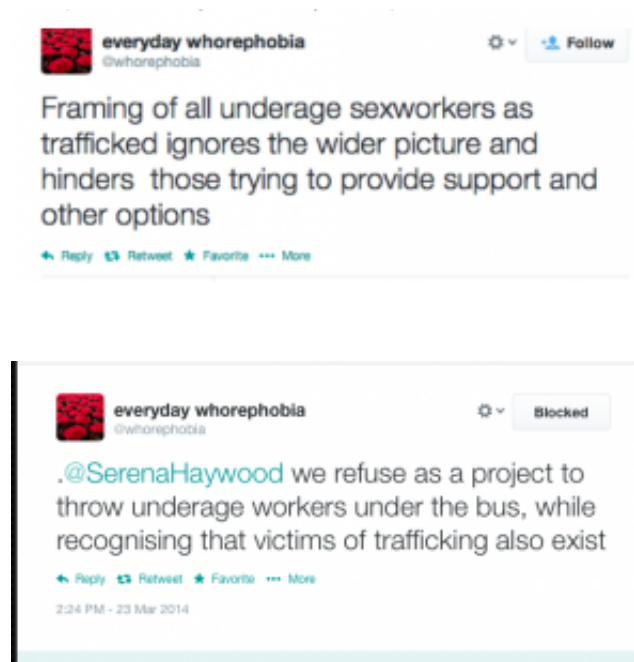




## "Underage sexworkers" do not exist.



This morning, I awoke to the above being retweeted into my twitter feed.

The euphemism used for children who are abused and raped in the making of pornography is "youthful sex worker". Women and children who are trafficked are referred to as "migrant sex workers" and now children who sexually exploited and raped in prostitution are called "underage sex workers". These euphemisms seek to erase what is actually happening: the sexual exploitation of children. No child can consent to be prostituted or trafficked.

Using these terms erases the perpetrator and makes the child complicit in their own abuse. This is the very essence of victim blaming. Children are sexually exploited and trafficked for a number of reasons and we need to acknowledge the context within which this exploitation and trafficking occurs. Frequently, children who end up sexually exploited are victims of family members directly selling their bodies or have run away to escape sexual abuse within the home. There is the exploitation of girls within gang culture. All of these forms of exploitation are due to patriarchy and the construction of women and children as a sex class.

We absolutely cannot use language like "underage sex worker" when discussing child sexual exploitation. It puts further children at risk of exploitation and blames the children who are currently being exploited for their abuse. We need an analysis of child sexual exploitation which puts the perpetrator at the centre of responsibility and puts the needs of the children first. We need to ensure that the most marginalised of victims have access to appropriate services and that their needs will not be erased or ignored within the system. The system needs to be flexible and responsive to the needs of the victims. Support for children will not be appropriate if we use language which ignores the roles of the perpetrator.