sentence. He valued his friends and received support from some members of his immediate family in regards to his decision to work in a criminal group. His motivation was money, however he had experienced some negative consequences, mainly prison sentences, and at the time of the interview was concerned he may return to prison. His case demonstrates saturation in relationships which approve and model profitable criminal behavior. These relationships appear to demonstrate their influential nature in terms of his decision to remain in the illegal economy, as he faced the possibility of another prison sentence.

Ilcho agreed to give an interview, but only in the presence of the gatekeeper due to his position in a criminal network and also in light of some current issues regarding the criminal justice system. He could not risk any breach of confidentiality. His current criminal justice issues, mainly the possibility of returning to prison, set the tone for the interview. While he answered questions, he was more closed than other participants and repeated his concern of the possibility of being convicted and sent to prison (the pending charges were not related to sexual exploitation).

Ilcho's childhood had been characterized by the community as somewhat tumultuous. He acquired a reputation as a bully and a "ringleader". Later, as a young adult there were rumors that he physically assaulted women, but this remained unfounded and could be false. Independent of this, his responses indicated that he valued his friends and he seemed to have a

social personality. He connected his friends with his decision to get involved with prostitution and understood his moment of opportunity as a multi-stage process. This process consisted of multiple prison sentences, which facilitated the opportunity to meet likeminded people and plan future involvement in the gray economy. Concerning the first instance, he stated that friends related to his mandatory service in the military (required under communism) proposed a job in transportation in the legal sector, which he in turn used as platform to network in a city in which he frequently had deliveries. This networking resulted in new friends who encouraged him to join them in a certain illegal activity. A few years later and while serving a prison sentence, he made friends with people who proposed he join them in getting involved with prostitution at the Black Sea.

While his criminal behavior was in line with that of his friends, he stated this his life was a clear deviation from other family members. He reported that several close family members, including his parents, were greatly saddened by his repeated trips to prison and overall, his decision to work in a criminal network. That said, his wife supported him and was not ashamed of his work in the gray economy. He shielded his child/children from his work.

Differential reinforcement is seen in his interest in making great sums of money, but also his repeated interactions with the criminal justice system. He admitted that money drove his involvement in the gray economy. His income allowed him provide for much more than the basic needs of his wife and child/children. Nevertheless, the interview was very much overshadowed by the possibility of his return to prison. His desire to avoid prison was also demonstrated in a story he told. He shared that at one point while working as pimp and making good money (he specifically said that he had 15 women working for him) he became concerned about being apprehended by the police. This prompted him to leave prostitution and he took up a

different illegal activity. Ironically, this decision proved futile, as he was caught, convicted, and returned to prison. While he was agitated about prison, he never expressed regret or any interest in leaving his life in the gray economy.

Yosif

Yosif made the decision to profit from prostitution when he worked at a hotel. He taught Asen how to deceive the client (guest at the hotel) about the cost of a prostitute in order to collect the difference, but did not share how he learned this skill. He did not directly state this during the interview, but did admit to having a role in prostitution. His case illustrates the influence of friends and a work environment that is indifferent and approves (respectively) of prostitution, as well as the pull of financial reward.

He agreed to give an interview most likely because of his trust in and close relationship with Asen, who recruited him. Within the first few minutes of the interview he shared his concern.

-I thought maybe it [interview] was some kind of hoax (fraud/trick)

The gatekeeper reminded him that Asen would not trick him by sending him into such an interview, which he strongly affirmed (“Oh no, of course not”). During the course of the interview he became somewhat more relaxed, however he remained guarded, especially in regards to sharing personal experiences and opinions. At both the beginning and end of the interview, he asked the researcher to further explain the project.

His interview was characterized by his attempt to simultaneously share factual information, minimize his role in prostitution, and not express any firm, critical opinions towards any actor or aspect of prostitution.

-They [the prostitutes] do it for the money...they assess their situation and then decide to do it for the money...I would never judge them [puts his hand over his chest and looks at the researcher]"

-My friends, they think like I do...they are indifferent

-They [his family] are more conservative and do not like it, but their generation is like this

-[Regarding his role] Oh no [leaned back, said with a stronger tone of voice]...[it's] not a big part...some guests just don't know how to do it...

-They [escort agencies] just bring those cards and we call them

-I worked there [hotel] two years, but not full time, and I left there about a year ago

In spite of positioning himself on the edge of prostitution he offered a few perspectives and insights into the process which were more detailed.

-Yes, [there are risks] but they are not because of the laws or policies...it is because maybe the competition [between other actors/pimps]

-Not all the girls have a pimp...I think maybe half of them do not have a pimp...but they have like, I would call them a coordinator, and you call them and talk to him and they send a girl

-Owners of the hotels are concerned about prostitution because it may give the hotel a bad reputation

-I have heard that these pop folk singers work for themselves [don't have pimps]

Regarding differential reinforcement, he stated that pimps were involved in prostitution because it was a profitable, low risk activity. This dynamic appears to have been present in his own experience, as he profited with no reported consequences. Moreover, he profited in

cooperation with Asen, who remained a good friend. The influence of his friends, a work environment that financially benefits from prostitution, and financial reward seem to have collectively influenced him more than being raised in a family opposed to prostitution. However, this influence may have only prevailed in the event of opportunity, as at the time of the interview, he had left his job at the hotel for a different and non-related legal sector position. In other words, his case shows evidence of all four SLT components, but especially differential association and differential reinforcement.

Finally, Yosif's interview was distinguished by the information he chose not to share in comparison with Asen and Evtim. Yosif was more guarded, less judgmental, and characterized his role as innocuous. In contrast, both Asen and Evtim commented on the bad character (morals) of the boss of the hotel. Asen personally admitted to profiting and confessed on behalf of Evtim and Yosif. Evtim tacitly admitted to profiting, but Yosif did not comment or even hint at any profiting activity.

Kalofer

Kalofer profited from prostitution through his profession as a taxi driver. His worldview simultaneously disapproved of prostitution and condoned his profitable role, mainly driving girls. His family was opposed to prostitution, but his work colleagues were actively profiting, some of whom gave interviews. His case presents evidence in which internal beliefs (definitions) are overpowered by work colleagues and a society (differential association) that tacitly approves of prostitution as a means to earning money (differential reinforcement).

His interview was one of five interviews which followed an alternative method for recruitment (see Methodology). These interviews were conducted on a busy street in a large city in an area notorious for prostitution. These interviews were shorter in length and did not permit

extended exploration. However, his time as a taxi driver (28 years) allowed him to share his experience and perspective.

At first, he was hesitant to participate. The gatekeeper approached him alone, but he declined to give an interview. However, a few moments later and after the researcher had joined the gatekeeper, he reached out.

-Wait...are you taping it?

After being assured that no personal information was being gathered and that the interview was not being recorded, he consented.

Although he was initially suspect, he never paused when answering a question. The only point in the interview in which he appeared more evasive was while attempting to give a monthly estimate of how many girls he drove. He never provided an actual figure, but instead rambled about a variety of factors related to this topic. Similar to his colleagues and Gergo, he very happily accepted the remuneration of 15 Bulgarian leva (\$8). Evidence of a certain level of gained trust became apparent when he, with the help of Minko and completely unprompted by the research team, encouraged two other colleagues (Nuri and Orlin) to give an interview (see Methodology).

Even though he admitted to profiting, he was unequivocal in his disapproval of prostitution. Additionally, he shared that his immediate family and friends were also quite opposed to prostitution.

-How can a young girl be on the street [selling sex]?

-I am very close and honest with my wife...she does not approve of it

-We [he and his friends] are really used to it because it is everywhere...but we also do not talk about it

Additionally, he added that he and his friends had never “used” a prostitute.

He spent extended time describing prostitution, particularly comparing the girls who work on the street and those who work in clubs, but he also commented on the invulnerability of pimps. From his perspective, prostitution was rampant, but he did state that he had noticed a decrease in the number of girls working on the street, with there being more girls five to ten years ago.

-There are many girls in this region [area] ...especially in the evening

-I have driven all kinds of girls

-[In his taxi] they behave normal

-It is the easiest way to make money [for the girls]

-The money they [girls in the clubs] make in one hour would take me 2 days to earn

Differential reinforcement is not only evident in the lives of pimps and prostitutes, but also in his own experience. He lamented that the pimps were engaged in an illegal activity, but yet faced no consequences because of pervasive corruption.

-There should be risks with it [pimping] ...since it is an illegal activity

However, he did not report any negative consequences in connection with his role. Differential reinforcement appeared to be further strengthened by the role of his colleagues who were also active in profiting from prostitution (differential association and imitation).

Lashko

Lashko was able to profit from prostitution in his capacity as a taxi driver for a company which intentionally targeted actors in the sex industry, meaning that drivers most frequently drove clients, girls, and pimps. He was not opposed to prostitution (definitions), but was frustrated that he was unable to make as much money as he insisted the girls (working in clubs)

earned. His case appears to demonstrate alignment of his personal and professional surroundings (differential association and imitation) with his perspectives (definitions) and ability to profit from prostitution (differential reinforcement).

His interview followed the alternative recruitment methodology (see Methodology). Of these five interviews, Lashko was one of only two taxi drivers who did not express (verbally or otherwise) any concern or hesitation when approached and invited to give an interview. Furthermore, he maintained great passion and energy during the entire interview and was the most animated of all five taxi drivers.

His most repeated message was frustration that he was not earning as much from prostitution as other actors.

-[Prostitution is] easy money [for the girls]...it doesn't bother me at all [using hand motions] ...but it needs to be made legal so that it can be regulated like it is in other countries

-[Prostitution] is absolutely not a moral issue

-Girls [Bulgarian, working in clubs] can make 500-600 leva [\$270-324] a night

-[Regarding his deal with pimps] For example, if the total [for the client] is 60 leva [\$32], then I get 10 [\$5]

By including specific figures, he demonstrated the financial chasm that existed between his earnings and that of a Bulgarian girl working in a club. Furthermore, he added that their superior income enabled them to spend all day shopping and enjoying nice restaurants.

His insistence that prostitution be legalized did not seem to be grounded in concern for the safety and protection of women, but instead would permit the Bulgarian government to tax prostitutes, since prostitution would be recognized as a legal profession. From his perspective,

legalization would result in great wealth for the Bulgarian state, which he saw as an advantage, but he did not connect this advantage to himself personally. Interestingly, he noted that corruption was the most significant issue plaguing Bulgaria, which would seem to undermine his interest in creating a new stream of wealth for the Bulgarian government.

-Corruption is everywhere and that is the biggest problem here

Lashko was blunt in terms of his fixation on money and overall showed very little concern for the women selling sex. In order to demonstrate his approval of prostitution, he shared that not only did he and his friends approve, but one time his friends even “treated” him to a prostitute. While he spent most of the interview apparently resenting the fact that Bulgarian girls made such exorbitant amounts of money, he stated that in his experience about 70% of them are addicted to drugs and after working all night, end up spending much of their earnings on cocaine. Yet again, this was shared more as a fact and with little concern or regard for their welfare. He did acknowledge that the Roma girls work mostly on the street and made very little money, but this comment was made flippantly and he did not mention the Roma again.

His interview exemplified the decision to profit being made in a personal and professional environment (differential association) which not only approves, but encourages profiting from prostitution (definitions). The only negative figure he reported was his wife with whom he did not discuss prostitution, including the time he was given a girl by a friend. However, his friends and employer were purposefully involved in prostitution. Not only did they model the rewards of involvement, but Lashko had experienced the rewards (differential reinforcement). He did not report any negative consequences.

Minko

Minko profited from prostitution through his profession as a taxi driver. He struggled to articulate a clear opinion concerning prostitution and instead described it as a sign of economic desperation. His insights concerning the relationship between the pimp and the prostitute pointed to the strength of differential reinforcement in prostitution. His case demonstrated tacit recognition that prostitution was not a good option for women, but verbal acknowledgement that it was both a necessity for survival (women) and a way to generate money, including for himself.

His interview followed the alternative recruitment methodology (see Methodology). His trust in the research team seemed to grow during the course of the interview. He was approached by the gatekeeper and then qualified his verbal agreement to give an interview by stating he would participate “as long as it does not cause any problems”. Evidence of his trust was perhaps best exemplified in his recruitment of two of his colleagues (Nuri and Orlin). Right after completing his interview, he approached Nuri and Orlin and then introduced them to the researcher and the gatekeeper as willing to participate. This was in no way encouraged, nor prompted by the research team.

Minko was reluctant to share a personal stance or judge prostitution, as well as the views of friends and family. Instead, he repeated the plight of the girls forced to work on the street. In the context of describing their desperation, he admitted that prostitution was not a good option for them and specifically that it did not allow them to get ahead in life. This comment was his most clearly articulated opinion concerning prostitution.

-They [the girls] do it because they have no other options...90% of them do not have any other options [said with a strong, definite tone]

-[This part of a large city] is 50/50 between Bulgarian and Roma girls

-90% of them do not have any other options...[on average] the girls make 100-120 leva [\$54-64] a night...which means maybe 20 or 30 leva [\$10 or \$16] for sex

He briefly commented on the “girls working in the clubs”, but his primary focus was the girls working on the street.

Regarding differential reinforcement, his interview showed money and no experienced consequences as an active mechanism. This was evident in both his own experience and what he had witnessed in 20 years as a taxi driver. Regarding pimps, he was the first and one of only two participants to directly comment on the nature of the relationship between the pimp and the girl. Specifically, and in regards to differential reinforcement, he stated that pimps were protected through their familial relationship or friendship with the girls they were exploiting.

-There are no risks usually because they [the pimp and girl] know each other

-Family members and friends are the pimps

Minko’s interview exemplified saturation in a work environment (differential association) with colleagues (Kalofer, Nuri, and Orlin) who at least tacitly approved of prostitution and actively modeled profiting. Finally, he offered one neutralizing comment in regards to his involvement, in which he underscored the role of his colleagues (definitions).

-[regarding how many girls he drives] Only a couple a month...but there are more here besides me...my colleagues are here

Nuri

Nuri profited from prostitution through his job as a taxi driver. He verbalized strong opposition to prostitution (definitions), but also acknowledged the economic desperation of the girls working on the street. Deemed an inevitable reality, prostitution became an acceptable way to make money and therefore legitimized his role, in addition to that of his work colleagues who

were actively profiting. His case provided additional evidence in support of the seemingly weak influential nature of individually (personally) held definitions (attitudes) in a broader context in which all four SLT components operate and collectively present prostitution as a profitable opportunity.

His interview followed the alternative recruitment methodology (see Methodology). He was one of only two of the five taxi drivers who did not physically, nor verbally, show any signs of concern regarding the interview (the first was Lashko). He was friendly and maintained a cheerful and polite demeanor throughout the interview. Another distinctive aspect of his interview was his tendency to use more qualifying statements, such as “As far as I know” and “From what I’ve seen”.

He presented prostitution as a result of economic desperation, intrinsically immoral, and pragmatically as an opportunity to profit. He was firm and absolute in his and his family’s rejection of prostitution, which he connected to their personal religious beliefs (see below). Yet, as a taxi driver for 20 years, he understood poverty as the underlying force leading girls to prostitute.

-They do it because they [the girls] are forced – as far as I know the people do it because they have families and young children...it is not because they have a desire...they are forced

-Two years ago there were a lot more girls and I was driving them almost every night [but now] there is no money, so there are less girls...[he sees] about 4-5 girls a night [on the street]

-We...me and my wife...we do not approve...we go to church, we are Protestants...prostitution is a big sin [tone of voice became more serious and he put his hand over his heart]

Nuri shared details concerning different aspects of how prostitution operated, which demonstrated the violence and abuse the girls face.

-About 50% are Bulgarian and 30% are Roma [on the street] ...but the Bulgarian girls are usually from villages and they do not understand what they have done...they think that they will be spoiled...have [material] things

-In my experience, most of the girls work without a pimp now...but they still pay a man to have the right to prostitute for a certain part of the sidewalk on a street and not be bothered by anyone

He connected this information with differential reinforcement, which was primarily expressed through financial reward and a lack of negative consequences.

-Everything...it's all about the money...[the pimp and the girl make] around 100 leva [54] a night

-They [pimps] take all the money...[but] I have heard that some work 50/50

Neither Nuri's strong objections to prostitution, nor his knowledge of the violence and abuse suffered by the women (definitions), prevented him from profiting from prostitution, which seemingly bolsters the influence the remaining SLT components (differential association, differential reinforcement, and imitation).

Orlin

Orlin profited from prostitution through his job as a taxi driver. He shared very little in terms of his personal opinion, as well as that of his friends and family. His descriptions of

prostitution and the actors demonstrated differential reinforcement as a pivotal mechanism. The only clear evidence of differential association and imitation were seen in his work surroundings and colleagues.

His interview followed the alternative recruitment methodology (see Methodology). Of all the participants in this study, Orlin exhibited the most hesitation, suspicion, and overall distrust. He was not directly approached by the gatekeeper, but was recruited with Nuri by Minko. He verbally agreed to give the interview, which was conducted in his taxi. His concern was shown in the following three comments.

-[Right at the beginning] How many questions are there?

-You aren't recording this, right?

-You don't have some kind of hidden camera, right?

Yet, while he verbalized varying levels of distrust and suspicion, at the end of the interview he did not try to immediately distance himself and instead suggested that the researcher and gatekeeper remain in his taxi to finish documenting the interview.

He shared few opinions or accounts from his own personal experience and instead offered general descriptions. His decision to not share any personal experience did not seem be due to lack of experience, as towards the close of the interview he stated he had been a taxi driver for 26 years. For most of this time he worked a night shift, and consequently (due to increased opportunity), was more involved in prostitution.

-Now because I work a day shift I do not drive as many girls, but yes, when during the night, I was driving more

When asked his opinion of prostitution, he responded both immediately and concisely:

-The girls do it for the money....there is a lot of unemployment here...there is no work for Roma...the girls are desperate...but it is not a good option for them

During his interview, he focused almost exclusively on the Roma who work predominantly on the streets.

-[Referring to the streets] Maybe 70% Roma and 30% Bulgarian...there are others but not many

Regarding pimps, he was one of only two participants who commented on the familial relationship or friendship pimps often had with the girls (the other was Minko). He chose to share this comment by recounting a time he drove a man and woman in his taxi who already knew each other. Nonetheless, at another point in the interview he minimized the pervasiveness of pimps.

-A man and a woman, will get out of my taxi...because they need to [meaning sell sex on the street]

-There are not a lot of pimps

Orlin's interview revealed very little in terms of personal relationships, however in terms of differential association, he was saturated in a work environment and had trusting relationships with his colleagues, all of whom approved of profiting from prostitution to varying degrees. Differential reinforcement was represented by a need for money and a lack of negative consequences both for pimps and prostitutes, with the latter being too desperate to be concerned with any potential risks. In line with this, Orlin commented on the risks facing the girls (from the clients), but did not identify any related to the pimps.

-How could there not be a risk?...At night a risk are the clients because they want more...they want sex without a condom

Later and in a private location away from where this interview was completed, the gatekeeper became quite adamant that he was either a pimp or had been one in the past. He was the only participant who had not self-identified as a pimp when characterized as such by the gatekeeper.

Peter

Peter's opportunity to profit from prostitution existed in the legal sector through his job as an assistant manager of a strip club in a large city. However, his salary was determined by how much sex was sold at the club, which was illegal. With the exception of his family, his other relationships supported and encouraged profiting from the sex industry (differential association). He reported differential reinforcement as pivotal, in that financial rewards were a personal priority and he had yet to experience any negative consequences.

His interview was the only interview conducted by phone. The gatekeeper completed this interview alone. He was somewhat limited in specific details related to the strip club and did not comment at all concerning his original reason or motivation for pursuing a job at the strip club. However, the gatekeeper attributed this in part to his position and his business associates at the strip club. The gatekeeper was put in contact with him through a friend who had a relative who (at one time) had worked as a driver for a criminal group.

Concerning differential association, he reported having more relationships in favor of prostitution and the sex industry. He viewed prostitution as normal work, as did his friends who all knew and approved of his position at the strip club (definitions). Moreover, his current status as an assistant manager was a result of developing a close relationship with his boss who owned at least one other strip club. He began at the strip club with an entry-level position related to food service, but his boss was impressed with his work ethic resulting in a closer, trusting relationship. When the boss decided to open a second strip club, he offered Peter a promotion to

assistant manager at this new club. His family was reported as not approving of prostitution. He also added that while they knew where he worked, he did not describe or discuss his work with them in any way.

Differential reinforcement was exhibited in his occupation with money and material wealth coupled with relatively few negative consequences. During the interview, he verbally demonstrated that money occupied a central place in his thinking and understanding of prostitution. His income allowed him to have all the material items he wanted. His satisfaction with his income was also evidenced in his stated intention to never leave the sex industry for a different profession in a different sector, as according to him, the profitability of prostitution was unrivaled.

He did associate several risks with involvement in prostitution, but ultimately, he felt that each could be managed and this had been positively reinforced in his experience. The first risk concerned the Bulgarian girls who worked at the strip club and their proclivity to drugs. He shared that most of the girls ended up using and getting addicted to drugs, which could not be tolerated, as he needed them available and physically able to provide sex for clients. Moreover, a reputation for having drug-addicted women would be poor for the club. Interestingly, he added that when he says “girls” he was referring exclusively to Bulgarian girls (meaning not Roma) and that all of the girls had sought a position at the club (meaning they volunteered) and wanted to work there.

A second risk concerned the clients, in that some became quite intoxicated and had to be escorted out of the club by security, which could result in other complications (he did not elaborate on this).

Finally, he shared that government authorities and the police could sometimes pose a risk. He admitted that his interactions with them had to be conducted delicately, as errors could be costly not only for him, but for his boss. The sex industry landscape in Bulgaria was quite competitive, meaning that one group's demise can be another's opportunity. Peter shared an example from a few years ago in which the police came to the club unannounced and in the middle of the night in order to conduct an inspection. Issues were uncovered, but he was able to salvage the situation by bribing the appropriate officials.

Summary of Narrative Analysis

The narrative analysis has sought to provide contextual depth to each case in order to enhance the SLT/SOS theoretical framework. For example, the deductive coding analysis indicated that differential reinforcement was pivotal in decision-making, as every participant remarked on his desire or another actor's desire for money. Yet, the narrative analysis has positioned and connected this occupation with financial gain to limited, profitable legal economy jobs, a desire to support wives and children, and the continual witness of the illicit, criminal behavior of sexual exploitation resulting in lucrative wages and not punishment.

Narrative analysis was also crucial to understanding better the perspectives of the participants, as decision-making and the emergence of opportunity are processes, not isolated, independent events. The detailed cases highlight multiple actors, interactions, and emotions operating in decision-making. Conclusions and their implications drawn from both the deductive and narrative case analyses are discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION

Limitations

This dissertation's findings need to be understood in light of several limitations related to the research methodology and context of this study, as well as the research team. Several limitations relate to the sample, with the first being the small sample size. Although the 16 cases allowed for examination and discussion of the SLT/SOS framework, the overall generalizability of findings remains limited. A second limitation is the geographic focus on Bulgaria. Interviews were conducted only in Bulgaria and with Bulgarian citizens. Furthermore, while participants frequently commented on the Roma and the sample includes four Roma, the inclusion criteria specifically excluded persons who did not speak Bulgarian, meaning that Roma participants lacking proficient knowledge of Bulgarian could not participate. Especially since participants drew sharp comparisons between prostitution in Bulgarian and Roma communities, findings and conclusions must be understood as consisting of a disproportionate number of Bulgarian perspectives.

A third limitation concerns the diversity of roles in the process of sexual exploitation. Some participants, such as taxi drivers, presented their role as more on the fringe of this process, while others, such as the pimps, retold more specific accounts in which they are featured as key actors.

A fourth limitation is the participant's status regarding whether he was active or had "retired" from working in prostitution, which is directly related to retrospection and needing to recall past experiences. Of the six participants who reported not being engaged in prostitution or

the illegal economy, the longest reported length of retrospection was eight years with an average of 3.4 years.²⁸

A fifth limitation is the range of experience reported by participants. Some participants reported extensive experience with prostitution, including the illegal economy (e.g. Zoro, Ilcho), while others described situationally profiting as the opportunity presented and for much shorter periods of time (e.g. Asen, Evtim, Yosif). Lastly, profiting from prostitution is presented only from a male perspective. While this was not intended through the research methodology, the sampling strategy uncovered only one potential female participant, however she declined to give an interview. The inclusion of female voices on a topic in which women occupy a central position would have diversified and bolstered this dissertation.

Regarding the methodology, a sixth limitation is the self-reported composition of the data. Findings and conclusions are based on the participants' experiences, views, and opinions and therefore cannot be verified in terms of veracity. A seventh limitation is the reliance on snowballing, which was supplemented after the tenth interview with a more direct selection process in order to recruit more participants (see Methodology). Although effective in terms of recruitment, the geographic context of the interviews, in addition to the research team's relationship with these participants, precluded prolonged exposure and more in-depth interviews. Collectively, these interviews (n=5) reflect less personal depth regarding the participants as individuals and instead focus more on their perspectives and experiences with prostitution.

Finally, the research team consisted of two women, each in possession of at least two graduate degrees, and both working in the professional, academic sphere. Therefore, it is presumed that participants were somewhat cautious in sharing explicit details regarding their

²⁸ Of the six participants, only five lengths of time are known: Asen (estimate), Gergo, Evtim (estimate), Zhadomir, and Yosif

treatment of women, experience with offenders, and in some cases, their criminal record. However, the participant's often ascribed student status to the American researcher and likely explain a willingness to teach on the nature of prostitution in Bulgaria. Indicative of the influence of the American status of researcher, the four interviews conducted alone by the Bulgarian gatekeeper lacked any reference to the US. In contrast, several participants asked questions related to the US and prostitution, as well as other US related topics (e.g. political topics) when the research team interviewed together.

Overarching Proposition

Data analysis elicited support of the examined propositions. According to the statement representing each of the four SLT propositions and SOS, this dissertation found that:

A Bulgarian considers, learns, and ultimately decides to become a human trafficker engaged in sexual exploitation when (a) he associates more with peers and work colleagues already actively profiting from sexual exploitation, (b) is more saturated in the positive and/or neutralizing definitions and attitudes expressed and learned through association, (c) experiences greater rewards and a lack of punishment, and (d) witnesses and is therefore exposed repeatedly to others profiting from sexual exploitation. The opportunity to become a human trafficker presented more often through differential association represented by peer and work relationships and thereby less likely through targeted, organized crime recruitment and networking.

Key observations are presented and followed by a discussion of their implications.

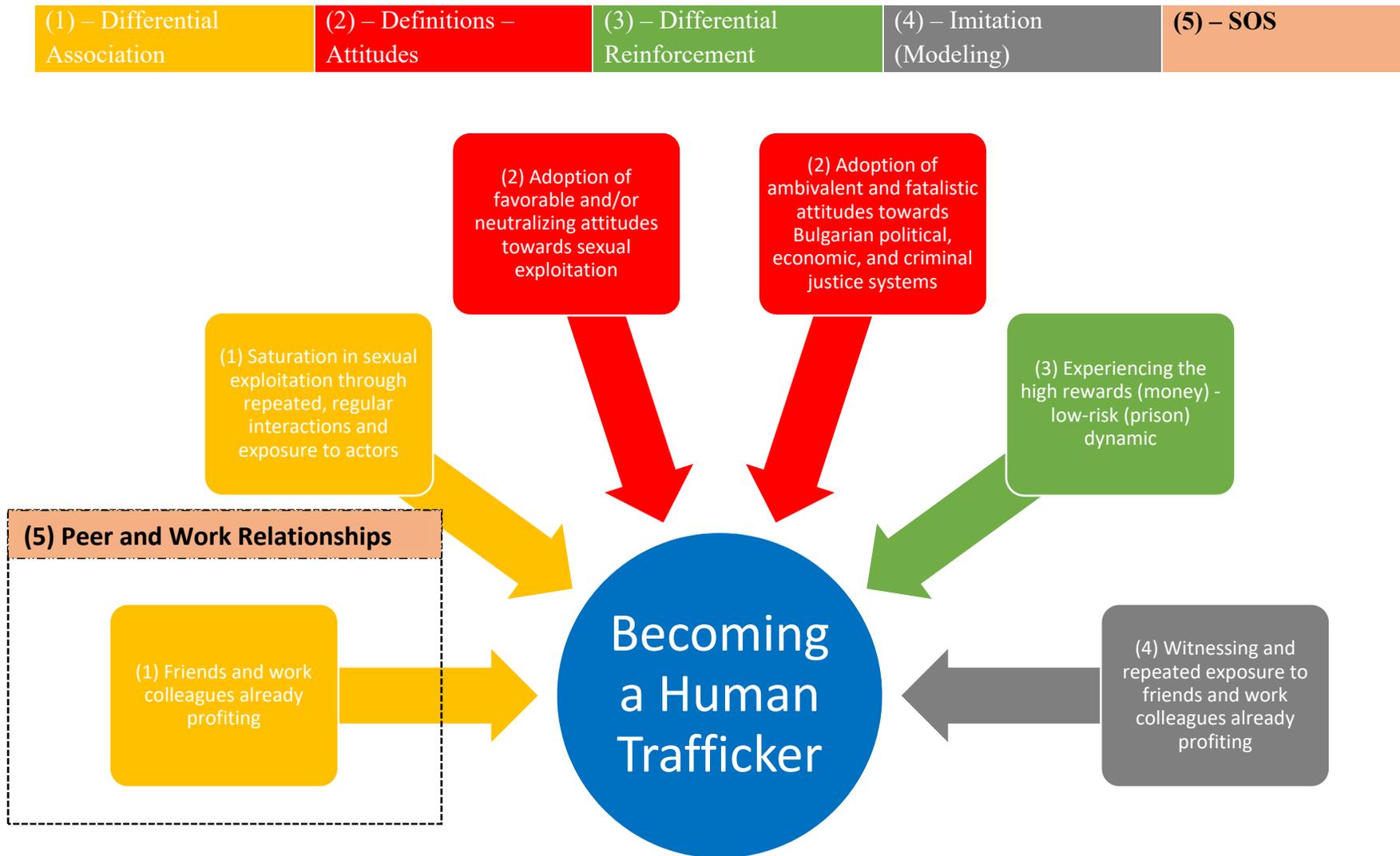
Social Learning Theory

The following salient SLT components and mechanisms regarding the decision-making process are summarized below (see also Figure 1).

- a. Regarding differential association, family was found to play a less influential role in terms of decision-making, while peer and work colleagues dominated. Although peer and work relationships were influential, peer relationships formed during childhood and adolescence and characterized by positive and/or neutralizing attitudes already realized in practiced criminal behavior, were decisive in decision-making in regards to longer-term, more exclusive gray economy experiences.
- b. Also, regarding differential association, the distinction between legal and illegal work environments was blurry, in that even those working in the legal sector were oversaturated in sexual exploitation through their interactions and observations with different actors (see also Discussion – Social Opportunity Structure).
- c. Individually held definitions and attitudes in opposition to prostitution were exchanged for favorable and/or neutralizing definitions. New attitudes were adopted chiefly through differential association represented by friend and work relationships. Additionally, participants expressed feelings of ambivalence and fatalism to the broader Bulgarian political, economic, and criminal justice systems (see Discussion – Differential Reinforcement). Collectively, these sets of attitudes were alone unable to deter participation in sexual exploitation, especially after the opportunity to profit appeared.
- d. The behavioral mechanism of differential reinforcement, represented by a high rewards (money) and low-risk (prison) dynamic, was pervasive and extremely persuasive in decision-making. Moreover, this mechanism appeared to be concurrently reinforced by the above-mentioned general attitudes of ambivalence and fatalism. The second behavioral mechanism of imitation (modeling) was chiefly

represented by peer and work colleagues already participating in sexual exploitation
and as represented by differential association.

Figure 2. Salient Social Learning Theory and Opportunity Components in Decision-Making



Differential association and family. Akers (1998) understood the family to occupy a chief place in terms of learning criminal (deviant) behavior. The family is theorized to represent intimate and valued relationships and is the context in which an individual spends a majority of his time (Akers, 1998). The family is termed an “intimate personal group” and its significance is linked to the facilitation of the remaining SLT components, but especially the behavioral mechanisms, mainly differential reinforcement and imitation (Akers, 1998, p. 60).

It [SLT] proposes that the significance of primary groups comes not only from their role in exposing the individual to culturally transmitted and individually espoused definitions but also from the presence of behavioral models to imitate and their control over what rewards and punishers will likely be available and attached to criminal or conforming behavior. (Akers, 1998, p. 61)

Nevertheless, findings elevated the role of friends and work colleagues. As reported by the participants, they exchanged their family’s negative views towards prostitution and profiting from prostitution with either positive or neutralizing attitudes, which were adopted from peers and work colleagues. The evidence of this exchange was seen upon receipt of opportunity. While several participants recognized and stated their family’s negative views, their allegiance to these views was limited to verbal acknowledgement.

Family members, which included parents and spouses, were mentioned by 13 participants, but only one (Boris) indicated having the full support of his family. In a second case, a participant (Ilcho) stated his wife supported him, but he had very strained relationships with other relatives. Yet, even including these two exceptions, no participants reported family members as influential in their decision to engage in prostitution. Moreover, no participants connected opportunity with their families (see Discussion – Social Opportunity Structure).

This finding corroborates the EU study on human traffickers, which included data on 32 BHTs (Rijken et al., 2015). In this study, no BHTs indicated their family as securing or encouraging their involvement in sexual exploitation. However, this finding seems to contradict several studies underscoring a familial dimension to sexual exploitation in Bulgaria, such as accounts of family members exploiting each other and showing support for relatives who sell sex (Petrunov, 2011a; Petrunov et al., 2013; Siegel, 2012).

One possible explanation for this incongruity is the difference in how prostitution is understood to manifest and is therefore perceived by the participants and Bulgarian and Roma communities. In this dissertation, participants illustrated vast differences in the treatment and experiences of Bulgarian and Roma women. For example, most references to Bulgarian women were positive. For instance, Bulgarian women are considered more desirable than Roma women resulting in the opportunity for the former to make more money, as well as work in exclusive, private clubs. During his interview, Peter intentionally (i.e. unprompted by the gatekeeper) stated that his club only features Bulgarian girls, all of whom desire a job in the sex industry. As reported by two participants (Lashko and Peter), this access allows Bulgarian women to buy expensive clothes, eat in luxurious restaurants, and supports expensive drug habits. Additionally, Bulgarian women are described as considering prostitution to be a good opportunity to make more money in a short period of time. Therefore, they elect to prostitute and seek the assistance of criminal networks to prostitute both domestically and abroad. One resulting positive outcome for those who work abroad is the ability to better support one's families (Siegel, 2012).

In contrast, the Roma are paid significantly less for sex, mostly work on the street, and are thought to be primarily led into prostitution because of deceit, trickery, and physical abuse. One participant (Boris), who had a lengthy history in prostitution and strongly espoused

prostitution as a profitable opportunity for Bulgarian women, conceded that prostitution in Roma communities is tragic and “scary”. In line with this, several taxi drivers commented on street prostitution being inundated with Roma girls. Minko, Nuri, and Orlin both reiterated economic desperation as the pivotal factor leading Roma girls to prostitute on the street. Orlin even specifically noted that unemployment is more striking in Roma communities. This fusion of prejudice and economic desperation was connected to male Roma family members exploiting female relatives. This familial aspect of Roma prostitution was explicitly described by Minko and Orlin.

In summary, Roma communities may adopt more favorable definitions of prostitution in light of economic inequality and discrimination resulting in families participating in prostitution as a means to economic survival. In contrast, Bulgarian communities may verbally express negative views, but tacitly concede that for some Bulgarian women, prostitution is the only reliable and well-paid source of income available. This exemplifies the influence of differential reinforcement in participant decision-making, in that financial gain coupled with no negative consequences overrides negative conceptualizations and attitudes (see Discussion – Differential Reinforcement). Moreover, Bulgarian women are framed as active decision makers and not coerced and deceived victims of exploitation. In conjunction with financial opportunity, several participants used this aspect of prostitution (female autonomy) as a rationalization and justification in their decision-making process (see also Discussion – Social Opportunity Structure for a discussion of neutralization).

Differential association and peers. Social learning theory emphasizes the role of peer groups, especially during adolescence (Akers, 1998). The 12 participants who directly commented on friends described them as approving of prostitution with several indicating that

their friends use prostitutes. Also, five participants specifically linked friends with their opportunity to engage in prostitution.

Yet, the findings suggest a stronger, influential link between friendships during adolescence and the level of commitment to the gray economy, of which prostitution is only one of several illicit activities. To a certain extent, this was seen in the case of Boris, but it was much more pronounced in the cases of Zhadomir, Zoro, and Ilcho. This group of three was described as participating in deviant activities by adolescence (at the latest) which contributed to their characterizations as bullies and ringleaders. Moreover, all three rejected the conventional life purported by their families and in turn were ostracized by most, if not all, family members. All three have served at least one prison sentence and two are actively working to avoid returning to prison. In contrast, no other participants commented on their friends' deviance and its relationship to their decision to profit from prostitution.

Differential association and environment. A final observation regarding differential association concerns repeated exposure and interactions with actors in the sexual exploitation process (prostitutes, pimps, clients, and corrupt police officers). Despite the diversity in terms of role and demographics, all the participants had repeated, regular, and frequent exposure and, in several cases, interactions, with pimps and prostitutes. This saturation is theorized to be the space in which differential reinforcement's high rewards – low cost dynamic is modeled, thus increasing the appeal of profiting from prostitution (see Discussion – Differential Reinforcement).

Definitions and attitudes. Regarding definitions and attitudes towards prostitution, the participants represented a spectrum of acceptance (favorable attitudes) since all had a role in sexual exploitation. Yet overall, findings suggest that individually held negative beliefs and

attitudes towards prostitution are alone insufficient to deter engaging in prostitution for profit. This was seen in the exchange of family disapproval for the positive and neutralizing attitudes of friends and work colleagues through differential association. Yet, in all cases, traces of a general ambivalence and fatalism were identified and worked in conjunction with differential reinforcement (see Discussion – Differential reinforcement).

Regarding prostitution, seven participants expressed disapproval, but then neutralized and/or rationalized their own decision to profit.²⁹ A second group of seven shared positive definitions of prostitution, meaning that they viewed prostitution as “morally desirable and wholly permissible” (Akers, 1998, p. 79).³⁰ This latter group seemed to understand prostitution as synonymous with any other money generating activity, illegal or otherwise. Contrarily, while the first group did frame prostitution in terms of money, it placed a greater emphasis on the economic desperation pushing women to enter prostitution.

Differential reinforcement. Differential association and definitions are key components, however SLT is distinguished by the inclusion of differential reinforcement (Akers, 1998). This mechanism is pivotal and was strongly supported in all 16 cases, as collectively, the cases depict prostitution as a profitable, low-risk activity. This is expected and widely supported in the literature (see Literature Review).

Yet, the findings suggest that this high profits – low-risk dynamic is further reinforced by an attitude of ambivalence and fatalism towards the Bulgarian political, economic, and criminal justice systems. These attitudes and beliefs were primarily directed towards the government, law enforcement, and the legal economy. For example, participants recounted interactions with and observations of bribed police officers, the impunity of pimps, and a corrupt and weak criminal

²⁹ See Asen, Gergo, Evtim (tacit), Kalofer, Minko, Nuri, and Orlin

³⁰ See Boris, Vulko, Zhadomir, Zoro, Ilcho, Lashko, and Peter

justice system. As reported in the literature, findings confirm the stark contrast between the legal and illicit (gray) economy. Participants depicted the legal economy as impotent and offering minimal financial security and low wages. Alternatively, the illicit economy provides high, reliable wages and offers position (role) flexibility with little threat of punitive consequences.

This finding is also drawn in light of Akers's (1998) linking of the adoption of definitions with reinforcement.

Social learning theory proposes that the definitions themselves are learned through reinforcement contingencies operating in the socialization process and function less as direct motivators than as facilitative or inhibitory 'discriminative stimuli', cues signaling that certain behavior is appropriate and likely to be rewarded or inappropriate and likely to be punished. (Akers, 1998, p. 84)

In the context of this dissertation, findings suggest that participants' positive and neutralizing attitudes towards prostitution, in addition to more general fatalistic attitudes, were learned through the process of watching, and subsequently, joining friends and work colleagues profiting, but experiencing few to no consequences.

Social Opportunity Structure

Overall, findings supported the examined proposition, mainly that participants were exposed to opportunity through social relationships (peer and work). Additionally, findings underscored the significance of the intersection of social and work relationships, although most participants did not distinguish between these two relational categories. Nevertheless, findings showed less support to SOS as presented in the research literature since the majority of the participants did not report being directly approached and recruited by a criminal group due to their already established social and professional network. Key observations are listed below.

- a. Participants tended to assign a passive role in regards to opportunity and their subsequent decision-making process, meaning that few verbalized intentionally seeking the opportunity to participate and profit from prostitution.
- b. Opportunity to participate in sexual exploitation was not bound to the gray economy, and in the context of this dissertation, was found more often in the legal economy. Additionally, opportunity proved a viable option for fringe actors, meaning people who have a role in sexual exploitation (e.g. hotel clerk), but who appear to have rejected working in a more traditional role commonly associated with formal, organized criminal groups (e.g. a trafficker). Finally, although prostitution appeared to be more profitable for those working exclusively in the gray economy, those working in the legal sector not only had ample opportunity, but the chance to supplement their low wages.
- c. After opportunity was seized, few participants commented on needing a specialized skill set, as described under the SLT component of definitions, meaning that opportunity appeared to be quite inclusive, as only a low, non-specialized skill set is required.

Opportunity and intentions. The 15 participants who profited from prostitution framed the emergence of opportunity as accidental, coincidental, or inevitable, including participants with more extensive, and in some cases, active backgrounds in the illegal economy (Boris, Zhadomir, Zoro, and Ilcho). Participants working in the legal economy more often understood prostitution as omnipresent and inextricably linked to their professional duties, thereby making participation unavoidable.

It is possible that the fatalism mechanism touched upon in regards to definitions and differential reinforcement could be a factor in this more passive conceptualization of their role. However, another explanation is offered by Sykes and Matza's (1957) techniques of neutralization, which posits the act of framing opportunity as accidental as a tool to minimize or shift responsibility for the act. Additionally, the offender builds on this neutralization of opportunity (framing opportunity as an accident) by insisting that external circumstances are to blame.

It may also be asserted that delinquent acts are due to forces outside of the individual and beyond his control such as unloving parents, bad companions, or a slum neighborhood.

In effect, the delinquent approaches a "billiard ball" conception of himself in which he sees himself as helplessly propelled into new situations. (Sykes & Matza, 1957, p. 667)

Findings from this study are supported by Antonopoulos and Winterdyk (2005), who qualitatively examined this theory with one Greek, male trafficker and found evidence of four of the five neutralization techniques.³¹

Opportunity and the legal economy. Although generally more associated with the illegal economy, prostitution proved a profitable opportunity for those in both the gray and legal economies. Prostitution may be managed exclusively by organized crime, but the findings of this dissertation challenges them as the sole benefactors. Opportunity was financially viable and beneficial even for fringe actors, such as hotel clerks, who appear to have no explicit connections with criminal groups, formal or otherwise. Although findings portrayed prostitution as more financially rewarding for those working in the gray economy, fringe actors were still well-compensated for their role relative to their meager, legal economy salaries.

³¹ Sykes & Matza (1957) list five techniques: 1) denial of responsibility, 2) denial of injury, 3) denial of the victim, 4) condemnation of the condemners, and 5) appeal to higher loyalties.

In other words, prostitution was found to be a situational opportunity for some participants, in that they could temporarily supplement their incomes in the legal economy with little threat of punishment or other negative consequences. This is significant for two reasons, with the first being that it demonstrates that profiting from prostitution is not dependent on pursuing a formal position within a criminal group, but can be enjoyed from a safe distance, thus further lowering any risks. Second, this blurry line between the two economic sectors results in a wider field of actors, some of whom are quite insulated in the legal economy, thus further complicating the identification and prosecution of offenders (see Implications).

Opportunity and inclusivity. Skill development to commit a crime is included under SLT's second component (definitions and attitudes), but is connected to opportunity due to the participants' professions. In connection with the idea of fringe actors, their opportunity to profit was not predicated on possessing a specialized skill set. Quite the opposite, opportunity was characterized as low-skilled and non-specialized, and therefore more inclusive. Furthermore, several participants were purposefully learned and/or were instructed on their role in sexual exploitation as a part of their legal job descriptions (e.g. hotel clerks, taxi drivers).

Exceptions, to varying degrees, existed regarding those working in the illegal sector, as in the cases of Boris, Zhadomir, Zoro, and Ilcho, since the *modus operandi* of criminal networks is more intricate. Another exception was Peter, who described being mentored by his boss and subsequently being promoted to assistant manager, which entailed learning a new set of skills. In conclusion, opportunity is portrayed as readily available, not limited to the gray economy, financially rewarding for fringe actors, and accessible to people of all skill level backgrounds.

Implications

Three key areas of implications for anti-trafficking policy in Bulgaria are trafficker deterrence, communities and prevention, and differential reinforcement and deterrence. A discussion of these key areas is followed by a discussion of specific implications for social work policy and practice.

Trafficker deterrence. In spite of the influential, decisive role of differential reinforcement, findings indicate that individual worldviews and understandings of sexual exploitation are factors in decision-making and ultimately justifying involvement. Findings uncovered a typology of trafficker neutralizations for behavior, ranging from complete acceptance, seemingly predicated on a woman's voluntary engagement, to prostitution being deemed immoral, but inevitable.

Therefore, one short-term anti-trafficking policy intervention could prioritize dismantling such neutralizations through educational campaigns. For example, views could be challenged through discussions of the health and psychological impact of prostitution on women regardless of a woman's volition. Additionally, while Bulgarian society may continue to debate the moral status of prostitution, a discussion of the broader influence of participation in sexual exploitation could be launched, such as its direct relationship to organized crime (i.e. participation in prostitution sustains organized crime).

Although such campaigns will continue to be challenged by differential reinforcement, and particularly the profitability of sexual exploitation, some participants showed that, at some point, money (rewards) depreciated in favor of new employment in the legal economy which has no apparent links to sexual exploitation. Presumably, these cases represent worldviews with

embedded, protective factors capable of resisting differential reinforcement and are thereby worthy of further exploration (see Discussion – Future Research).

Communities and prevention. A second implication in line with the first, is to elevate the preventative role of communities, especially in terms of adapting and disseminating worldviews to discourage participation in sexual exploitation. Communities offer a space for relationships which facilitate and reinforce worldviews and underpinning values. Beyond trafficker worldviews, sexual exploitation pertains to broader topics such as gender, power, money, and morality and their subsequent links to behavior. Because communities represent a space facilitating relationships and the adoption of certain worldviews, it would be advantageous to explore preventative approaches originating from the community level, thereby enabling them to undertake a more visible and intentional role.

In the context of Bulgaria, this would mean shifting from a “top-down” to a “bottom-up” approach in terms of development and implementation of prevention strategy. Presently, anti-trafficking policy is managed by the National Commission for Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings (NCCTHB) and consists of nine local commissions (NCCTHB, 2016a).³² The National Strategy for 2016 listed six prevention activities designed to increase general public awareness, as well as that of at-risk groups (NCCTHB, 2016a, 2016b). Of these activities, five were informational campaigns with four targeting the general public (NCCTHB, 2016b). Again, such campaigns are necessary and relevant, but in addition to being undermined by differential reinforcement, they also overlook the intimate, highly relational aspect of sexual exploitation.³³

³² Blagoevgrad, Burgas, Varna, Veliko Turnovo, Montana, Pazardzhik, Plovdiv, Ruse, and Sliven

³³ In addition to Rijken et al., (2015) and Petrunov (2011a) cited in the Literature Review, see also Vance (2011) for the key role played by relatives and friends in exploitation.

Instead, prevention campaigns could be derived from community leaders and citizens in light of community-specific nuances and features. One example would be drawing adolescents into the prostitution discourse. While high school students may periodically be the targets of informational campaigns, they could be invited to contribute their perspectives to related issues, such as gender and corruption (see NCCTHB, 2016a). Additionally, and in conjunction with the first implication about trafficker justifications of behavior, communities could design their own campaigns targeting neutralizing worldviews. For example, transparent discussions could explore competing values and goals, such as the cost of pursuing financial gain at the expense of another person. These examples feature personal, relational channels for community discussion and debate versus distant, unknown government leaders (who also may be deemed corrupt) dictating general knowledge about sexual exploitation.

Differential reinforcement and deterrence. The third implication concerns the expansion of anti-trafficking policy to include more explicit discussion of long-term strategies to address underlying systemic factors, such as policies connected to underemployment and poverty. This implication is grounded on the following finding:

Prostitution in Bulgaria is understood chiefly within an economic framework, with moral, criminal, and human rights related understandings receiving tacit, or secondary, attention. This economic framework is expressed in differential reinforcement. It was highly influential and salient in decision-making and unsurprisingly the most reiterated mechanism encouraging people, including both traffickers and prostitutes, to engage in prostitution.

Yet, in Bulgaria, prevention strategy has emphasized raising awareness and educating on human rights. This is achieved in presenting sexual exploitation as a human rights violation, depicted by a trafficker preying on an innocent, naïve victim (see NCCTHB, 2016a, 2016b).

While this message remains relevant, policymakers and social workers should seek to address long-term underlying economic and social policy concerns contributing to sexual exploitation. This is imperative as findings suggest that cognitive knowledge and conventional, moral belief systems were neutralized when the opportunity to supplement one's income through prostitution arose.

The challenge of addressing long-term, complex systemic issues is not limited to Bulgaria. Poverty and its relationship to sexual exploitation is restated in policy and research, but tends to remain absent from preventative interventions. For example, a 2015 report by the European Commission assessing anti-trafficking prevention initiatives cited poverty as a pivotal, but challenging factor in addressing human trafficking (European Commission, 2015). Yet after analyzing 43 prevention initiatives (17 of which had at least partial focus on Bulgaria, Hungary, and Romania), 85% were identified as informational, awareness raising campaigns and none targeted socioeconomic, root issues (European Commission, 2015).

The second element of differential reinforcement, the lack of negative consequences, functions in tandem with prostitution's profitability. Measures to deter perpetrators will be undermined as long as participation remains low-risk. The inability to prosecute traffickers promotes despondency towards justice and fairness, which in turn anchors rationalizations for participation. In other words, there is a mutually reinforcing relationship between the widely-disseminated messages that offenders only rarely face punitive consequences and the rationalizations espoused by human traffickers and fringe actors justifying their decision to profit from sexual exploitation. In summary, both elements of differential reinforcement illustrate a pernicious cycle, as a prevention strategy propagating moral and human rights values will only continue to be weakened by prostitution's lucrative, low-risk nature.

Although a crucial component, criminal justice reform will be challenged not only by intractable corruption, but the pervasive nature of prostitution, meaning that opportunity abounds. Prostitution's intrinsic profitability is not confined to organized crime and the gray economy, but supplements the income of those working in the legal sector, thus expanding the prevalence and dispersion of agents. In summary, there is a great need for multidisciplinary collaboration, as sexual exploitation represents an intersection of political, economic, and social policy.

Social work implications for policy and practice. In line with these implications, social workers have the opportunity to advocate for, and participate in, a multisector anti-trafficking policy response featuring both long- and short-term interventions.

One short-term intervention is to design and implement community-based prevention campaigns. Social workers can engage and empower communities to develop and disseminate more nuanced campaigns, including those targeting trafficker worldviews. Yet, especially in the context of Bulgaria, this may first require advocating on behalf of communities to undertake a more prominent preventative role, as well as educating members of the community on the power of collective action, as national government structures may be reluctant to directly work with communities and/or doubt the efficacy of such an approach. Also, social workers can collaborate with the educational system, particularly high schools, and encourage students to debate and openly discuss sexual exploitation and related issues.

Concerning long-term interventions, social workers are well-positioned to advocate for economic, social, and criminal justice policy reform. Social workers could advocate for equal, economically favorable opportunity being extended to all women, so that prostitution may no longer exist as a superficial solution and a "last resort" response to economic desperation. Social

workers could participate in economic policy discussions designed to strengthen the legal economy, particularly regarding measures to protect the social benefits associated with employment. Also, Bulgaria, in spite of EU membership, has the lowest average minimum wage salary of all EU member countries (see Literature Review). Social workers could advocate for increases and improved benefits associated with minimum wage, which may alleviate some financial pressure for female-led, single parent homes.

Similarly, social workers could examine social policy reforms as a way to offer more incentives and feature more positive reinforcement-type programs for vulnerable families and women. For example, incentives related to maintaining employment in the legal economy and regularly sending children to school. In other words, social workers could advocate for a more positive, strengths-based approach to policy as a means of discouraging lower socioeconomic status mothers from resorting to prostitution, but to remain connected to the legal economy and social welfare policy systems.

Turning to criminal justice reform, social workers could advocate for a reexamination of Bulgaria's obscure and vague policy approach to prostitution. Although sexual exploitation is condemned and includes a disregard for the consent of a person, the widespread belief in the voluntary nature of prostitution greatly undermines the criminalization of sexual exploitation. In other words, the current legal approach characterizes sexual exploitation as violent and prostitution as immoral. Yet, prostitution is also characterized as voluntary, thereby resulting in the dissemination of a broader message that while perhaps undesirable, a woman can elect to sell sex. Even the NCCTHB's most recent annual report documented a trend in the coastal city of Varna reflecting the diverse educational and social status typology of women who elect to sell sex as a means to making money quickly (NCCTHB, 2016a).

In conjunction with the real and pivotal role of differential reinforcement, traffickers and other fringe actors use this current policy approach as a justification for their own decision to profit from prostitution. Also, this contributes to the perpetuation of an exclusively economic understanding of prostitution at the expense of other human rights-based conceptualizations. Differential reinforcement is exemplified in such economic perceptions of prostitution, such as the need for demand, a market, supply, and the pursuit of higher wages. Additionally, the lucrative nature of voluntary prostitution is routinely positioned against a backdrop of poverty amidst a barren or feeble legal economy.

In light of this, Bulgarian social workers should consider exercising caution in importing Western discourses espousing female sexual autonomy and independence. An assessment of Bulgarian and Roma women in their environment injects skepticism into such discourses, as they exist in disproportionate poverty and weak political, economic, and social welfare systems. This reality undermines independent, autonomous decision-making in which prostitution was one of many attractive economic opportunities.

Quite the opposite, Bulgarian women are presented as assessing the poor economic landscape and subsequently choosing what they understand to be the most viable economic option. Especially in the context of this dissertation, the circumstances concerning Roma women are much worse because they seem to be forced into prostitution through physical and psychological abuse and coercion. Popov (2011), a Bulgarian research expert on sexual exploitation, characterized the freedom prostitution extends to women in the following statement: "It [Prostitution] however cannot be a "free profession" since it is 90% managed by criminal networks (p. 6-7).

In Bulgaria, prostitution is fueled by demand (sex industry) and organized crime. The sex industry in Europe is profitable, organized crime is widespread and recognized as the chief benefactor. While Bulgarian men do purchase sex, demand is more frequently linked to both Western European markets and Western European visitors to Bulgaria. In the context of this dissertation, demand was geographically fixed in six interviews: Turkey (twice), France (three times), Western Europe (generally), the Netherlands, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the United Kingdom, and Greece (twice).³⁴ In Bulgaria, demand is synonymous with Black Sea coastal cities. Hesse and Tutenges (2011) depict the coastal town of Sunny Beach as a top sex and drug destination for young Danish tourists.³⁵ The research of Petrunov (2010) substantiates EU citizens' attraction to sex tourism as featured in Bulgarian coastal cities.

In such a context, it is hardly unexpected that Bulgarian women, who are frequently not victims of physical and emotional coercion, are willingly and openly seeking the opportunity to sell sex. Yet, while seeking to support and serve women working in the sex industry, Bulgarian social workers must not be complacent with the ironic juxtaposition of Western European demand and Western European criticism regarding Bulgaria's struggles to curb organized crime. This is particularly relevant because Western European demand and organized crime tend to push women into prostitution (see European Commission, 2017). Instead, social workers should consider advocating for a policy approach to prostitution that accounts for differential reinforcement and especially the economic push and pull factors sustaining this lucrative business.

Future Research

³⁴ These locations were mentioned by Boris, Gergo, Evtim, Zhadomir, Zoro, and Yosif

³⁵ The drug use and related behaviors in coastal Bulgarian cities are reported in the following articles: Tutenges (2009) and Tutenges & Hesse (2008).

Findings uncovered several areas for future research. First, qualitative examinations of the definitions component of SLT revealed varying justifications for engagement in sexual exploitation. Akers (1998) connected this SLT component to the research of Sykes and Matza (1957) and the techniques of neutralization. Future research could further examine rationalizations through the Sykes and Matza (1957) theoretical framework in order to consider developing deterrence interventions targeting specific justifications.

A second, related area for further exploration concerns moral development and its relationship to human-rights education and anti-trafficking strategy. Research could examine Kohlberg's stages of moral development, specifically his post-conventional morality stage, which Kohlberg linked with learning human-rights' principles (Crain, 2000). Also, this research could involve comparison groups, such as collecting adolescent responses and then comparing such responses to those of traffickers. This research could enhance our understanding about how human rights are understood (or not understood) in the prostitution discourse, as well as uncover educational strategies for how to teach a human-rights worldview (see Weyers & Köbel, 2015). As with the examination of justifications, this research could further nuance anti-trafficking strategy. Additionally, this would provide the opportunity to develop the international research knowledge base about more diverse applications of Kohlberg's stages of moral development.

A third area of future research concerns international applications of SLT and the category of intangible rewards under differential reinforcement. This dissertation uncovered a disproportionate focus on the tangible intrinsic rewards (money) of engaging in sexual exploitation. Yet, the concept of rewards encompasses intangible rewards, such as status, approval, emotional highs, and prestige (Akers, 1998). Exploring the role, if any, of intangible rewards in international applications of SLT would add nuance to the understanding of

differential reinforcement exclusively in terms of money and the primacy of economic incentives. Explorations of intangible rewards, as well as intangible consequences, could also shed light on why traffickers and fringe actors involved in sexual exploitation choose to leave sexual exploitation for lesser-paid employment in the legal sector, which was reported by five participants.³⁶ Yet, more broadly speaking, the topic of voluntarily leaving sexual exploitation, meaning individuals who were not incarcerated or experienced any obvious punitive consequences, is significant. Further exploration could identify other salient motivations and factors in this “exiting” decision-making process.

³⁶ Asen, Gergo, Evtim, Zhadomir, and Yosif

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Appendix A: Map of Bulgaria



Taken from: www.yourchildlearns.com (Jan. 20, 2016)

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

The goal of this interview is for me to learn more about your relationships (family, friends, colleagues, etc.) and get your opinion on whether you think these relationships played a role in your decision to work with people selling sex.

In order to do this, I am going to ask you to describe how you started working with people selling sex. You can share as much detail as you feel comfortable. As you retell your experience, I may ask you a question that helps me learn more or understand better, but again, you do not have to answer these questions.

Before you share your experience, I would like to ask you six questions that will help me understand better who you are. Again, you do not have to answer any question you do not want to.

Demographic

1. Gender

- Male
- Female

2. Age

- 18 – 28
- 29 – 39
- 40 – 50
- 51 – 61
- 62 – older

3. Marital Status

- Yes
- No

4. Child/Children

- Yes
- No

5. Highest Grade or Level of School Completed

- None
- First – Fourth
- Fifth – Eighth

- High School
- University

6. Employed

- Yes
- No

Interview Questions

Narrative Introduction Question:

1. I am interested to hear about how you started working (worked) with people who are selling sex. For example, I am curious how you first heard about this job and what your friends and family think about it. Can you first describe to me how you got this job? **Remember, I am only interested in your experience and not the people who sell sex.**
 - a. *[Throughout the course of the narrative, I will be listening for answers/opinions/thoughts on the following questions. At appropriate times, I may ask one of the following questions. After the participant seems to have finished retelling his/her story and if he/she did not touch on any of the following questions, I will ask them as follow-up questions.]*

Follow-Up/Probing/Clarification Questions:

2. When you were growing up (a child/teenager), who did you spend more time with? Family? Friends? Or, do you think it was about the same?
 - a. Of these relationships, can you think of a few that have had a positive influence in your life?
 - i. If you can, why do you think this? Can you share a few examples?
 - b. Now, I am curious about the opposite. Do you remember any relationships which you do not think had (have had) a positive influence?
 - i. If yes, what made these relationships different? Why were they not positive? Can you share a few examples?
 - c. When you were growing up, do you remember spending time with people who were doing things you thought (or now think) were (are) wrong?
 - i. Would you say that you were close with these people?
 - ii. Very briefly and without a lot of detail, what were they doing that you disagreed with?
3. In your opinion, before you decided to start working with people selling sex, did you spend time with people (family, friends, colleagues, etc.) who were already doing this?
 - a. If yes, do you think you spent more time with the people working with people selling sex than with other people, such as family and friends?

- i. Would you say that you had a close relationship with at least one person who was already working with people selling sex before you decided to do this job?
 - 1. If yes, did this person (people) teach you or help you in some way to do this job?
 - 2. Or, do you remember watching and/or listening to this person talk about his/her work with people selling sex?
 - b. In your opinion, do you think your relationships people already doing this job encouraged you to find/get a job like this?
 - i. If yes, why?
 - ii. If no, why not?
- 4. In your opinion, what do you think your family, friends, and others with whom you are close, think about this type of work? For example, do they make positive statements? Do they seem to think it is a good opportunity?
 - a. If yes, can you share some examples of comments a person has made?
 - b. If no, can you share some examples of negative comments a person has made?
 - c. Do you think the opinions of your close family and friends has influenced you to get (or keep) this type of job?
 - i. If yes, why do you think this?
 - ii. If no, why do you not think so?
- 5. Has anyone ever told you that you are doing something wrong by working with people selling sex?
 - a. If yes, do you remember why this person thought it was wrong?
 - b. What do you think?
 - i. Do you agree or disagree with this person?
- 6. What are the main benefits of this type of work?
 - a. Are there any non-material (physical) benefits? For example, do you feel more accepted by family and friends because of your job?
- 7. Are there any risks?
 - a. If yes, how do you manage these risks?
 - b. Are the risks a significant concern for you?
 - c. Is there a certain risk, that if it happened, would you encourage you to find a different job?
- 8. In your opinion, are there more benefits or risks?
- 9. Do you think the benefits you receive motivate you to keep this type of job?

Appendix C: Theoretical Components and Interview Questions

Theoretical Component	Proposition	Interview Questions
Differential Association	Bulgarian human traffickers consistently spend (spent) time with family and peers active and/or with past experience in sexual exploitation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When you were growing up (a child/teenager), who did you spend more time with? Family? Friends? Or, do you think it was about the same? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Of these relationships, can you think of a few that have had a positive influence in your life? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ If you can, why do you think this? Can you share a few examples? ○ Now, I am curious about the opposite. Do you remember any relationships which you do not think had (have had) a positive influence? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ If yes, what made these relationships different? Why were they not positive? Can you share a few examples? ○ When you were growing up, do you remember spending time with people who were doing things you thought (or now think) were (are) wrong? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Would you say that you were close with these people? ▪ Very briefly and without a lot of detail, what were they doing that you disagreed with? • In your opinion, before you decided to start working with people selling sex, did you spend time with people (family, friends, colleagues, etc.) who were already doing this? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If yes, do you think you spent more time with the people working with people selling sex than with other people, such as family and friends?

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Would you say that you had a close relationship with at least one person who was already working with people selling sex before you decided to do this job? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If yes, did this person (people) teach you or help you in some way to do this job? • Or, do you remember watching and/or listening to this person talk about his/her work with people selling sex? ○ In your opinion, do you think your relationships people already doing this job encouraged you to find/get a job like this? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ If yes, why? ▪ If no, why not?
Definitions/Attitudes	Bulgarian human traffickers initially acquire and ultimately adopt(ed) favorable definitions and attitudes to sexual exploitation through interactions inherent to differential association.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In your opinion, what do you think your family, friends, and others with whom you are close, think about this type of work? For example, do they make positive statements? Do they seem to think it is a good opportunity? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If yes, can you share some examples of comments a person has made? ○ If no, can you share some examples of negative comments a person has made? ○ Do you think the opinions of your close family and friends has influenced you to get (or keep) this type of job? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ If yes, why do you think this? ▪ If no, why do you not think so? • Has anyone ever told you that you are doing something wrong by working with people selling sex?

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If yes, do you remember why this person thought it was wrong? ○ What do you think? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Do you agree or disagree with this person?
Differential Reinforcement	Bulgarian human traffickers repeatedly experience(d) greater rewards, both positive and negative, and less punishment as a result of involvement in sexual exploitation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the main benefits of this type of work? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Are there any non-material (physical) benefits? For example, do you feel more accepted by family and friends because of your job? • Are there any risks? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If yes, how do you manage these risks? ○ Are the risks a significant concern for you? ○ Is there a certain risk, that if it happened, would you encourage you to find a different job? • In your opinion, are there more benefits or risks? • Do you think the benefits you receive motivate you to keep this type of job?
Imitation	Bulgarian human traffickers are (were) exposed to active and/or ex-human traffickers (models), of whom a greater amount are (were) family and/or close peer relationships.	**See role model questions under differential association
Social Opportunity Structure	The opportunity to become a human trafficker was presented by a family member and/or peer (social network) and therefore not the result of organized crime recruitment strategy, consisting of targeting individuals based on his/her valuable/advantageous professional network.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am interested to hear about how you started working (worked) with people who are selling sex. For example, I am curious how you first heard about this job and what your friends and family think about it. Can you first describe to me how you got this job?