



Trisha Baptie: Why prostitution, the world's oldest oppression, must be stamped out

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By **Trisha Baptie**

The conversation that pits current prostitute against former prostitute, indoor versus outdoor, and drug-addicted versus Gucci-addicted has gone on for too long. I have fallen into all those categories. With female “choice” being the only side discussed, let’s subvert that conversation and ask the root question: As a society do we think men should be able to pay to sexually access women’s bodies?

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Do we really think that is a sign of an egalitarian society?

One of the most “sex-positive” things you can do is make sure men cannot buy sex, because the buying of sex is violence against women and is a direct deterrent to women’s equality.

Women’s silence and “consent” can be bought—I remember how much mine cost—and almost 100 percent want out now. Allowing a minority of women in prostitution to argue “choice” on the backs of the majority who are out there, in perfect storm of oppression, neglect, abuse, and human trafficking, is absurd. Instead of offering them a hand to reach their full potential, we offer them up to feed the demand for paid sex whilst “choice” is argued.

Prostitution commodifies women’s bodies; this is sexual and social subordination, wherein all women are seen as a subclass of being. Tolerating prostitution affects everyone, because the inherent inequality in prostitution becomes a reference point for sexual and social relations, which are not rooted in equality, fairness, or respect.

It is not the prostituted women we must penalize but rather the men who demand access to them. Prostitution is the oldest form of patriarchal oppression, which is why we must hold accountable the men who pay for sex.

I remember working indoors and men calling in and ordering a woman: “I want brunette, small boobs, will do

_____ or Asian, round face, petite.” You get the idea. How is it equality if women can be reduced to what amounts to ordering a pizza and picking the toppings? How are those men respecting, honouring, and valuing women?

What I remember about my years as a prostituted woman was how much I tried to find something empowering in what I found myself doing.

That by choosing who raped me, based on their ability to pay, I was empowered.

That by consenting to the abuse, I was free from it.

That by caving in to the demands of patriarchy; by working hard to look like what they wanted, talk like they wanted; and when submitting to sex on their terms, for which I got money, that I had somehow bested them and was now in control of them.

But I was not, for I remember how much I flinched when they moved too quickly, how I would lay under them and in my imagination be anywhere else. How they always seemed to have a sob story for why they needed to buy me, but my sob story of not wanting to be under them, not wanting to have them in my mouth, was never as urgent a need as theirs.

Saying prostitution will always be with us is cynicism and hopelessness.

Sweden, the global beacon of hope, criminalized the buying, pimping, and procuring, and decriminalized the women in 1999. It has since seen a drastic drop in prostitution. Sweden is no longer a destination country for human traffickers—to gender-equality seekers, that is a country that says, “We value our women.” Norway, Iceland, and Bulgaria have all followed Sweden’s noble lead.

They also implemented exiting strategies, adequate welfare, and a huge awareness campaign when the laws were implemented. I am a realist and know it will be a hard transition period, but I find great hope in the fact that there are 10-year-olds in Sweden growing up in a country committed to mutual equality and opportunity.

To me, it is about legacy. *No* prostituted women I know, myself included, wants her daughter to be a prostitute. We know firsthand that it devastates the mind, body, and spirit.

So, with every breath in me, I will work ceaselessly towards creating a world rooted in fairness and equality, that values humanity—and that will be done by stamping out prostitution, the world’s oldest oppression, which is within our grasp to do.

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