

## Vincent George Jr. and Sr: When is it consensual and when is it trafficking?

By Sheila Weller, Updated: June 4, 2013

Their [stories](#) could have been an episode of “Law & Order SVU.” In fact they’re probably being turned into one as we speak.

Five very attractive young women stand outside of a courthouse – well-scrubbed and long-straight-haired enough to be first-year law school students or habitués of a downtown Manhattan café.

They’re arrayed in a row and wearing T-shirts emblazoned with “VINCENT GEORGE SR. AND VINCENT GEORGE JR.: NOT GUILTY! VINCENT GEORGE SR. AND VINCENT GEORGE JR.: INNOCENT! FREE VINCENT GEORGE SR. AND VINCENT GEORGE JR.!”

The men they’re defending aren’t professors or political activists up on civil disobedience charges for some idealistic protest. They’re pimps. And the women are prostitutes who live with them in a house in Allentown, Penn., and who have reportedly been promised ownership rights to other real estate they’re paying the Georges money toward.

In fact, they are in a kind of group marriage with George Jr., who has fathered children with several of them. Three of them spent last week testifying in Manhattan’s State Supreme Court that they love George Jr. deeply, that they are in the life voluntary, that both men have helped them kick drug habits and find a better life.

The scary thing is, they may be making a good impression. As Sam A. Schmidt, an experienced Manhattan defense attorney who’s been following the trial told me, “These women don’t look frightened. They’re fairly articulate and they do care about these men,” especially the younger one, George Jr.

“I would say that I make my own choices. I am not a dumb person; I know what I’m doing,” [said](#) a self-possessed Heather Keith, 26, who met George Jr. when she was a prostitute at 19, and who has George’s pimp name, King Koby, prominently tattooed on her neck.

“He’s a teddy bear” who took them all for fun ski trips in Vermont, [gushed](#) a smiling Desiree Ellis, 24, who was a streetwalker at 13.

No one was coerced, insisted 31-year-old Danielle Geissler, who has been in the “group family” for 14 years, has an 8-year-old daughter with George Jr. She said she never took his

threats seriously. “I let it go in one ear and out the other,” she said calmly.

The threats she was referring to – hundreds of hours of what the New York Times called “profanity-laced recorded phone calls,” including one in which “George Jr. is threatening to beat one of the women if she fails to ‘get me my money’ or check in every two hours” – are what the Manhattan district attorney’s office has going for it in this head-spinning and troubling case, which will be decided Thursday.

The case is head-spinning because — well, first of all, we’ve greatly evolved as a society from the days of the Manson Girls (which this assemblage eerily harkens to) and the Hare Krishna bell-tinklers, the Lyman Family coffee-pourers and numerous other hippie-Stepford cult chicks of yore.

Today, the scourge of human trafficking, which is the more serious charge against the Georges (it can carry imprisonment of 15 to 25 years; promoting prostitution is the lesser charge, with a possible sentence of four to seven years), is a widely touted cause, one that many a Hollywood actress has lent her name to, to earn humanitarian cred. It seems as oddly out of place for young women to be aggressively and cheerfully sticking up for a visible version of trafficking as it would be to see a crusade for smoking in schools or the right to despoil the environment.

But it’s head-spinning for the opposite reason, too. For the last 10 or so years, we’ve had a push-pull public conversation about alternative lifestyles that include group marriage (the recent HBO series “Big Love”; the rise of the polyamory movement, which has gone from approving essays in Salon.com to a recent episode of “Wife Swap”), as well as our perennial back-and-forth about prostitution, both pimp-enabled (Terrence Howard was praised for his sympathetic portrayal in “Hustle and Flow” and the movie’s “It’s Hard Out There For A Pimp” won best song at the 2006 Academy Awards) and solo practice.

Some years ago the New York Times published a [story](#) about supposedly well-adjusted, upscale sex workers (that’s the preferred term), with one of them — a “Williamsburg hipster” — interviewed as she read a Junot Diaz novel while wheeling her shopping cart in the Whole Foods checkout line.

And porn movies constitute such a big industry in Southern California, its trade association representative (yes, it has one) has been [threatening](#) to move the industry to another state if nettlesome regulations are not relaxed.

So we’re not sure how we’re supposed to feel about these things — and the exponential proliferation of escort and porn sites on the Internet (Just seven years ago, the heads of the U.S.’s two vice officers’ associations told me it was impossible to patrol them all) makes our earnest concern seem both fruitless and quaint.

The George case is a bit of a breakout. Often prosecutors decline to prosecute pimps unless their prostitutes will testify against them. Here, the women are doing the opposite— testifying for the defense. And while the prosecution may be counting on the women’s willingness to champion the men being seen as evidence that they have been coerced and manipulated, Schmidt thinks there’s as strong a possibility that their testimony — if it was received by the

one person who matters (the judge; the Georges have waived a jury) as effectively as it has been conveyed in the press – might be just what the defense needs.

“The prosecution may be saying, ‘Oh, come on! They’ve have been yelled at and screamed at and cursed at — that means they *do* fear them!’ But if I was a juror, [the women's testimony] might be the point where I’m not convinced beyond a reasonable doubt” that the men used actual force, he said.

Whatever happens Thursday, Harmony Dust has something to say. Harmony is a remarkable young woman. She was deeply loyal to a pimp who for years took all her money when she was a stripper while attending college in Los Angeles She finally broke free of him, got her MSW at UCLA, became an Los Angeles County social worker, and formed the now-international [Treasures](#), which helps 5,000 to 7,000 women a year get out of stripping, prostitution and porn.

Harmony says Vincent George Jr. seems to be what is called a “lover-boy pimp” — sometimes they’re even called “managers,” rather than a “brute-force pimp.”

Vulnerable women form a “trauma bond” with such men, “and there are a number of factors — imbalance of power, sporadic incidence of abuse or intimidation or threats” — that make for “a victim who is able to dissociate and focus on the positive aspects,” she said. Such victims “are not even able to admit [the coercion] to themselves.”

Harmony’s group — through workshops, peer mentoring and therapy — takes exploited women on a journey “from survivor to overcomer to liberator.”

Personally, I hope the judge makes a decision that by putting these men away for a long enough time frees the young women of the sad, creepy Vincent George cheerleader squad to take that same journey themselves.

*Sheila Weller is an award-winning magazine journalist and the author of six books, including 2008's New York Times bestseller “Girls Like Us: Carole King, Joni Mitchell, Carly Simon — And the Journey of a Generation.” She is currently working on “The News Sorority: Diane Sawyer, Katie Couric, Christiane Amanpour — and the Triumph of Women in TV News.”*

