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# From Carnivals to Red Light Districts: Mexican Gender Norms and Sex Trafficking

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# Mexican Gender Norms and Sex

# Trafficking


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*A female body lies abandoned in the inhospitable Chihuahuan desert in between the U.S. and Mexico. The remains belonged to Marisol, who was only sixteen years of age. A charismatic young man with a twinkle in his eye had promised her a job in a restaurant just north of the border. Her family desperately needed the money. She had dropped out of school when she was twelve in order to work odd hours to support her stay-at-home mother and violent, alcoholic father. Nonetheless, she loved them dearly. When an opportunity arose, she jumped on the idea of a new life abroad and the chance to send back remittances. She had been a virgin until the young man brutally raped and beat her. She accepted the initial beatings, yet refused to prostitute herself. Her trafficker left her in the desert with no water—she wandered north to her death. Thousands of miles in the same direction, another young victim named Esperanza sits in the corner of her room in a New York City apartment. She waits for a knock on the door that signals one of two things—a meager meal, which she will eventually have to pay back through a "service," or the arrival of a customer. Esperanza dreams about how her knight in shining armor will arrive. As a girl, she always wanted a man who would rescue her from her job in the marketplace selling produce. Eperanza was so excited when Juan called her the most beautiful girl he had ever set eyes on and bought her chocolate every Friday. She was shocked when he offered her his hand in marriage and the opportunity to work for his family in the U.S. After crossing the border, he handed her a short dress and a pair of stilettos. She thought he was joking. Five months and hundreds of tricks later, Esperanza was hopeless, violated, and forever tainted. She could never return. Even if she did escape, what would her mother say? What happened to her prince charming?*

*Sex trafficking is a growing phenomenon on the U.S.-Mexico border. Esperanza and Marisol's stories represent two extremes amongst victim narratives. If anyone had bothered to recount them, they would notice the girls' vulnerabilities that are so easily exploited by traffickers. Regardless of the headlines, the photographs of women lining the red light districts in downtown Mexico City, and the documentaries telling these victims' disheartening stories, two words illuminate why violence against women has become normalized and how sex trafficking remains invisible: Marianismo and machismo.*

## Introduction

The sex trade has become the new global slavery; traffickers deceive women with promises of jobs, smuggle them over international borders, and prostitute their victims abroad. This phenomenon has taken root in the United States, where thousands of young Mexican females are trafficked across the border and forced to prostitute themselves multiple times a day (Clark 2012: 113). Male traffickers often coerce these young women into prostitution by means of violence, psychological manipulation, and deception. Meanwhile, they reap the benefits of this trade; sex trafficking has become the third largest source of illegal income in the world (Archaya 2008: 79). Not only is this horrendous trade growing due to its lucrative nature, but current gender norms entail a patriarchal atmosphere that facilitates this phenomenon by making victims and trafficking invisible.

Throughout this paper, I will explore how traditional Mexican gender norms have allowed violence to become normative, and in turn, have facilitated sex trafficking on the U.S.-Mexico border. In order to demonstrate this relationship, I will focus on the influence of marianismo and machismo in the conservative, rural state of Tlaxcala, Mexico. In this context, machismo is the traditional concept of masculinity encompassing violence, competition, control, and liberal sexual norms; and marianismo comprises a notion of femininity that prescribes women to be virginal, self-sacrificing, family-oriented, and submissive (Stevens 1994). I will first give a background about sex trafficking in the 21st century on the U.S.-Mexico border. This background will uncover trends in trafficking related to the history and politics of smuggling, immigration push and pull factors, and victim and trafficker demographics. I also explain the progression of marianismo and machismo in order to show how the normalization of patriarchal expectations and traditions plays a huge role in facilitating trafficking.

After having established the background of sex trafficking on the border, I provide a review of the literature regarding female vulnerability in sex trafficking. Authors have a propensity to focus on fiscal influences and experiences that facilitate the sex trade. Economically, the liberalization of

Mexico's economy has pushed impoverished Mexican women to migrate; consequently, these women are more susceptible to fraudulent job offers abroad and exploitation at the border. In contrast to this review, I find that social factors better explain the presence of trafficking in this particular context and illuminate background experiences that an economic perspective cannot fully portray. Thus, I focus my argument on Mexican gender norms in particular in order to show how marianismo and machismo normalize violence in Mexican society; in turn, traffickers manipulate such norms and violence in their victimization practices that encompass deception, physical violence, and psychological manipulation. In turn, marianismo and machismo facilitate the continuity of the sex trade on the U.S.-Mexico border because they have made sex trafficking normative and invisible. In order to fully explore this argument, I use the Mexican state of Tlaxcala as my case study and compile data from a variety of sources. These data includes statistics from the National Human Trafficking Resource Center, Mexican and American newspaper articles revealing details of trafficking cases in the U.S., narratives from victims who were trafficked from Southern Mexico into the United States, and interviews from various people who have lived in Tlaxcala, the world capital of sex trafficking.

## Terms

In order to better understand this argument, I have provided definitions that will be used throughout this analysis. When considering female vulnerability in relation to gender norms and various economic, political, and social factors, vulnerability refers to exaggerated susceptibility due to "poverty, underdevelopment and lack of equal opportunity" (Archaya 2008: 54). Throughout this work, I address this vulnerability in relation to marianismo, as Mexican females are especially susceptible to exploitation in the sex trafficking industry because of their expectations of living up to the Virgin Mary. This vulnerability stems from expectations to be pure, subservient to men, family-oriented, and long-suffering.

Another term used throughout this paper refers to exploitation, especially in reference to machismo and the exaggerated masculinity of traffickers. Thus, I define sexual exploitation as the following: “Any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another” (Csaky 2008: vi). In essence, my reference to the sexual exploitation of gender norms corresponds to traffickers’ ability to take advantage of women by employing characteristics of machismo including seducing and showing extreme violence toward women.

Finally, experiences involving the term “violence” include “witnessing domestic violence, being a victim of physical or sexual abuse, being a victim of intimate partner violence, witnessing a murder, and being harassed and beaten in school” (Ditmore et al 2012: 11). Because violence is ubiquitous with machismo, male traffickers inflict these experiences on victims. Meanwhile, marianismo facilitates an acceptance of such experiences.

## A Background to Sex Trafficking on the U.S.-Mexico Border

People have captured, traded, and enslaved one another throughout history. Given the easy flow of ideas, people, and products in 21st century globalization, modern-day slavery is accomplished through human trafficking (Tiano 2012: 15-16). Sex trafficking is the "recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act" (Sangalis 2011: 408). The commercial sex trade is a lucrative business involving the repeated sale of the same product as a service, great financial incentives, and little deterrence (Sangalis 2011:77-79). Often, the victim knows the recruiting trafficker, who could be a family friend of the victim or a neighbor (Sangalis 2011: 100; Ditmore et al 2012: 53; Urías and Chagoya 2011). Traffickers frequently offer employment possibilities abroad such as a factory worker, waitress, aid, nanny, model, or dancer. Although they understand the risky nature of the jobs abroad, victims are unaware of the exploitation that trafficking later entails (Sangalis 2011: 101; Ditmore et al 2012: 58; Risley 2010; Bales and Soodalter 2009). After being recruited and transported, they must perform sex work to pay back travel expenses, recruitment fees, and other debts (Risley 2010: 100; Carroll 2013; Lozano 2013). Although sex trafficking has become a phenomenon in a variety of regions throughout the world, the influence of gender norms in traditional, rural areas of Mexico like Tlaxcala contributes to a better understanding of the roots of the sex trade that occurs north of the border.

### *The Context of Trafficking*

The U.S.-Mexico border is an area involving a massive volume of sex trafficking due to the increasing amount of immigration. In 2011, there were 463,000 apprehensions related to individuals trying to illegally enter the U.S. by land; therefore, the nation has taken various measures to reduce the flow of immigrants (Alden 2012: 112). There now exists a quasi-military presence at U.S.-Mexico. The border hosts the largest law enforcement agency in the U.S. and is also lined with vehicle and pedestrian fencing along its 700 miles (Alden 2012: 112; Ackleson 2005: 171). Given

this protection, between 40 and 60 percent of those who try to cross the southern land border illegally are arrested (Alden 2012: 115; Ackleson 2005: 167). In turn, this tougher enforcement increases the price of anyone wishing to enter the U.S. illegally. Many who cross the border now use the expertise of smugglers to enter illegally (Alden 2012: 116). With over four million border crossings every year, smugglers circumvent laws and are often linked to sex trafficking rings (Clark 2012: 113; Cornelius 2001; Guerette and Clark 2005: 160).

Understanding the push and pull factors as well as victims and trafficker demographics allows for a better knowledge of cultural influences that explain the large number of illegal crossings. Mexico has become a major supply country of potential sex trafficking victims; the country's underdevelopment serves as an essential push factor (Clark 2012: 111). Mexico faces widespread violence, poverty, great disparities in wealth, and a lack of sufficient progress in regards to child mortality rates, unemployment, access to primary education, sanitation, and environmental sustainability (Archaya 2011). Accordingly, the principal reasons for trafficking of women are the following: Poverty, lack of job opportunities, unemployment, gender-based discrimination, abandonment by husband, ethnic conflict, migration and employment in the U.S., infertility, infidelity, and domestic violence (Archaya 2011: 44). As Langberg explains, "young adult women (aged 18 to 25) and children (aged 12 to 17) fell victim to traffickers because of economic necessity, responsibility as single heads of households, illiteracy or minimal education, lack of technical skills, and a history of physical and sexual abuse" (2005: 133). In essence, Mexico's push factors represent a financial pre-disposition for trafficking amongst potential victims.

The sex industry across the border serves as a major factor pulling Mexican females to work in the U.S. Around 50,000 women and children are trafficked each year throughout the U.S. for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation. These forms often include prostitution, live sex shows, stripping, and pornography (Hepburn 2012: 4). Both illegal and legal forms of prostitution in the U.S. encompass the widespread demand for sex north of the border. The black market of the sex industry

exists throughout the U.S. Up to 3,500 illegal prostitutes work in Las Vegas (Brents and Hausbeck 2007: 429), and countless women are engaged in prostitution throughout the country. Furthermore, the prostitution business (illegal or legal) is booming, especially in areas where U.S. law permits the business. “Las Vegas draws more than 38 million tourists annually to more than 133,000 hotels” because it has been able to capitalize the sex industry through selling glamorous experiences of adult entertainment (Brents and Hausbeck 2007: 429). Las Vegas has modernized this industry to the point of “Mcdonaldization”, where women are lined up to be picked by potential buyers (Brents and Hausbeck 2007: 434). In a thriving market where men desire personal erotic experiences with foreign beauties, vulnerable women who aspire to work in the U.S. are deceived, smuggled, manipulated, and forced to work abroad in this industry.

Latina victims specifically have a role to play in clients’ desires for exotic women north of the border. When considering this expanding market, Zhang’s study found that pimps also responded to the desire for cheap sex in Tijuana; they regularly used women willing to work in the sex industry to their benefit. Entrepreneurs’ ultimate goal is to benefit financially from this industry and rely on female sex workers in this lucrative business (2011; 2007). In consequence, Mexicans and Latin American immigrants meet the demand for cheap sex in the U.S.; traffickers have turned to forced prostitution in order to take full advantage of this profitable market and are accustomed to exploiting a specific demographic of women. When identifying victims, patterns are found in their origins, ethnicities, and ages. The majority of women are of the mestizo ethnic group (Archaya 2011: 45), as a vast amount of Central Americans are trafficked into the U.S.

Traffickers prey on specific demographics amongst Mexican women. Most of the victims come from poorer areas in Oaxaca, Guerrero, Chiapas, Michoacan, Zacatecas, Colima, Chihuahua, Yucatan, and Veracruz (Clark 2012: 116). Victims typically come from rural areas: Out of the total sample of 60 trafficked women respondents, 12 were from urban and 48 from rural areas and mostly trafficked from central and southern states of Mexico. Trafficked women are typically young; nearly

72 percent were younger than 24 (Archaya 2008: 84), and around 50 percent are minors (Risley 2010: 101). Sex trafficking victims are typically young females from the South of Mexico; because this demographic encompasses areas in which traditional gender norms play the strongest role amongst a very impressionable young population, an understanding of the cultural adherence to gender norms better explains victimization practices and exploitation.

Meanwhile, the majority of traffickers or pimps are known to come from the Southern Mexican city of Tenancingo, Tlaxcala where patriarchal norms are strongest and normalize trafficking (Ignacio 2012, Vivas 2013, Discovery en Español 2014). These traffickers target poor, rural, and primarily indigenous women and girls using practices developed and applied over the past thirty years (HSTC 2011: 1). The history of this region explains its current title as the world capital of sex trafficking. Tlaxcala used to be the chief exporter of laborers to Puebla. In turn, Tlaxcalan men became accustomed to traveling to support their families. With new developments in transportation, economic decline (HSTC 2011: 2), and temporary migration for farm work, Tlaxcalans' continued to leave the home (HSTC 2011: 3). Women also began to work in the service sector in Mexico City starting in the 1970s. With the consent of their families, these women relied on "padrotes" who were responsible for transporting them (HSTC 2011: 4). Because of economic unrest and protest in the 1980s, unemployed and blacklisted laborers turned to prostitution (HSTC 2011: 5). The 1994 Mexican peso crisis, which elevated unemployment levels and opportunities in legal markets, also encouraged the sex trade. Given all of these influences, Tlaxcalan migrants transitioned from factory employment to prostitution in order to earn a living (HSTC 2011: 4). Currently, traffickers and their families manipulate and exploit customary marriage traditions. In effect, padrotes successfully deceive, coerce, and traffick young women and reap the benefits of this lucrative phenomenon (Ditmore et al 2012: 24).

## Gender Norms and Sex Trafficking

Mexico has become a major country of origin for sex trafficking due to a variety of factors. Political and economic issues are well-known influences connected to this trade as a whole and are found in many countries throughout the world. In contrast, social influences play an essential role in the unique cases of sex trafficking occurring on the U.S.-Mexico border since the majority of victims and traffickers seem to originate from the most traditional and patriarchal states in Mexico. Thus, cultural connections must be explored in order to understand why trafficking has become normalized and exploited in this context and transported to the U.S. Specifically, gender norms explain customs, traditions, and a culture of patriarchy that allows for victims to experience heightened vulnerability while traffickers manipulate cultural practices and exploit women. By focusing on the region of Tlaxcala, where traditional gender norms are strong and influence the daily lives of locals, there is a better understanding of how violence is normative in this context and facilitates sex trafficking.

### *Marianismo and Machismo*

When considering the growing sex trade, I examine how Mexican gender norms contribute to a patriarchal culture that tolerates and facilitates the continuity of the sex trade. Although both marianismo and machismo have ancient roots and developed throughout centuries in Latin America, these norms have transformed to include expectations for Mexican men and women currently. In turn, these expectations have normalized gender-related vulnerabilities among women and male dominance that allow for sex trafficking to become normative in this context.

Marianismo has roots in ancient traditions found in pre-Hispanic Mexican religion. The Aztecs and other indigenous peoples in the region marveled at women's ability to produce life and regularly worshipped goddesses and female fertility. With the arrival of the Spaniards and Catholicism, the Virgin Mary replaced these Aztec goddesses throughout this 'New World' (Kroger and Granziera 1). The celebration of motherhood later became associated with the Virgin Mary; in turn, marianismo grew and became more prominent during colonization under the Catholic Church's

influence (Stevens 1994: 5; Garcia 1997; Kroger and Granziera 2012). Although formal Catholicism associated the Virgin Mary with differing connotations, indigenous Mexican groups largely viewed her as a protective intercessor and fertile mother (Taylor 11: 2012). In essence, there was a general understanding that both groups were devoted to a figure representing the divinity of motherhood.

In Latin America, the Marian cult gained popularity with the sighting of the holy mother of god on a mound north of Mexico City. The traditions of worshipping a goddess named Tonantzin (our mother) mixed with Spanish colonial practices (Stevens 8: 1994). Consequently, this apparition became associated with the Virgin Mary. The Spaniards related this incident to the presence of the Lady of Guadalupe, a figure venerated in southwest Spain. Thus, La Virgin de Guadalupe became the patroness of New Spain in 1756 (Stevens 8: 1994) and inspired a following of Mexican women to strive to be like the Virgin: Spiritually strong, divine, morally superior, humble, and open to sacrifice and self-denial (Stevens 9: 1994). Overall, the worshipping of maternal figures has always played a huge role in Mexican history and is applicable to this day when considering the ideal feminine figure.

Machismo serves as the counterpoint ideal to marianismo. Machismo encompasses aggressiveness and hypersexuality, which might have developed because of natural male biology as related to testosterone levels, the influence of Catholicism, and a Latin American cultural history still present from Spanish colonization (Stevens 1994). A biological model of machismo relates a genetic base to a natural inclination toward violence for males due to a sex difference (Falicov 2010: 310). Macho male behavior is influenced by the drive for one's genes to reproduce themselves; therefore, men use exaggerated masculinity to attract females and ensure the presence of their traits in offspring (Falicov 2010: 310). Although some may argue that biology may pre-dispose all men to machista behavior, this gender norm evolved in Latin America and has played an essential role in male traffickers' victimization practices on the U.S.-Mexico border region specifically.

Historically, machismo was transported from the Mediterranean culture and Catholic religion. During colonization, it mixed with Latin American influences. Catholicism stressed

patriarchy throughout European history, as only men had the ability to become priests and were of a much more privileged social status (Stevens 1974: 3). Religion mixed with concepts of honor, shame, and masculinity found in Southern Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa. During the 16th and 17th century, concepts of masculinity, patriarchy, and machismo became exaggerated and traveled to the Latin American culture via soldiers and adventurers in conquest (Stevens 1974: 5). Latin American machismo's origins relate to Spanish conquistadores, the raping of indigenous women, the response to indigenous imperial ritual, and the sublimation of indigenous male sexuality (Hardin 2002: 1). As a whole, machismo's origins in Latin American are deeply rooted in both natural and learned male behavior that is currently pertinent as well.

Although these gender norms have ancient roots, both are applicable in contemporary traditions that have held considerable influence in Mexico and contribute to the normalization of violence and subsequent manipulation in the sex trade. Traffickers benefit from the ideal of marianismo and virginity through sexually exploiting victims and rendering them "unreturnable" because of the cultural values explained above. This practice culminates in the "theft of the bride." Traditionally in rural Mexico, a man would forcibly kidnap and rape a woman who did not want to become his bride; he would later acquire a blessing for marriage (Ditmore et al 2012: 25). Machismo plays an important role in customary practices as well. The ability to control and manipulate women is notable in the practice known as the "asking of the hand." This strategy encompasses the trafficker's "wooing and courting adolescent women for a culturally acceptable amount of time before asking permission of the bride's family for her hand in marriage." After marrying and living together, the trafficker persuades his young bride that prostitution would be a profitable strategy to overcome financial difficulties. He then coerces his young bride into sex trafficking (Ditmore et al 2012: 24). Overall, marianismo and machismo encompass two gender norms that have historically encouraged specific notions of masculinity and femininity, influenced traditional practices, and normalized violence against women in Mexican society.

## Economic Vulnerability to Sex Trafficking Amongst Mexican Females

Rather than fully analyzing social influences and cultural values, the literature connects female economic vulnerability as sanctioned by the Mexican state and society to the growing phenomenon of sex trafficking in this region. Because vulnerability includes exaggerated susceptibility due to "poverty, underdevelopment and lack of equal opportunity" (Archaya 2008: 54), a better understanding of female susceptibility to traffickers and male manipulation reveals a great deal about the implications of marianismo and machismo that contribute to this trade. Because of the underlying presence of these norms in Mexican society, traffickers are able to regularly employ violence and exploit female vulnerabilities in order to ensure their acquiescence in sex trafficking. Currently, the relevant literature that connects gender norms and exploitation addresses female vulnerability as related to economic factors in particular. Consequently, authors find that the liberalization of the Mexican economy and the feminization of poverty and migration explain women's financial susceptibility to traffickers.

## Economic Influences

The literature addressing economic influences in sex trafficking shows the gendered effects of poverty and a lack of economic opportunity. Because of economic liberalization (which includes deregulation, less restrictions on trade, and the widespread privatization of industries), and the subsequent feminization of poverty and migration, scholars explain how women have become increasingly vulnerable to traffickers' exploitation. In turn, this approach becomes highly applicable in relating gender norms to a lack of financial opportunities amongst Mexican women; consequently, they seek opportunities abroad, desire higher salaries, migrate, and are susceptible to machista pimps and their trafficking practices both before and upon reaching the border.

### *Liberalization*

Various authors address the influence of economic policies on sex trafficking. These scholars connect a lack of regulation and privatization to lower salaries, worse working conditions, and a lack

of employment opportunities for women. Although privatization increased the demand for wage laborers, which women responded to, liberalization largely contributed to sex trafficking. Women founds opportunities such as factory work in the textile industry; nonetheless, these types of jobs offered little wages, benefits, and long-term contractual agreements (Goh 2010; Gnam 2013; Vadi 2001; Wright 2004; Azaola 2009; Wheaton et al 2010; Bastia 2006; Langberg 2005; Bales 2000). Consequently, worsening economic conditions and poverty have led to vulnerabilities and a lack of job opportunities offering decent salaries and benefits. Due to this lack of opportunity for full-time, professional work, sex traffickers exploit financially vulnerable women.

Gnam and Vadi outline how the state plays a role in sex trafficking as associated with poverty through its measures of economic liberalization. Vadi explains the results of newly-introduced liberal trends, including the privatization of state-owned enterprises, tariff reductions, the elimination of barriers to foreign investment, reductions in social provisions, currency devaluations, and the decentralization of decision making and market orientation (2001:130). Consequently, Mexico experienced widespread financial decay in the 1990s including grossly uneven distribution of wealth in Mexico, an increase by 60 percent in the cost of the basic food, and the loss of one million jobs (Vadi 2001: 133). Overall, these patterns have led to growing unemployment, declining social provisions in health and education, lower real wages, and growing financial insecurity (Vadi 2001). Similarly, Gnam's text addresses how Mexico has enacted many structural adjustment policies meant to integrate the Mexican economy into the world market. These actions encouraged global and regional trade and cut public expenditure and investment in social services and national institutions (Gnam 2013). In turn, this financial strategy has created a smaller role for state, reduced wages, increased unemployment, and encouraged the growth of low-pay, low-status processing and packing jobs or jobs in domestic service.

Given these policies and universal effects, Gnam, Bastia, and Wright connect liberal economics to a disparate and disproportionate impact on women. They argue that Mexico's

economic policies associated with privatization, free trade, and cuts in social services and public investment ultimately reduced wages; increased unemployment, low-pay, and low-status jobs; intensified gender inequalities; and led to the undervaluing and exploitation of women's work (Gnam 2013: 726; Wright 2004: 371). All outline how these policies have gendered effects causing widespread disadvantages amongst women, who are forced to accept wage labor positions in the informal, unregulated sectors of the economy such as the maquiladora industries, domestic work, and careers in social services (Bastia 2006; Wright 2004; Gnam, 2013). Women's labor has become undervalued; they work longer hours without compensatory pay (Gnam 2013: 726). Meanwhile, women are exposed to increasing housework, care work, and low-paid employment in labor-intensive manufacturing for export. Thus, Mexican economic policies have created financial vulnerability amongst women: their labor, working conditions, and opportunities have diminished.

Azaola ultimately relates these arguments to sex trafficking (2009). In examining the relation between poverty and income distribution to the commercial sexual exploitation of children in Mexico, Azaola connects economic instability to the deterioration of conditions, quality, and life expectations of wide sectors of the population during recent years (2009: 99). She argues that these conditions allow for girls to be especially vulnerable to gender-based violence on the border. She examined how impoverished children are subject to various types of commercial sexual exploitation while living on the street; are taken into hotels, cars, night clubs, and brothels to offer such services; and are often exploited in a concealed way (Azaola 2009: 103). Girls especially are likely to be taken under false pretenses to work as waitresses and forced to work in a removed location such as the U.S. There, traffickers hide, control, supervise, and exploit them. Ultimately, Azaola connects the literatures' economic arguments regarding gendered impacts on financial vulnerability to traffickers' exploitation when examining cases of sexual assault, rape, kidnapping, beatings, extortion, and the exploitation of these children in the sex trafficking business. She thus shows how impoverished Mexican women are especially vulnerable to traffickers' exploitation.

*Migration*

The scholarship on migration and sex trafficking explains the complicated context of the U.S.-Mexico border and the need to migrate under strained economic circumstances. When considering increased poverty levels as a result of millions of jobs lost, higher food prices (Vadi 2001: 133), and an average annual wage for women of 3,875 dollars annually before migration (Gnam 2013: 721), women look for new means of survival though accepting jobs abroad in unprofessional sectors. They typically accept work in restaurants, laundromats, and massage parlors (Gnam 2013; Acharya 2009; Bastia 2006: 30; Sangalis 2011; Risley 2010; Bales and Soodalter 2009; Walters and Davis 2011, Goh 2010; Shelley 2010; Chew 2006; Schauer and Wheaton 2006; Logan et al 2009). Accordingly, the literature relates economic conditions to gendered migration and vulnerability to traffickers on the border.

Many authors address the phenomenon known as the "feminization of migration," in which women are increasingly migrating North due to their role as the economic providers for their families as a reaction to the state's economic policies. Gnam sees women's reactions to poverty, unemployment, and inequity as the "feminization of survival," in which women shoulder the financial burden of the household; consequently, these women turn to migration as a way to support themselves and their families (Gnam 2013: 727; Goh 2010). Given increased poverty and the lack of neutrality in the labor market, women are forced to accept low-waged, undervalued, part-time jobs or move in order to find better employment (Gnam 2013: 720, Bastia 2006: 30; Acharya 2008, 2009).

Acharya expands on Gnam's idea by relating this phenomenon to trafficking (2010). He argues that the growing number of females in the immigration process is an inevitable outcome of the feminization of poverty and the feminization of employment in the world labor market (20: 2010). Consequently, he claims that this migration of young women from rural areas in Mexico exposes females to highly vulnerable situations of sexual exploitation (Acharya 2010: 26), as they pose a double vulnerability as both migrants and females (2010: 21). After already having experienced

limited employment opportunities in their hometown and being susceptible to traffickers because of a lack of economic stability, women also have a pre-disposition to traffickers, who are also known to inflict gender-based violence and abuse (2010: 20). In essence, female vulnerability is exaggerated amongst the increasingly greater amount of female migrants with poor financial backgrounds.

When considering the feminization of migration, the literature also addresses how females are vulnerable due to limited economic opportunities and the need to seek employment elsewhere; consequently, they are more easily mislead and trafficked by smugglers specifically. The literature focuses on the implications regarding a lack of economic opportunity for females: they become more gullible, desperate, entrepreneurial, and risk-taking (Bastia 2006: 30; Sangalis 2011; Risley 2010; Bales and Soodalter 2009; Walters and Davis 2011, Goh 2010). In effect, many texts note how traffickers enjoy more success when misleading victims and offering good-paying jobs overseas (Risley 100: 2010; Sangalis 2011: 414; Shelley 2010; Bales and Soodalter 2009; Goh 2010).

Regarding this occurrence, Walter's examination of the current situation of child victims of various types of sexual slavery in the volatile context of the U.S.-Mexico border illuminates reactions to these job offers on the U.S.-Mexico border. He argues that young girls unwittingly become trafficking victims through smugglers' debt-bondage in their journey North (2011). These smugglers use false promises of jobs and other economic opportunities in the U.S. to dupe girls (Walters and Davis 2011: 3). Accordingly, Walters connects the literature on migration given limited economic opportunities to female vulnerability and exploitation on the border.

Overall, the literature on gender norms and sex trafficking takes an economics-based approach in order to link female financial susceptibility to forced prostitution both within Mexico and north of the border. As a consequence of economic liberalization, women have limited opportunities to participate in the professional sectors of the Mexican economy and earn decent wages. Consequently, they find themselves forced to search for better opportunities elsewhere, accept risky job offers, and migrate. Considering this pattern, known as the feminization of migration,

women find themselves highly vulnerable to deception, manipulation, and exploitation by traffickers who take advantage of their dire economic backgrounds.

## Gender Norms, the Normalization of Violence, and Sex Trafficking

Although the current literature focuses on economics, a social analysis of sex trafficking in this region provides a better understanding of patriarchal influences, victims' background experiences, trafficking practices, and emotional struggles that financial factors simple cannot illuminate. In turn, I focus on the impact of cultural factors in order to provide a new approach to exploring how traditional Mexican gender norms such as marianismo and machismo normalize violence and facilitate trafficking when examining practices related to deception, physical violence, and psychological manipulation. Consequently, these normative practices and the acceptance of such violence in particularly conservative, rural locations like Tlaxcala enable the continuity of the sex trade north of the border.

This analysis will include a variety of sources in order to show how these gender norms have facilitated trafficking through normative exploitative practices and the exaggeration of cultural norms on the U.S.-Mexico border. When examining the data related to this topic, information describing the identities and roles of both male traffickers and female victims is essential to gaining a better understanding of the presence and continuity of trafficking. For this reason, a collection of hotline statistics, newspaper articles, victim narratives, and interviews with locals from the Mexican capital of sex trafficking (Tenancingo, Tlaxcala) illuminate this connection. Hotline data explicate the presence of female Latino victims and their inability to contact authorities while also showing the influence of Mexican pimps who operate north of the border. News articles are useful in describing trafficking trends as related to family networks and manipulative practices. Victim narratives serve as essential qualitative data that describe common background identities amongst victims of the trade and their experiences in forced sex work. Finally, interviews with Tenancingo locals and videos portraying city-wide celebrations illuminate the influence of traditional practices and norms in the hometown of traffickers and depict exploitative norms. Altogether, this compilation of data shows how marianismo and machismo promote normative violence in both Mexican society and

victimization strategies when considering the background and identities of victims, common experiences, and exploitative practices related to sex trafficking.

## Deception

Gender norms play an essential role in sex trafficking because marianismo and machismo entail the toleration of fraud and prostitution in Mexican society, which traffickers take advantage of in order to assume that trafficking remains invisible. Male traffickers exploit the machista image of a seductive male who has the power to "conquer" women (Gutmann 2006; Stevens 1994). In turn, these macho men abuse their ability to seduce young victims, promise them long-lasting romance, and trick them into a life of servitude. Simultaneously, marianismo contributes to this process. Mexican women who are targeted and exploited explain their expectations for men to amorously pursue them, are virginal and fully devoted to their partners, and obsess over the idea of committed love that entails a future family (Stevens 1994; Hirsch 2003).

Furthermore, gender norms are present in traffickers' ability to deceive women economically as well. In a society that encourages male wealth, statuses, and power, machismo prescribes men to financially exploit inferior women for their benefit. In contrast, Mexican women are now accustomed to accepting job offers in the U.S. due to a history of servile and informal positions as associated with marianismo. They have little recourse in local opportunities and education and are also expected to accept servile roles; consequently, traffickers manipulate their susceptibility by means of offering false job offers abroad. Subsequently, the fact that forty-two out of sixty five articles about sex trafficking describe deception, which entails either romantic seduction or economic fraud, as a method employed by traffickers (Heath 2014) deserves further exploration.

### *Romantic Deception*

Marianismo and machismo seem to be contradictory forces with regard to expectations in relationships. Marianismo encourages women to be virgins, expect romantic notions of love and commitment, and remain married until their death. In contrast, machismo prescribes men to chase

women and view romance as a competition, use the services of prostitutes, and act violently rather than tenderly toward their partners. In effect, these norms make patriarchal violence and the female experience of childhood trauma normative and allow for the continuation of such violence in the domestic sphere. Thus, marianismo and machismo contribute to trafficking through normalizing violence in romantic relationships and trafficking strategies.

## Future Love and Marriage

Seeing as marianismo prescribes women to hold romantic love, marriage, and their families in high esteem, machista men are able to take advantage of women via sex trafficking after initial seduction. Various newspaper articles explain the influence of specific pimps that use romance to deceive potential victims by promising them love and gifts like chocolates (Ditmore et al. 2012). These typical practices portray how normative the manipulation of women has become in traditional areas of Mexico such as Tlaxcala. In turn, gender norms facilitate such practices and enable the sex trade because women commit themselves to exploitative male partners and are misled into continued prostitution in the name of love and family.

Marianista women are pure and wholeheartedly committed to their families and spouses. Marianismo dictates a devotion to kin, which is viewed as sacred (Stevens 1994: 14). Because the Virgin Mary tends to be the ideal figure for Mexican Catholic women, Marianismo serves to compare the Virgin Mary's feminine virtue to a woman's reputation, values, and actions. In effect, the Catholic majority in Mexican society expects women to uphold expectations as related to this cult of feminine spiritual superiority (Stevens 1994: 3-9). Women are to be submissive to the demands of men and expected to be wholesome, pure wives. Furthermore, the Virgin Mary idealizes women's sadness and encourages them to accept sorrow in their lives (Stevens 1994: 9; Gutmann 2006). Consequently, women associate their lives with a "negative existence" noted by self-denial, emotional suffering, and psychological and economical dependency. Within their three roles as virgins, wives, and mothers, they are to be forever pure and passive bystanders (Garcia 1997: 49).

Overall, the marianista role encompasses women to be loyal wives, accept motherhood, live in the shadow of husbands and children, and support them by all measures needed (D'Alonzo 2012: 125).

Given the context of marianista expectations for women, the literature on sex trafficking and gender norms addresses the influence of romantic deception in relation to the acceptance of dependency and abuse against Mexican women. Frias argues that poor women with low levels of education and few occupational skills remain dependent on abusive partners. She finds that poverty and patriarchal social norms clearly increase the risk of violence and undermine a woman's ability to escape it or bring charges against the abuser (Frias 2010: 23). Furthermore, Leidholdt argues that prostitution itself represents gender-based discrimination and a practice of violence against women (Leidholdt 2004: 167). She claims that women are vulnerable in their relationships with men, as several of the prostitutes who she interviewed had husbands that were also their pimps (Leidholdt 2004:169).

When considering such characteristic dependency and violence in Mexican society and relationships, gender norms facilitate this pattern in trafficking: marianismo contributes to trafficking in the institution of marriage by sanctioning prostitution within an esteemed, long-lasting institution. Tlaxcala interviews reveal that women have always been taught that marriage is for life; they do not accept short-term commitments (Urías and Chagoya 2011). A stunted marriage corresponds to a moral sin because the Catholic Church states that marriage is until death. In effect, traffickers exploit marianismo through seducing, marrying, and having children with their victims (Urías and Chagoya 2011). An interviewee explains the application of this manipulation in trafficking. He discloses how pimps romance young women, become their boyfriends, promise their love, and get married in other parts of Mexico. Women are deceived when they begin to have kids with their "husbands" and are later prostituted (Urías and Chagoya 2011). In turn, marriage has become a normalized strategy in Mexican trafficking, as seen in the infamous Carreto case in New York: "What makes [the Carreto case] distinct from human trafficking cases involving Eastern

European women is that the alleged pimps professed to love and honor their prostitutes. The defendants entered into relationships - and sometimes marriages - with the women and used those bonds to increase their ability to manipulate and coerce the women" (Marzulli 2005 a). Therefore, marianismo facilitates a tolerance of trafficking practices: men exploit seductive roles in order to continually prostitute marianista women, who are endlessly devoted to their romantic partners.

In effect, marianismo plays an essential role in females' experiences with this type of deception. An interview with a group from Tlaxcala shows the influence of romantic manipulation. Trafficked women often believe that they are prostituting themselves out of their own free will in order to help their "boyfriends" or even "husbands." A former victim named Kiara reveals how her trafficker manipulated her into prostitution through using their relationship as a justification: "He said that since we were living as a couple now, he was like the husband and I had to do as he said" (Ditmore et al 2012: 57). As a result, victims might even have a desire to work the streets in order to avoid beatings, satisfy their trafficker, and create a false image of acceptance and happiness in their dismal situation. One interviewee concludes that trafficking victims understand what trafficking is, yet they work out of desire. This "desire" stems from physical beatings and terrible psychological manipulation, where women think that they are girlfriends and wives who will eventually produce a happy family (Urías and Chagoya 2011). Hence, marianismo's ideal of achieving romantic love, getting married, and becoming a mother and wife normalizes women's deception and a toleration of domestic violence in sex trafficking.

## Seduction and Prostitution

In addition to marianismo enabling forced prostitution, machismo encourages a general tolerance of the sex trade as well. When considering this gender norms' relation to trafficking, machismo's sexuality liberty encourages prostitution: The macho male assumes "the right to sexually exploit any female" (Ugarte et al 2003: 156). Consequently, Machismo allows men to accept the existence of an involuntary sexual labor force (Ditmore et al 2012: 22). Many young Mexican men

lose their virginity to a sex worker as a rite of passage. Older men may bring a boy to a brothel, which society deems the appropriate environment for men to lose their virginity (Herrera 1998: 112). Amongst Mexican high school students, twenty percent of the well-off boys reported having their first sexual relation with a prostitute. Prostitution also occurs outside of brothels as well. Middle class Mexican men follow a convention in which a father hires a maid with whom his sons can have their first sexual encounters (Gutmann 2006: 133). As a result, machismo's liberal sexual norms legitimize male control through reinforcing male domination and female subordination (Sangalis 2011: 412).

Machismo's liberal sexual norms relate to a widespread demand for sex. Subsequently, Sangalis and Shelley's examinations show how Mexico's patriarchal state has allowed sex trafficking to thrive given this demand. Sangalis finds that there is a lack of enforcement of laws criminalizing or condemning prostitution as well as limited trafficker arrests, prosecutions, and convictions (2011). Furthermore, Sangalis argues that there have been no efforts to decrease the demand for sex or prosecute those procuring these services (2011: 412). Shelley compliments this argument by explaining how traffickers enter the lucrative business because the probability of arrests is infinitesimal (Shelley 2010: 243). A negligent Mexican state has ultimately normalized the exploitation of women: There have been few arrests of domestic or foreign traffickers who exploit women and young girls (Shelley 2010: 262). Wright (2004) expands on Sangalis and Shelley's examination of state negligence in her examination of Mexico's abysmal treatment of prostitutes (2004). Her study reveals that the government accepts illegal actions against women such as murder, rape, and torture (Wright 2004: 376). Keeping this literature in mind, there is an understanding that machismo encourages a societal and legal acceptance of sexual violence against women in Mexico that allows for trafficking to become normative.

Interviews with victims depict similar patterns in Mexican males' manipulation of the liberal sexual norms as prescribed by machismo and the toleration of exploitation. The Sex Workers'

Project's data discloses information regarding victims who did not already have a close relationship or personal connections to their trafficker; these women fell victim to romantic manipulation encompassing strategies ranging from buying potential victims gifts like candy or dancing with women at local fiestas (Ditmore et al 2012). The thirty-eight percent of women who did not have any previous connection to their traffickers met these male strangers in a public space such as a park. Later, traffickers approach, seduce, and force victims into sexual servitude (Ditmore et al 2112: 53). An interview with a former victim named Lelia, who was seduced by a professional pimp, reveals this method of deception and entrapment with her trafficker: "I trusted him to take care of me—I was naïve and could not believe he would do anything to harm me. Thus, I was trapped when he eventually became mean and vicious" (Ditmore et al 2012: 57). Due to the ability to manipulate societal expectations encompassing a seductive nature, Mexican macho pimps are able to capitalize on the sex trafficking industry.

Trafficking reports chronicled in the U.S. demonstrate similarities in manipulative strategies. The Medeles-Arguello case illustrates an example this gender norm: A family trafficking ring relied on professional pimps to romance, recruit, smuggle, and supply twelve young women between the ages of fourteen and seventeen to be prostituted in the bars (Lozano 2013; Carroll 2014; Denny 2013). Another case exposes how a trafficker named Jose Carreto seduced an anonymous victim with promises of love and marriage and even visited her regularly while she was working at a pastry shop (Marzulli 2005; USDOJ 2007). Similarly, men from the Granados network also used deception to woo women and bring them to the U.S. as girlfriends; later, they sexually exploited, threatened, and enslaved these female victims in Queens (EFE c 12; Pearson 2012, a 2012; Marzulli 2012). As Samuel Granados admits, seduction was essential in his ability to take advantage of his victim, who was his partner at the time: "I made her believe our relationship was a serious one, romantic" (Marzulli 2012). In turn, these women also believe that they work are "helping [their husbands] pay the rent" (Marzulli 2012). These cases show the influence of gender norms in sex trafficking:

machista pimps are employed to seduce potential victims and prey on the female marianista expectation for commitment, romance, and love. Specifically, traffickers rely on their capabilities as macho men to deceive women into forced prostitution; consequently, this continued deception allows for seduction to become a typical practice in victimizing women and manipulating them into sexual servitude.

### *Economic Deception*

Gender norms also contribute to a female pre-disposition to poverty, a lack of opportunities, and susceptibility to trafficking. In an economy where economic opportunities are already limited for women, marianismo contributes to fiscal vulnerability because this norm prescribes women to accept servile, domestic positions. Meanwhile, traffickers are able to benefit from their financial susceptibility through economic deception. In turn, pimps continually traffick females given the presence of financial instability and patriarchal influences that are characteristic of Mexico.

### Economic Control

Machismo encourages a societal acceptance of men to exercise their dominance over women through relationships of dependency and control. Mexican society has made males' influence over their partners' employment decisions characteristic: 40% of women in the country report needing male permission to work for pay (Villarreal 2007: 430). This dependency is so customary in Mexican society to the point where the state sanctions such control: There has been a deliberate lack of educational opportunity for women in order to encourage their dependency on men (Ugarte et al 2003: 156). Gutmann's interview with a Mexican named Elena reveals this phenomenon in everyday life: "My parents didn't know how to read because their parents and their grandparents had told the girls, 'No, why should you go to school? There's no need for you to go to school because then you're going to marry, and then he's going to support you. So school's useless" (2006: 207). When considering machismo's reinforcement of patriarchal relationships and dependency, this gender norm makes financial manipulation normative: In Tlaxcala, young boys aspire to achieve the lucrative

careers of their fathers and uncles; they learn early how to dupe poor women with limited education into situations of forced prostitution (HSTC 2013: 2). Machismo ultimately fortifies and typifies male dominance in relationships involving females with limited education, which entails dependent relationships.

The data collected continues to depict similar patterns regarding limited prospects for women and the presence of patriarchy. An interview with a Tenancingo woman named Esther portrays the disadvantages of being a woman in a man's world with respect to her search for employment: "There are not many opportunities for women in Mexico . . .Here in Tenancingo either you study or you work. You can't do both" (Vazquez 2013). A lack of opportunities is also notable with respect to community participation. Women are regularly ignored: "Tlaxcala men do not accept orders from women. For example, my husband and I were building our house with a worker from one of the other municipalities, they didn't accept what I was suggesting and ignored me" (Urías and Chagoya 2011: 31). Another newspaper article also reveals women's absence in government, as there is a devaluation, limitations, and a sense of exaggerated machismo still prevalent since women believe that their only obligation is in the house with their families (Briones 2013). In essence, machismo is present in Tenancingo's patriarchal society, as women are continually denied opportunities to participate, receive an education, and work; in effect, Mexican society ensures that many will become vulnerable to exploitation and deception associated with trafficking rings when considering opportunities abroad.

Simultaneously, gender norms prescribe women to accept economic weakness without question or opposition. Marianismo is a very strong gender norm found in Tenancingo and is associated with servile, domestic positions and submission to the demands of men (Stevens 3: 1994): "Tlaxcala women should carry with an enormous weight the traditions that negate their possibility to develop as an individual. The women in Tlaxcala, although being professional, have the implicit role to serve" (Urías and Chagoya 2011: 17). A woman from Tenancingo named Doña Jose explains the

influence of this gender norm in her city. Professional roles are useless; she never considered devoting herself to anything else because “a woman’s place is in the kitchen and household.” Even when she was a child, Doña Jose had to learn how to cook rather than being able to play outside (Vazquez 2013). Overall, marianismo is influential in trafficking due to the strong belief that women are to serve men and retain domestic duties; thus, their servile positions and lack of economic opportunities normalize their submission in trafficking and inability to escape.

## Limited Opportunities

Not only are marianista women expected to be servile, but marianismo also pre-disposes women to poverty. Poor economic opportunity plays a huge role in the recruitment of sex trafficking victims because females have limited prospects, participation, and influence in the legal economy; thus, illegal opportunities become suitable. Wright’s analysis of the maquiladora textile industry reveals the accepted notion that Mexican women hold little esteem in the formal economy: they are not able to be trained, are docile and submissive to patriarchal influences, and lack ambition (Wright 2004: 83). An interview with a woman named Alejandra from southern Mexico illuminates this “lack of ambition” in Mexico: her mother was a housewife, and although Alejandra had studied nursing, she did not pursue a medical career while married and found herself unable to find a nursing job without experience (Vazquez 2013). In turn, these poor economic conditions have facilitated sex trafficking. Seventy-five percent of former sex trafficking victims interviewed described fiscal hardship during their childhood. The majority also cited financial reasons for leaving school before graduation or failing to attend at all (Ditmore et al. 2012). Generally, marianismo has cultivated a widespread lack of faith in female employees as well as limited opportunities for advancement in Mexican society, which has subsequently pre-disposed women to sex trafficking.

## Migration and Recruitment

There exists a general lack of economic opportunities outside of the home due to factors associated with marianismo. In effect, traffickers are successful in recruiting women because of

greater female vulnerability associated with a lack of local jobs and education that would normally allow women to find employment in more professional settings in the formal economy. Young Mexican women are also accustomed to migrating in order to find potential employment, and this trend is notable amongst trafficking victims: Out of thirty-seven victims, seven had to migrate when young to big cities like Mexico City to find employment and send remittances back to their families (Ditmore et al. 2012: 46). Therefore, many traffickers exploit this economic situation by promising job opportunities to potential victims. These men simultaneously benefit from the lucrative nature of trafficking and limited deterrence. Risley argues that the combined impact of complicity, corruption, uneven enforcement of the nation's laws, and a relatively ineffectual justice system allows for minimized risks associated with trafficking (Risley 2010: 110).

Given the need to find employment elsewhere and a lack of reliance on Mexican authorities to ensure secure migration, gender norms normalize a patriarchal atmosphere that breeds vulnerability, exploitation, and trafficking. The data reveals a pattern of attractive opportunities and little legal interference. The Marquez case in El Paso includes a Mexican national who smuggled and prostituted women from Juarez Mexico after they responded to his online and newspaper ads seeking escorts, models, masseurs and caretakers. The Carreto family also offered jobs in New York restaurants and laundromats, recruited the women primarily from impoverished communities in Mexico, smuggled them across the border, brought them to New York, and housed them in simple apartments when prostituting them (Marzulli 2005, 2009; Semple 2008; Glaberson 2005). Seeing as gender norms have typified the feminization of migration and a lack of state interference, traffickers capitalize on such factors through the common practice of offering false jobs abroad.

In addition to state toleration facilitating smuggling and the forced prostitution of economically vulnerable women, the context of immigration on the U.S.-Mexico border also contributes to trafficking because of Mexican women's financial and natural, anatomical vulnerabilities in this context. Women's need to find employment outweighs the risks associated with

illegally crossing into the U.S. with coyotes. Slack and Whiteford find that women face kidnappings, rape, sexual abuse, debt bondage, and other life-threatening situations due to their increased reliance on smugglers when traversing the militarized border (Slack and Whiteford 2011: 14). Furthermore, the data shows how these coyotes prey on women because of their knowledge of the limited employment opportunities amongst females and their desperation. A former victim named Mariana explains her experience in trafficking after having been deceived with a job offer in the U.S.: "I thought that we would be working together in his sister's restaurant. . .I also wanted to earn some money for my children because I was not making enough to provide for my family. Therefore, I agreed to go to the US with [trafficker]" (Ditmore et al 2012: 58). In essence, traffickers use gender norms to their advantage in exploiting females' lack of job opportunities and educational attainment in order to lure them with the false promise of careers abroad. Simultaneously, they are able to manipulate women in this context since Mexican authorities fail to intervene and address such violence.

**Physical Violence**

When examining the normalization of violence in Mexican society, gender norms reflect such abuse in trafficking. Marianismo exaggerates the acceptance of hostility while machismo allows traffickers to exploit their male dominance and aggressive tendencies. Marianista women are expected to be long-suffering and accept life's woes (Stevens 1994: 3; Gutmann 207; Hirsch 2003: 88). This attitude is essential in their toleration of physical, psychological, and sexual abuse. Seeing as cultural norms dictate that Mexican girls idealize the Virgin Mary and the sacredness of motherhood, they tend to greatly cherish their families and children (Stevens 1994: 3; Gutmann 2006:168). Thus, trafficking becomes tolerated amongst victims whose traffickers hold their families hostage or use threats to coerce them into prostitution. Meanwhile, machismo idealizes the violent, seductive, power-hungry male (Hirsch 2003: 119, 139; Paz 1985: 81). Mexican society accepts men's raping, beating, and threatening of women, which traffickers then employ to coerce victims

into prostitution: Forty-eight out of sixty five articles about sex trafficking mention violence as a factor that pimps employed (Heath 2014).

### *Past Violence*

Experiences with violence prior to trafficking and the history of an acceptance of such violence reveal the presence of gender norms in Mexican society and sex trafficking. These experiences illuminate a cultural connection between common experiences of violence experienced by Mexican women, their vulnerability to prostitution, and their presence in forced prostitution rings north of the border. Overall, marianismo and machismo normalize childhood abuse and domestic violence, which pre-dispose women to work in prostitution and subsequent sex trafficking north of the border.

### Childhood Trauma

Past experiences with sexual violence can dramatically alter a woman's life and pre-dispose her to trafficking. In Mexico, a girl's first sexual experience is typically sexual abuse by a family member, co-worker, or acquaintance (Ugarte et al 2003: 156). These experiences are widespread and often violent: 40 percent of Mexican women suffered physical, sexual, and/or emotional violence in 2006, and every three seconds, a woman in Mexico is sexually violated (Clark 2012: 117). Given the connection between the high prevalence of childhood trauma and trafficking, Cepeda's study found that many prostitutes come from the rural interior of Mexico, which hosts a more patriarchal family system and less egalitarian gender roles (2011). She argues that dominating males are physically and psychologically damaging to children; they cause traumatic victimization, which leads to greater susceptibility for high-risk behaviors linked to sex trafficking (2011: 684). Thus, studying Tlaxcala in particular demonstrates a connection between the normalization of patriarchal violence in the background experiences of many women and their subsequent victimization in trafficking.

Interviews with those from Tlaxcala, the capital of sex trafficking, reveal the influence of gender norms in traditional practices and the acceptance of sex trafficking in the region (Pearson

2013, Reyes 2012, Vivas 2013, Quesada 2013). With respect to the history of this location, women have been traditionally submissive. From a group interview including a variety of Tlaxcalan locals, there was a consensus that women have never been in power since pre-historic times; in effect, women are only involved in domestic activities. One interviewee recounts how women have been serving men since Tlaxcala allied with the Spanish during the conquest and later accepted the Catholic Church (Urías and Chagoya 2011: 16). Seeing as a submissive nature is associated with the marianista custom of subservient women, gender norms contribute to female exploitation in this city; there is an acceptance that women will serve men in a variety of ways—prostitution included.

As the literature explains, this submission and subsequent prostitution has roots in male-dominant families. Many female trafficking victims have a history of sexual abuse as children (2003: 256). Farley explains how traumatic sexualization inappropriately conditions an young girl's sexual responsiveness and socializes them into damaged beliefs and conventions about sexuality. Ultimately, this experience leaves women vulnerable to additional sexual exploitation and subsequent prostitution (Farley 2003: 256). Farley's findings relate to Mexican patriarchy and growth in the current sex trafficking industry. Out of thirty-seven victims trafficked from Mexico to New York, fifty-four percent described a violent experience prior to trafficking including "witnessing domestic violence, being a victim of physical or sexual abuse, being a victim of intimate partner violence, witnessing a murder, and being harassed and beaten in school" (Ditmore et al 2012: 11). Many victims also revealed that past rape, beatings, and fear of drunken family members contributed to a pattern consisting of a toleration of violence (Ditmore et al 2012).

In effect, Katz relates these violent experiences of early sexual abuse to crime and delinquency including prostitution (2000: 635). She argues that early victimization experiences are predictive of criminal involvement. The combination of girls' victimization by male partners and familial patriarchy leads to feelings of entrapment and criminal involvement (2000: 635). Data from thirty-seven former victims describes this connection: "Violence in childhood appears to be linked to

re-victimization in adulthood" (Ditmore et al 2013: 48). When recounting their experiences in forced prostitution, numerous victims disclose that past violent experiences contributed to their recruitment and allowed the victims to accept their fate after being trafficking and prostituted. Tatiana reveals how her father's violent nature, a characteristic associated with machismo, played a large role in her childhood: "My father drank a lot, and when he drank he was violent. . .he would beat me and my mother until we bled" (Ditmore et al 2012: 48). Consequently, this victim continued to accept abusive male behavior in relationships and tolerated her traffickers' violent behavior after being smuggled to New York. Juliana and Diana also divulge how their drunken, vicious fathers forced them to leave their homes and search for employment elsewhere, accept illegal work, and become victimized in prostitution rings (Ditmore et al 45: 2012). These examples illuminate continued practices in trafficking that connect Mexican gender norms, patriarchal influences, past experiences with violence, and a cycle of prostitution.

## Domestic Violence

Gender norms contribute to a widespread acceptance of physical abuse in Mexico. One can clearly see the influence of patriarchy and machismo in relationships: A key component of a male's machismo is his relationship to female bodies, which corresponds to dominance through physical abuse and beatings (Paz 1985). Accordingly, familial abuse is typical in Mexican society (BBC Mundo 2007; Baños 2008), as at least fifty percent of Mexican men commit domestic violence (Guarneros 2013). Gutmann's interview with a woman named Susana reveals the prominence of this abuse in Mexican society: "[My husband] was very jealous and he began to beat me a lot. He was drinking a lot and he'd get home and begin beating me" (2006: 194). Another interview with a Mexican woman named Juanita exposes the reason behind the beatings: "I'd say machismo. The man says, I'm the man, I'm the one who strong and you're the one who serves me. You're the one who lets me beat you" (Gutmann 2006: 201). Machismo reinforces the societal norm of familial

violence and spousal abuse; seeing as machismo normalizes abuse, it becomes an essential tool in sex trafficking.

In addition to childhood sexual abuse as mentioned previously, the literature also connects previous experiences with domestic violence to trafficking. Fuschel, Marrs, Murphy, and Dufresne find that girls' understanding of familial roles greatly impacts their future. Due to male-dominant influences in families, the authors find that daughters tend to internalize violent messages about the role of a wife in a marriage. Mexican girls understand that male control entails the accepting of beatings, domestic violence, and infidelity (Fuchsel et al 2012: 267). Villarreal examines the prevalence of intimate partner violence and argues that gender-based violence constitutes an important social problem in Mexico. Her study found that controlling men actively prevent a woman from working and are also more likely to physically harm their partners (Villarreal 2007: 430). She argues that her study is consistent with marital dependency theory in which employed women are less dependent on their partners for support and are less likely to tolerate abuse (Villarreal 2007: 430). These findings can be easily applied to my case study of Tlaxcala, where patriarchy and a strong sense of tradition breed domestic violence and trafficking.

The reality of extensive violence and its toleration in Mexican society demonstrates the literature's findings. Because of past experiences with machista violence, which is often directed toward women in a household, many women are accustomed to tolerate aggressive behavior: "It is very common to see men abusing and threatening women, which continues until their children grow up with this fear and living with violence is normalized. Women now allow for such aggressive behavior, as this is relatively normal—something that they have been living with since infancy in their own nuclear families" (Guarneros 2013). A woman from Mexico City named Juanita reveals this normalized violence in relation to expectations for women to be "abnegada," or self-sacrificing: "I say this is a big influence on women letting themselves be beaten, mistreated, more than anything

else" (Gutmann 2006: 207). Accordingly, all types of women, including prostitutes, feel the pressure to be self-sacrificing and tolerant of violence in Mexican society.

Given this cultural acceptance, trafficking victims follow marianista norms in their toleration of violence in their daily lives as well as in sex trafficking. In the case of the thirty-seven former victims who were interviewed, fifty-four percent victims mention a violent experience prior to trafficking (2012:48). Mariana's story of victimization exemplifies this statistic: "My ex-husband was abusive and used to beat me. He also drank a lot," which caused her to normalize physical abuse and accept her trafficker's beatings (Ditmore et al 2012). Simultaneously, traffickers benefit from this cultural acceptance by employing physical violence as a means to continuously prostitute their victims. Subsequently, traffickers capitalize on this normalization of violence through employing abusive practices in order to continually prostitute women. As seen in the Carreto case, traffickers regularly instill a "climate of fear" through intimidation, threats and beatings (Semple 2008). Thus, gender norms contribute to the normalization of domestic violence, which entails a cultural pre-disposition to trafficking amongst Mexican women. These norms also facilitate the female acceptance of physical abuse, which traffickers manipulate to their benefit.

*Rape, Beatings, and Threats*

Violence is ubiquitous in all forms of prostitution, yet sex trafficking that occurs on the U.S.-Mexico border employs a cultural element regarding aggressive tendencies. There are many countries throughout the world that tolerate female sexual victimization and have high levels of poverty amongst women; nonetheless, Mexico represents a country of origin for both victims and pimps in the U.S. regardless of American border security measures. Pimp-controlled prostitution is the most common type found in the U.S. (NHTRC 2013; 2014), and the NHTRC has noted Latino nationals and networks operating in all of the top caller states: California, Texas, Florida and New York (NHTRC a,b,c,d 2012). Furthermore, twenty-one out of sixty five articles about sex trafficking mention pimps' use of threats towards victims personal wellbeing, families, or children (Heath

2014). Therefore, an examination of Mexican pimps' practices in sex trafficking exposes a cultural connection between Latino trafficking networks, their practices that specifically manipulate gender norms, and the presence and continuity of trafficking in the U.S.

## Traditional Practices

Interviews with those from Tlaxcala, the capital of sex trafficking, reveal the influence of gender norms in traditional practices and the acceptance of sex trafficking in the region (Pearson 2013, Reyes 2012, Vivas 2013, Quesada 2013). The yearly carnival in Tenancingo portrays a culmination of male dominance in the context of a yearly celebration. This event depicts machista norms, as there is an emphasis on masculine strength, competition, and violence. Since machismo prescribes liberal sexual norms and encourages men to seduce women (Hirsch 2003: 139), this carnival is also a representation of this expectation: many videos show men flirting with women in the crowd and whipping their prostitutes, who they show off to spectators (Discovery Español 2014). Furthermore, this celebration shows that patriarchy and violence are historical, yet still held in high esteem in Southern Mexico. An interviewee describes this historical influence in current traditions such as carnivals carried out by men in Tenancingo: "The carnival is prehispanic, from then it seems as though there were already pimps, or something like them, but they also have been the protagonists in the dispute over power, they have always been violent, always showing who is the strongest, always fighting between groups to see who attracts the most women, who is the most "chignon" of the chingones" (Urías and Chagoya 2011: 25).

This carnival represents how gender-related violence has become reproduced and tolerated in Southern Mexico. Private relationships related to the body, sex, and sexuality are political in this highly gendered culture (Urías and Chagoya 2011: 24). Those in this region reproduce strong notions of masculinity and accept the trade of women for sexual services as a normative aspect of their culture. In effect, both women and men in Tlaxcala celebrate such extreme notions of gender: "Here also women in addition to traffickers celebrate this rite. This relates to the formation of being a

man" (Urías and Chagoya 2011: 24). The festivities encompass the celebration of victimizing and abusing women. The annual parade emphasizes the ability of the male actors to attract women, and in some cases, exert dominance through the act of using violence against submissive female victims (Discovery Español). In essence, the fact that these male pimps are protagonists in this yearly carnival shows that the trafficking capital of the world not only normalizes patriarchy, but holds machismo in high esteem to the point where sex trafficking and victimization practices are not only normative, but celebrated.

## Current Influences

Given the importance of strength and violence in Southern Mexican towns, data from U.S. hotline statistics highlight the current application of such violence to ensure acquiescence in sex trafficking north of the border. The verb "chingar," or to do violence, serves as a tool for understanding masculinity. Macho Chingones are invulnerable and do violence to another through wounding, humiliation, and annihilation (Paz 1985: 81; Stevens 1965: 848). Because men's power derives from the possibility of violence, there is a strong correlation between aggression and control (Hirsch 2003:119), which traffickers employ.

Gender norms influence such male control over their female victims to the point where these women cannot contact authorities and are unable to escape from trafficking. Victims often lack access to telephones due to isolating conditions or the threat of violent repercussions from machista traffickers. For example, a pimp named Medeles-Arguello locked victims in an upstairs room, who were only allowed to leave "when a special client or big spender paid to have sex with one of them" (Lozano 2013). Another San Diego-based brothel run by three macho brothers reveals that the girls have no means of escape and are always under surveillance. They cannot talk with anyone and feel intense fear. If they attempt to flee, they will be beaten or killed (Landesman 2004). Overall, macho males manipulate their violent expectations in the context of sex trafficking to ensure continued prostitution.

Because traffickers are able to capitalize on such expectations, statistics suggest the presence of gender norms in Latino networks north of the border. Reporting data shows a potential connection between violence and the inability of female Latina victims to escape trafficking. Statistics from the National Human Trafficking Resource Center 2013 annual report outline the fact that the organization received 25,269 substantive calls, 8.87% of which came from potential victims of human trafficking (NHRTC 2014); less than ten percent of actual victims have the ability to reach the hotline in order to divulge information relating to their experiences in trafficking. Moreover, although victims who speak Spanish compose the second-most common caller and potential victim, three times more community members than actual victims contact the hotline (NHRTC 2013). Because victims are not likely to report cases of sex trafficking, there is an understanding that victims have difficulty contacting hotlines in order to request assistance in their escape. Therefore, reporting data suggests that this failure of communication corresponds to an inability to reach the hotline, and therefore curtail trafficking, because of circumstances such as violence.

Since machismo-related violence is typical in Mexican society, traffickers are able to manipulate such tolerance by threatening victims' contact with authorities by means of violence or threats to family members. Specific cases in the U.S. involving the Flores-Mendez, Lopez-Perez, and Zompantzi families reveal the presence of Mexican machismo in the use of violence and threats against family members. The Flores-Mendez case involves two brothers from Tenancingo who prostituted ten Mexican women after smuggling them into Queens, New York. These traffickers exerted machismo dominance in their physical control of their female victims. They used threats against the victims' children, violence, and rape to assure compliance in prostitution (Daily News a 2013; Daily News b 2013; Pearson a 2013). Traffickers also manipulate victims' strong connections to their families, a characteristic of marianismo. Brothers Benito Lopez-Perez and Anastasio Romero-Perez preyed on young women, threatened their families, and held their children hostage (EFE 2014; EFE 2011; Marzulli 2013; Marzulli 2012). Another case involved members of the

Zompantzi family who held four women's children hostage in order to coerce them into prostitution in the U.S. (EFE 2010). Yet again, macho traffickers manipulate expectations regarding their aggressive natures by exerting their masculine dominance and threatening the lives of their victims and their family members and children. In effect, gender norms play a huge role in the ability to continually exploit women through isolating circumstances and threats in order to ensure their silent acceptance.

## Psychological Manipulation

Through the generational acceptance of male dominance, female submission, and a sense of guilt amongst victims, marianismo and machismo highlight familial influences that contribute to sex trafficking on the U.S.-Mexico border. Due to the influence of the macho ideal, men regularly accept and even manipulate societal prescriptions related to their dominance and aggression. Consequently, traffickers often employ a variety of exploitative practices, many of which they learned from family members, in order to control their victims. Simultaneously, Mexican women are socialized into an acceptance of marianista ideals relating to purity and respect amongst their families and communities. As a result, victims often feel an inability to escape, denounce their trafficker, and return to their past life. In turn, marianismo and machismo facilitate the continuity of trafficking by means of normalizing the use and influence of psychological manipulation.

### *Familial Socialization and Networks*

Familial influences and the continuity of generational practices greatly contribute to the normalization of female victimization amongst macho pimps. Ingoldsby believes that machismo is a "cultural trait to satisfy the psychological need resulting from the inferiority complex in men"; consequently, men avoid feminine traits and emphasize male ones (1991: 59). This notion of masculinity is passed from generation, to generation; Latin American fathers show a lack of affection towards sons and instead display respect for them by means of separation, distance, and fear. In effect, men become tough, self-sufficient, and dominant (Ingoldsby 1991: 60). In effect, articles

about sex trafficking reveal the consequences of such socialization: Thirty-five out of sixty five articles about sex trafficking describe familial influences as playing a key role in creating trafficking networks and solidifying victimization practices (Heath 2014).

Interviews with Tlaxcala locals reflect widespread misogyny amongst various generations: "It seems like the men of Tlaxcala continue being macho, continue repeating stereotypes, and also, continue educating with the same roles with that which they were educated. They are violent, insecure, and arrogant" (Urías and Chagoya 2011: 37). Interviewees openly admit that Tenancingo idealizes the machista man who sees women as inferior, is very violent from infancy, and demonstrates his masculine identity in relationships. After being socialized in a patriarchal atmosphere, Mexican men are more accepting of violence and the victimization of women. There is a consensus amongst Tlaxcalan locals that men use psychological violence by placing prohibitions on women; they often resort to physical violence (Urías and Chagoya 2011). Accordingly, patriarchal gender norms that are common in certain locations, such as the capital of pimps, allow for men to accept their dominant positions, become abuse in relationships, and rationalize the recruitment of female victims in trafficking.

The legal context on the border of the U.S. and Mexico reflects male dominance and heightens the generational toleration of trafficking, thus making forced prostitution invisible. Criminal organizations recruit women with ease, and family networks also play a huge role in the trafficking of women and the normalization and continuity of the sex trade. Authors like Gnam examine how gangs act with impunity and connect with coyotes when kidnapping migrants (Gnam 2013: 729). Given a lack of legal deterrence, Shelley argues that those who traffick individuals to and within the United States can range from large-scale crime groups to loose networks, to individuals or couples who compel one or more individuals into domestic servitude (2010). Both authors ultimately relate the corruption of both American and Mexican officials (Gnam 2013; Shelley 2010) to the widespread exploitation of women in this context amongst a variety of different networks. Thus, it

seems as though patriarchal Mexican influences have limited state intervention in trafficking and contribute to the acceptance of networks' clandestine and sometimes familial activities.

Newspaper articles show how the normalization of violence in Mexican families and the lack of deterrence that facilitates trafficking. These accounts reveal the presence of gender norms in sex trafficking with respect to family influences, as machismo prescribes men to pass on their status, power, and occupation to their son (Stevens 1994). As seen in the infamous Granados, Carreto, and Lopez-Perez cases, fathers, brothers, mothers, and sons worked together in order successfully smuggle and prostitute young female victims. Amongst these families, male members share sex trafficking victimization practices. A pimp from Tenancingo named Montiel claims his uncle got him started in the business; he has since taught his techniques to his brother and two sons (Brumback and Stevenson 2010). Consequently, many young Mexican boys aspire to be traffickers when growing older and even admit that they would exploit their family members. Young boys from Tlaxcala hope to have "a lot of sisters and a lot of daughters to make lots of money," as the exploitation of sisters and daughters is part of this lucrative business (Brumback and Stevenson 2010). Overall, gender norms influence an acceptance of female exploitation, the manipulation of machismo, and the continuity of sex trafficking as a whole.

Familial influences associated with marianismo facilitate this trade because they play a large role in initially connecting victims to their traffickers and allowing for the unseen manipulation of feelings of trust. The majority of victims have personal connections to their traffickers, as sixty-nine percent of the victims who had been trafficked from Mexico to New York met their pimp through a family member, friend or neighbor. This initial connection caused their initial trust of the male stranger. Furthermore, four of the thirty-seven women interviewed were trafficked by a family member. Many victims' narratives reveal that traffickers with these connections were people in the community who they could trust: "I also trusted [trafficker], because my sister had dated her son, and so by association, I trusted [trafficker]" Belina (Ditmore et al 2012: 53). Seeing as marianismo

prescribes women to hold their families and community respect in high esteem, traffickers regularly prey on this vulnerability through using personal connections to earn their trust, exploit them, and keep trafficking invisible.

### *Shame*

Psychological manipulation associated with machismo and marianismo facilitates sex trafficking by means of normalizing feelings of culpability amongst female victims. Marianismo is found in women's feelings of widespread shame and guilt, even in violent situations: The ideal marianista woman is long-suffering: She accepts sorrow, mourning, and sadness in her life (Stevens 1994). Consequently, traffickers prey on vulnerable female victims knowing that these marianista women are already accustomed to accept fault and continue to work for them despite their illegal and horrific actions.

When considering violence and sex trafficking, the Mexican state and society reproduce gender norms and make violence against women normative. The literature addresses the relation between rural Mexican cultural, societal norms, and sex trafficking. Ugarte, Zarate, and Farley find incongruity in female expectations and common experiences: A girl's first sexual experience is often abuse by family member, co-worker, or acquaintance. Nonetheless, virginity is extremely important in Mexican society, as women are seen as promiscuous and damaged if they engage in pre-marital sex: "No matter what their experience, however, many of the women considered the possibility of getting married to be at risk if they had had sex first" (Herrera 1998: 111). Given the ideal of virginity, gender norms regularly hold women accountable for this exploitation.

Social norms and the state reflect this culpability. In Mexican society, a sexually active woman is promiscuous and damaged (Ugarte et al 2003: 156). Hirsch explains that a woman cannot spend the night outside of her parents' home due to expectations of virginity and reputation (2003: 86). Consequently, traditional expectations lead victimized women to internalize shame and become vulnerable to sex trafficking (Ugarte et al 156: 2003). The state also plays a role in this norm, as

Mexico often fails to prosecute those who abuse, murder, and rape women (Ditmore et al 2012: 23). Mexican authorities often do not take rape and other forms of violence seriously and rarely prosecutes perpetrators (Clark 2012: 118): “Only 1% of rapes result in criminal charges, and in some Mexican states, a girl who brings charges of rape against an adult is required to prove her chastity” (Ugarte et al 2003: 155). In essence, Mexican society encourages women to feel responsible for sexual exploitation: Since the state fails to prosecute rapists, there is an underlying message blaming women for their experiences with sexual exploitation.

Given this background of expectations prescribed by the state and society, the Mexican culture emphasizes the internalization of marianista guilt and lends itself to female psychological manipulation. Amongst various communities, women fail to denounce their traffickers and continue to be victimized. A Tenancingo local concludes that women who are victims of trafficking feel extreme culpability; thus, they often fail to condemn traffickers and continue their lives in forced prostitution (Urías and Chagoya 2011). Many victims reveal a connection to traditional customs and their goal of retaining marianismo for the sake of their culture and customs. Shame consumed Lelia and Inez after having intimate relations with their traffickers, and they felt as though they could not return home. Inez recalls how “[in] Mexican culture, a young woman cannot have sex with a boy and then come home to her parent’s house without being married” (Ditmore et al 2012: 55). She knew her community would look down upon her; consequently, she accepted her life in forced prostitution. Lelia’s account shows that felt a similar feeling of shame and entrapment because of her culture and community’s values. She felt that she simply could not return home to a village that knew she had relations with men: “I had to make my relationship with [trafficker] work no matter what because I had nowhere to go” (Ditmore et al 2012: 57). Since sexual acts are considered taboo, the influence of marianismo and the feminine respect for their home’s customs normalizes feelings of guilt and facilitates manipulation at the hands of male traffickers.

When considering these traditional norms and expectations, Steffensmeier argues that traditional norms have a direct connection with crime. He finds that female participation is highest for crimes most consistent with traditional norms and for which females have the most opportunity; these crimes are often sexually-based (1996: 479). This finding applies to marianista women who accept continued illegal employment due to fear of judgment by family members. Veronica, a nun who runs a rescue mission in Mexico City reveals that Mexican families do not accept former victims back into their homes: "The families don't want them back. They're shunned" (Landesman 2004). Consequently, many former victims internalize feelings of guilt and avoid contacting authorities for a fear of escaping and returning to a home full of family members that identify them as tainted prostitutes (Ditmore et al 2012).

Not only do these women refuse to contact the authorities, but many choose to continue a life with their trafficker and accept subsequent prostitution. In the case of a victim named Cecilia, she was continuously victimized after having realized her impurity: "[My trafficker's father] asked me to stay with his son. He told me to think about what my family would think since I had already spent the night with [trafficker]" (Ditmore et al 2012: 56). Another victim named Michaela chose to marry her trafficker in order to ease her family's worries as well rather than admit to her past sexual experiences (Ditmore et al 2012: 57). Overall, mariansimo encourages Mexican victims to idealize pure women while always keeping their families' judgment in mind; in effect, traffickers are able to continuously prostitute women since Mexican norms dictate that these victim should feel ashamed, entrapped, and spoiled.

## Conclusion

Traditional Mexican gender norms greatly facilitate sex trafficking on the U.S.-Mexico border because of the normalization of violence. In turn, an acceptance of such violence facilitates manipulative practices as related to deception, psychical violence, and psychological manipulation associated with marianismo and machismo. Machismo enables traffickers to use violence against women, threaten their families and children, deceive them with ideas of romance and opportunities abroad, and exploit the benefits of patriarchy and female vulnerability. Meanwhile, marianismo enables trafficking when considering the manipulation of women's toleration of violence, their strong connections to their families, their limited opportunities for advancement acceptance of blame, the internalization of guilt and shame, and their respect for purity and devotion. As a whole, both gender norms have contributed to the growth of sex trafficking north of the border. Seeing as more, and more victims and traffickers are Mexican nationals, traditional gender norms illuminate the Mexican influence of trafficking networks in the U.S.

As the background section reveals, a variety of factors are at play in the phenomenon of sex trafficking on the U.S.-Mexico border. While thousands of Mexican women are immigrating to the U.S. every year due to a variety of "push" factors, U.S. businesses are constantly pulling Mexican females to fill the demand in the American sex industry. In effect, smugglers continue to traffick women across the border and exploit female migrants to be later coerced into prostitution in various locations in the U.S. The cultural context shows how traditional norms such as marianismo and machismo play significant roles. Both gender norms have ancient roots in the Mexican culture that are still present and dominate the live of both men and women. While men are meant to be violent, seductive, and powerful, expectations for women are the opposite. Females are supposed to live up to the Virgin Mary: suffering, submission, family, and purity are of the utmost importance. Although these beliefs have developed in Mexican over centuries and are evolving currently, both marianismo and machismo currently facilitate trafficking.

After having reviewed the literature on sex trafficking and gender norms, I have found that the literature focuses female vulnerabilities in the economic sphere. Mexican reforms related to economic liberalization have exaggerated female migration; consequently, women are more susceptible to fraudulent job offers abroad. In contrast to this literature, I find that cultural factors linked to gender norms provide a more thorough examination of past experiences, influences, and factors that create a normative, violent atmosphere in Southern Mexico. In turn, the widespread acceptance of machista violence and the marianista toleration of abuse greatly contribute to the sex trade because violence and trafficking become invisible in this context.

In examining gender norms' influence on sex trafficking, marianismo and machismo connect Mexican traditions to the phenomenon of sex trafficking on the U.S.-Mexico border. Data from the National Human Trafficking Resource Center, Mexican and American newspaper articles, narratives from victims who were trafficking from Southern Mexico into the United States, and interviews from various people who have lived in Tlaxcala show patterns in the sex trade in this context. All data reveal the presence of violence, threats, and cultural manipulation because of the influence of machismo and marianismo. These norms make violence customary in Mexican society. Thus, when considering the growth of sex trafficking in the 21st century in this regional context, one must take a gender and culture-based approach in order to successfully understand, intervene, and resolve issues relating to the victims, traffickers, and continuity of practices in sex trafficking.

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