

# Speaking of **PROSTITUTION**

**Arguments  
counterarguments  
about prostitution**

**A Collection of Arguments  
from Kvinnofronten**  
- *The Women's front in Sweden*



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# Table of Contents:

Introduction	2
Speaking of Prostitution	3
Nothing is possible?	6
Different kinds of Prostitution – or NOT	9
Us & Them	13
Prostitution as "Sex Work"	15
A Free Choice?	21
Men's need	26
Patriarchy	29
Legislation	35
Stigmatisation of the Victim – Virgin & Whore	42
Morals – what's that about?	48
Sexuality	52
Afterword	57
Further Reading	59



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# Introduction

Have you ever found yourself getting nowhere in a discussion about prostitution? Ever felt like you lack arguments? You're not alone.

Discussions about prostitution tend to stir up some strong feelings. Many find it a heavy topic, since prostitution affects us all personally – it concerns our own sexuality, our perception of ourselves and our view of others. That's why it's so important to support each other! If we help each other, it's easier to find arguments.

## **COMMON ARGUMENTS**

In this booklet, we attempt to gather the most common arguments out of those we tend to see out there, and we hope it can be of use to you when you're out discussing. But remember that you're always entitled to your own opinion – even when you're stumped for words!

Also, don't think you have to "win" a discussion. Most people won't be convinced that way. Usually, several discussions are needed, as well as time to think over other people's arguments between rounds, before we change our minds about anything.

That's why it's so important to have all these short discussions in our everyday lives. So good luck, and don't give up!

*Kvinnofronten*  
~ Women's front



# Speaking of **PROSTITUTION**

**S**ex trade is nothing new. It's a part of all sexual exploitation and abuse, especially that of women and children, that has occurred all throughout history. But sex trade has also changed, as all commerce has changed. As everything else has been industrialized, so has sex trade become an industry – a worldwide billion dollar industry; partially legal, but often run by criminal organizations.

Today sex trade is one of the largest and most profitable industries in the world. It includes street prostitution, brothels, "massage parlors", strip clubs, human trafficking for sexual purposes, phone sex, child and adult pornography, mail order brides and sex tourism – just to mention a few of the most common examples.

## **OPPRESSION OF WOMEN**

This is good to keep in mind when we see how celebrity prostitution glamorizers describe prostitution as something sexually "liberated" or even as "women's right to do what they want with their own bodies" – in magazines, TV, and on the Internet.

These prostitution glamorizers often talk about prostitution as if it only concerns one particular woman and one particular man right at that particular moment, as if they were isolated from everything and everyone else – as if prostitution happens in a vacuum, unaffected by society's gender norms and gender power structures. They don't see, or they don't

want to see, that prostitution is about sexualization of power. Power based on gender, power based on class, power based on ethnicity.

Prostitution exists, as does everything else, in a context. In turn, prostitution also affects society – especially society's view of gender.

### **A PURITANICAL SEXUAL TRADITION**

Prostitution has its origins in a puritanical sexual tradition, where only men's sexuality counted. The wife, as well as "the whore", was supposed to be at the disposal of the heterosexual male.

The *prerequisite* of prostitution is the expectation that the one getting prostituted does *not* want to have sex. Prostitution is based on the sexuality of the buyer. The buyer orders and pays for what he wants to do, or get done, for him. He pays her to erase her own sexuality. The very reason that the one getting prostituted\* gets money, is that the "sex" in prostitution is exclusively defined by the buyer.

### **PERPETRATORS & GLAMORIZERS**

When we write about the *buyers* in prostitution we'll occasionally refer to them as "johns"\*\*. Usually, though, we name them as *prostitution perpetrators*. We do this to point out their similarities with other sex perpetrators. We don't want to belittle what they do.

We refer to those who trivialize prostitution and its consequences, and who portray it as "sex work", according to what they're actually doing: *glamorizing prostitution*.

\* We choose to say that someone is "being prostituted" instead of is "a prostitute", because prostitution is sexual abuse being inflicted on somebody, not a personal identity for the victim.

\*\* Johns is an American slang term for prostitution buyers.

## **MEN BUYING WOMEN**

We also write about "men" when we're speaking of *buyers* and "women" when we're writing about those *being prostituted*. We do this since the absolutely most common form of prostitution, in Sweden as well as in the rest of the world, is *men buying women*.

It's difficult to know to what extent they're also buying children, because a lot of prostitution is about men buying teenage girls – who usually don't count as children, even if they actually are.

Men buying men in prostitution isn't even remotely as common, but it's still the second most common form of prostitution. It's common for men to buy children or adolescents in this case as well. Women buying men is significantly more uncommon, and the most uncommon form of prostitution is women buying women. But all of these forms do exist.

And we're against prostitution in all of its forms.

## **MOST MEN AREN'T NOT PROSTITUTION PERPETRATORS**

Referring to prostitution perpetrators as "men" does *not*, however, mean that we think all men are or would want to be prostitution perpetrators. Studies estimate that one out of twelve men in Sweden have used women in prostitution. This means most men *aren't* prostitution perpetrators.

Despite this, there are way too few men who actively take a stand against prostitution when they're spending time with male friends and colleagues.

## **KEEP THE DISCUSSION GOING!**

You who on the other hand *do* want to discuss, but feel like you need help, will hopefully get some good tips among the 49 arguments we've put together in this text!

# ARGUMENTS

start here!

## NOTHING IS POSSIBLE



It's quite typical of our time to say that anything is possible when it's about you as an individual – but once we get to *political change* people suddenly claim that this and that just can't be done.

As if that's just the way things are. As if *the way things are now* is the only possible scenario – because it's human nature, because the market demands it, because of globalization, or whatever fits the occasion. The world is portrayed as predestined and impossible to change.

But of course that's not true. There are almost always alternatives. The world is as changeable now as it has always been. **History does not end today.**

That's why it's good to keep in mind that those who claim something is impossible often are the ones who *don't want* any change.

The important thing is what you *do want to change*. Of course we're likely to need some others who want to fight for the same thing in order to



succeed at changing anything. But it's possible!

Since we keep on hearing the opposite, it might be a good idea to constantly remind ourselves that the world *is* changeable, and that everyone can do *something*!



## Prostitution has always existed

*(Subtext: and so it's always going to.)*

**S**lavery has also "always existed", does that make it okay? Prostate cancer has "always" existed, does that mean we should stop treating it? Murder has "always" existed... and so on.

The question is whether we think it's acceptable or not. If we *don't* think prostitution is okay, it's time to start thinking about what we can do to change it.

**IN THE PAST**, it was common to beat children for disciplinary purposes. Thanks to the Swedish law against child abuse, among other things, a lot fewer people in Sweden beat their children today. People have changed their views on corporal punishment. Child abuse still *exists*, but the more children not having to suffer the better, isn't it?

That's how we see prostitution, rape and abuse of women; laws can't make oppression of women disappear, but sometimes they can still do some good – the fewer women not having to suffer the better, isn't it?

**OR ARE YOU SAYING** that heterosexual men have a genetic/biological inclination towards exploiting

women sexually instead of having a *mutual sexual meeting* (be it a one-time thing or long-term)?

Personally, I don't have such a pessimistic view of men.



## Prostitution is the world's oldest profession

**P**rostitution is not the world's oldest profession, since prostitution is *oppression*. If prostitution really is as ancient as you're saying, it would be one of the world's oldest forms of *men's sexualized violence against women*.

The world's oldest profession might rather be the shaman, the hunter or the farmer. Some say it's the midwife.

**EVERY DAY AND EVERY MINUTE** countless women and children suffer in prostitution. Dismissing that with comments of "it's always existed" or "it's the world's oldest profession" is belittling and trivializing their suffering.

It's also to take the easy way out and saying that I'm not going to do anything about it.

**AS I SEE IT** it seems more likely that this comment about "the world's oldest profession" actually is *the world's oldest excuse*.

# DIFFERENT KINDS of prostitution or NOT

Some talk about human trafficking as if it's something completely different from all other kinds of prostitution. But **all** forms of prostitution is based on the same idea: that a prostitution perpetrator buys sexual access to another person's body – to use it in the way he has paid for.

**The buyer is the basis of all prostitution.** Prostitution exists because prostitution perpetrators have channelized their sexuality into one-sided consumption. They claim the right to use others – whose sexual needs and desires are “erased” by the perpetrator's payment.

And all forms of prostitution have the same affects on *society's view of women*.

S.

Of course I'm against trafficking  
– but ordinary prostitution is  
something else.

In what way? Of course there are endless variations – from “only” having to receive a few prostitution perpetrators a month (perhaps at some fancy hotel) to being forced to receive 15 johns every night at a brothel ruled by a trafficking pimp – with countless

other variations in between. But the fact that the degree of suffering or coercion varies doesn't change the phenomenon itself – all prostitution is still based on a prostitution perpetrator buying access to another person for sexual use.

**THE PHENOMENON** of prostitution in itself is based on the expectation that the one satisfying the prostitution perpetrator *does not want* to have sex with him. The prostitution perpetrator is forcing his own sexuality onto somebody else (but buys himself “free” of responsibility).

That's what prostitution is.

## 4.

Girls are tricked into trafficking,  
but in ordinary prostitution  
they've made their own choices.

**N**o, it's not that simple. It's certainly that way for some women in trafficking, getting tricked into thinking they'll get pleasant and well-paid jobs at a cafe or something along those lines, but others are aware that they're going into prostitution – even if they often get tricked about to what extent they will be used or about how much money they're going to get. But many girls are tricked into “ordinary” prostitution as well.

So the distinction you're making doesn't actually exist.

**ALSO, THE THING** about “free choices” is that it isn't that simple either. (*Read more about choice on page 21*)

## 5.

Human trafficking for labor is a much worse problem, trafficking for sex is more uncommon.

No, that's a myth. Naturally it's impossible to get the exact numbers, but one report from the UN from 2009 indicates that about 79% of all human trafficking in the world is for sexual purposes.\* The report includes 155 countries.

**FOR THE VICTIM** human trafficking for sexual purposes can include isolation, threats, humiliation, psychological abuse, manipulation, violence, sexual abuse, torture and daily violations. It leads to both physical and psychological damage, and in worst case scenarios, death.\*\*

What makes prostitution, and human trafficking in particular, especially difficult for the victim to deal with is that the traumatic experiences are constantly repeated, and occur in a continuum – as opposed to when you suffer a single difficult experience.

\* *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, UNODC, 2009.*

\*\* (SWE) *Människohandel – en kränkning av mänskliga rättigheter. Fackförbund mot Människohandel, FMM. Unifem, 2009.*

## 6.

Most men don't actually want to buy sex from a woman who doesn't want to herself.

There's a difference between what they say and what they do. *Natasja Tenjeva*, a Russian girl who was used in human trafficking in Sweden,

has said that those who think men don't want to "buy sex" from someone being forced into prostitution are being naive. *"The men simply ignored that I felt bad, because it was easier that way. Because if they would have confronted the suffering they were causing through their actions, they would also have admitted their guilt."*

**THERE ARE TRAFFICKING VICTIMS** who have witnessed that they told their buyers outright that they were being used in trafficking, and the perpetrators still carried on.

**IN A SWEDISH GOVERNMENTAL STUDY**, prostitution perpetrators claimed that they wouldn't buy someone who was being used in trafficking. Many of them had still used women in trafficking, sometimes because they couldn't tell the difference and sometimes despite knowing the woman was being used in trafficking.\*

When asking why they had done so despite what they had said, the prostitution perpetrators gave answers like:

*"I was just too horny"*

*"It happened so fast"*

**BUT DO YOU REALLY BELIEVE** that a man who "only" would pay for access to a girl who (he thinks) is not being used in trafficking is so much better? Prostitution in itself is the perpetrator paying to "have sex" with someone who **does not** want to have sex with him.

I'd say it seems like he's trying to avoid responsibility by comparing himself to the slightly worse prostitution perpetrators.

\* (SWE) *Rapport 2008:24 Sexuell människohandel. En fråga om tillgång och efterfrågan*. Brå, 2008.

# US & THEM

**P**rostitution is about *sexualized power*, and consequently our views of prostitution depends on whom we identify with – the johns or the one being prostituted.

In order to be able to agree with prostitution perpetrators, you must first distance yourself – consciously or unconsciously – from the one being used. One argument which several prostitution glamorizers in Sweden have been using is that working class women have a more "instrumental relationship with their bodies" than middle class women – so prostitution means something different for "them".

And many try to explain the fact that Western men use women in Asia for prostitution tourism by claiming that Asian women – "they" – are "different" from Swedish women.

Such comments are of course expressions of both class contempt and racism.

Our traits do not decide which ones of us who will get prostituted. It's the circumstances of our lives.

7.

Those prostitutes  
are probably nymphos...

**I**f nymphomaniacs, i.e. women with an extremely strong sexual drive, really do exist, wouldn't it be more likely that they would go out and pick up

someone who wants to satisfy *them*?

Isn't it pretty illogical to think that those who have an *extra strong* sexual drive would want to engage in a trade-off about *neglecting* their own sexual needs and *instead* get paid for concentrating on those of the buyer?



Women in Asia are poor  
and through sex tourism they  
at least get some money.

**S**houldn't Asian women have a right to a reasonable life without sucking the dicks of rich Western tourists? To me, what you're saying sounds a lot like old, reactionary colonialism.\*

It's the pimps and the tourism industry that are profiting off poor women in prostitution in, for example, Thailand. But it doesn't pay off for either the women or the country. Quite the opposite – it creates a dependence on the West, on the perpetrators, and keeps the country in poverty instead of giving them a chance to develop.

I'm not only against prostitution because of its oppression of *women*, I'm against its *racist* and *imperialist*\*\* oppression as well!

\* **Reactionary** = wanting to return to an older political state, unwanting to change. **Colonialism** = one nation exploiting another on another continent as its "colony".

\*\* **Imperialism** = Imperialism means, according to a dictionary, "the pursuit of world domination", e.g rich countries expanding their "markets" by tying other (poorer) nations to itself and exploiting them economically.



# Prostitution as „Sex Work“

Those who oppose the Swedish prostitution law usually say that the problem with prostitution is that it isn't seen as a profession – “sex work”. If it was, prostituted women would pay taxes and get health insurance and other social rights. The stigma\* on prostitution would also disappear, they claim.

But they rarely speak of how it actually works in the countries where the law *already* proclaims that prostitution should be seen as “sex work”. For example, that's how it's been in Germany since 2001.

## A TEMPORARY SOLUTION

In Germany's evaluation of the law after five years, only **1%** (one percent) of the asked prostituted women had an employment contract as “sex workers”.\*\* (A few additional percents had health insurance as free-lancing “sex workers”). Most **did not want** an employment contract. When asked why, the majority of them answered that they saw prostitution as a **temporary solution** to an impossible (financial) situation, and as something they wanted to get away from.

Many were also worried that an employment contract would mean that they would no longer be able to make decisions of their own – like refusing some johns, or some of the johns' demands. Or that they would

\* **Stigma** = branding mark, ≈ being socially shunned and excluded.

\*\* *Report by the Federal Government on the Impact of the Act Regulating the Legal Situation of Prostitutes (Prostitution Act), by Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend, 2007.*

have to receive more johns than they possibly could.

When prostitution is portrayed as "sex work" it is the perpetrators – johns, pimps and human traffickers – who are applauding.

Because when prostitution is portrayed as "goods" or "services", its **power structures** are made invisible.



## All wage labor is slavery!

*There's not a big difference between selling your body in a mine and selling it in prostitution.*

**A**s a man (*'cause usually left-wing men are the ones using this argument!*), do you really not see a difference between working in a mine and giving a handjob to your boss? Or between a woman coming in to clean your office and coming in to give you a blowjob? I don't know about you, but *I do!*

**THINK ABOUT WHAT'S ACTUALLY HAPPENING** in prostitution: a man imposing his sexuality onto a woman without considering hers – in other circumstances, that's usually called sexual harassment, sexual abuse or rape.

The idea is of course that the *money* would turn this sexualized oppression of women into "sex work". But how can ***the very same sexualized actions*** which girls and women are otherwise fighting against, and the same actions *which the law otherwise define as sexual harassment and abuse* – suddenly be considered "work"?

How could you motivate the unionized struggle for *the right to not suffer* sexual harassment and sexual violence at work if such abuse – occasionally – should be seen as a "job"?

**MAYBE YOU SHOULD TRY** a new way of thinking: They got our bodies, but they're damn well not gonna mess with our sexuality!



Selling sex is no more strange  
than selling services like  
massage or podiatry.

**S**ure it is. At a job, everyone is selling their work capacity, but prostitution has consequences for our sexuality as well. Without romanticizing sexuality, it's easy to see that our sexuality is an integral part of our personality. In our sexuality, our turn-ons and our turn-offs, our earlier sexual experiences are included as we're making them. For the one getting prostituted, prostitution also becomes a part of one's sexuality – even if you've been trying to see it as something outside of yourself during your experiences.

That's why so many women in prostitution later talk about a division of one's identity, as if a split had happened while in prostitution. Many get used to shutting down one's own feelings during prostitution, but notice that it eventually gets difficult to reconnect with them at will. Prostitution is something completely different from a profession.

**AND FOR THE BUYERS** of prostitution it's not just any purchase either, since his sexuality is also affected. As is his overall view of women. It's hardly a coincidence that sexual harassment of girls and women on the streets is more common in for example the Red Light District of Amsterdam than in other places.

# 11.

The prostitutes themselves  
want prostitution to be seen as  
"sex work".

Do "they" really? Or is it a few scattered bloggers, or those few women in prostitution who are uplifted by the media, who claim to be speaking for everybody else, by always talking about "us prostitutes"?

**DO YOU KNOW** that in countries where the law has been altered so that prostitution is seen as "sex work", the majority of prostituted women did *not* want this, which is made clear by, for example, the evaluation of the German law?

If you look at prostitution globally, how many out of everyone being bought in prostitution do you think want prostitution to be seen as a "job"? Would you?



Sex worker's unions want it  
to be seen as work.

What unions? Those organizations which so far has called themselves "unions" for prostituted women have not actually been unions, i.e. been organizations that "are driven and financed by members and that act towards employers".\*

Lobby organizations for legalized prostitution, usually including pimps and others who want prostitution to be seen in a good light, have on the other hand

\* (SWE) *Varat och varan – Prostitution, surrogatmödraskap och den delade människan*, by Kajsa Ekis Ekman. Leopard förlag, 2010.

often *called* themselves "unions" for "sex workers" - to make people think of prostitution as work.

If you're feeling unsure about any such "union", then try asking *what kind of unionized* work they're doing, and *directed* at whom?

Real support organizations for prostituted women on the other hand usually don't call themselves unions. And most prostituted women don't want prostitution to be seen as "sex work".



But if you're not a prostitute,  
why should their jobs be any of  
YOUR business?

**O**f course it's "my business"! *Living in a society where women are for sale affects the values of everyone.* Society's view of prostitution also have clear and direct consequences in our everyday lives. You can especially see that in countries with laws like Germany's.

If prostitution is seen as "work" it's there with the ads in the newspapers, the company you work for gets offers of "surprises" for the company party, you get coupons in your mail box, you see posters for brothels at the bus stop and so on.

Understanding this is not about being sex negative or making up a moral nightmare scenario. It's about analyzing what a view of prostitution as "sex work" actually leads to in practice.

Consider what it would mean in our everyday lives – for example, professions like personal assistants and home care staff; should they be obligated to help with men's purchases of prostitution, like they are in the Netherlands?

**IF PROSTITUTION** is to be seen as a profession, should parent let their daughters get a summer job in prostitution? If prostitution is to be seen as a profession, should employment agencies refuse unemployment benefits to unemployed women if they do not accept going into prostitution?

If your answers to those questions are no, then you don't really think prostitution is a profession. Because if it was, it would work like any other job.

## 14.

But if a girl doesn't want to wear herself down in underpaid work, when she can get good pay as an escort\* – why shouldn't she be able to choose that?

**W**ell, you're not asking why she shouldn't abandon her job as CEO for an export company/real estate broker/dentist or similar jobs, to instead give blowjobs to men when ordered to do so. If prostitution is so nice, why is it those of us women who have the least to choose from who are expected to do this "job"?

Both in the industrialized world and in so called developing countries, mostly poor girls and women – who are simultaneously suffering class oppression and racism – are being used in prostitution.

*\* "Escort" is an euphemistic term for prostitution, making it sound like it's hardly about prostitution at all, but as fancy dinner company (as well as sex), or someone who could pass as the john's girlfriend. Since the word is considered to have such a positive connotation, it's often used in advertising for women who are in fact being trafficked.*

# a free choice?

It's always difficult to talk about *free will*, *voluntariness* and *free choices*. The fact that we've chosen something doesn't say anything about whether our choice was good or not. It depends on **what we have to choose from**, that is: what alternatives we have, or see.

Studies about "regular" prostitution show that pretty much all women in prostitution see it as something temporary, usually to solve a difficult financial situation, but it's also often an expression of self-destructiveness following earlier experiences. A person's choice is not automatically what she "wants", even if she has "chosen" it herself.

Additionally, the vast majority of everyone being used in prostitution are poor, homeless and have suffered other kinds of sexual abuse before prostitution.

## **HUMAN RIGHTS - FOR WOMEN TOO?**

But even if there is someone who wants to be in prostitution no matter the circumstances, prostitution still concerns a lot more than her personal choices.

Prostitution is global oppression. Men being able to buy women is part of the patriarchy at the basis of our society. And our struggle against prostitution is about the human rights of women.

## **WHAT ABOUT MEN?**

Also, the talk of "free choice" always tends to be about the woman, *the one getting prostituted*.

But **why do men choose** to use women in prostitution?

# 15.

A woman should be able to choose what to do with her body and her own sexuality.

Of course – that's an old feminist parole! But **prostitution** is not about women's rights – quite the opposite! In prostitution, a woman "chooses" to abstain from her own sexuality – to instead satisfy that of the man.

Most prostitution perpetrators don't care at all about what the one getting paid wants to. (See page 12) The one paying for sex is paying for a yes. He's buying a woman who only enjoys it *if* he wants her to, *when* he wants her to, and *in the way* he wants and has payed and ordered her to.

And what happens with *women's human rights* in a society where women can be bought?

# 16.

If you're against prostitution, you're trying to take adult women's free choices away from them.

What is a free choice? Freedom is no simple thing. It's affected by where we are born, and by which parents, and most of all, our actual alternatives. Choosing prostitution is for most people as free a choice as "choosing" poverty. The Swedish author Louise Eek has written that *the so called voluntariness has a sliding scale* in prostitution. How do you feel about that?



Several international studies show that the majority of everyone being bought in prostitution have been victim to sexual abuse as children.\* A Swedish study among teenagers stated that of those who had experiences having "sex with recompense" almost 89% had suffered other kinds of sexual abuse before prostitution.\*\*

**INTERNATIONAL STUDIES** show that the most common age of entering prostitution is early adolescence, around 14 years of age.\*\*\* This is confirmed by the Prostitution Unit of Stockholm.\*\*\*\*

For me all this talk of *free choices* and "the happy hooker" is difficult when I see that this so called freely chosen prostitution so often is about everything *but* free choices – for children/teenagers with experience of sexual abuse.

**AND IN A WIDER PERSPECTIVE** the background to women's and girl's "choices" of prostitution also contains a pattern of poverty – both that of individuals and that of nations.

\* (SWE) SOU 1995:15 *Könshandeln*.

\*\* (SWE) *Se mig – Unga om sex och internet*. Ungdomsstyrelsen, 2009.

\*\*\* *Fact sheet from Prostitution Research & Education, USA*.

\*\*\*\* (SWE) *24 frågor och svar om prostitution*. Prostitutions- och Spiralenheten vid Stockholms stad, 2009.

## 17.

What do they mean "happy hooker"  
- store clerks or nurses aren't  
happy all the time either!

**I** think you've misunderstood what people mean by "the happy hooker". No one's saying that women in prostitution are walking around being happy all

the time, or happier than others.

“The happy hooker” is an old *symbol* – and nowadays an expression of how prostitution glamorizers (especially in the media) put individual women, who are ready to say that prostitution is something altogether positive for them, forth to speak – while they're being awfully quiet about every negative aspect of prostitution.



But I've heard of this girl, who  
likes being a prostitute.

**D**o you honestly mean that the entire *societal analysis* of prostitution falls, if there's a single girl or woman who claims to like getting prostituted?

No matter how much or little an individual might like it, *prostitution* remains the same thing: *the prostitution perpetrator buying sexual access to the body of another human being; paying for the one getting prostituted to erase her own sexuality; paying to turn a no into a yes.*

**I ALSO HAVE DIFFICULTIES IGNORING** the fact that once women no longer are in prostitution many testify to have claimed similar things while still in the middle of it, since it was a way of dealing with that life.

But even if someone actually would enjoy prostitution, she could perhaps consider abstaining from it anyway – out of concern for the majority of women who suffer through prostitution, out of concern for women's human rights and out of concern for the struggle for equality between the sexes?

**ALTHOUGH I CAN'T HELP** but wonder why that argument is so common among guys and men, who often speak of prostitution as "women's right to choose" but so rarely speak of brothel *owners*, *pimps* and *buyers*?

Why don't they ever speak of *men's* choices?



Prostitution is an agreement  
between two individuals  
– and that's none of  
the government's business.

**A**lrigh**t**, so let's ignore the fact that you've "forgotten" all the brothel owners and pimps when you say that... But those "individuals" are still not alone, are they? At that very moment, lots of other "individuals" make numerous similar "individual agreements" – worldwide, all the time. And the majority of these constant "agreements" in the entire world is about *men* buying *sexual access to women's bodies*.

Don't you think that the similarities between these millions of "individual agreements" of this globally spread phenomenon is due some questioning?

**SERIOUSLY THOUGH**, prostitution is *not* some completely independent agreement between two individuals, so I'd rather discuss why global prostitution exists, and its consequences...

# Men's Needs

Usually prostitution glamorizers tend to speak of "women's free choices", but sometimes we may hear that prostitution has to exist for **the sake of others**; lonely men, disabled men, men whose wives don't want to, so that other women won't get raped, and so on.

## 20.

But think of  
all the poor lonely people!

Are you thinking of lonely old ladies here? Women live longer than men, so wouldn't it be older women who need younger prostituted men in that case?

Oh, but that wasn't the issue, was it? After all, most prostitution is about men buying access to younger women.

**IN REAL LIFE** the average perpetrators of prostitution are usually married men or men living in stable relationships, and many also have kids. According to a British-American study of the sex lives of prostitution perpetrators, many have also had more "regular" sexual contacts than average. So the "poor lonely" men are in a distinct minority.\*

\* *Men who buy sex - Who they buy and what they know*, by Melissa Farley, Julie Bindel and Jacqueline M. Golding, from Eaves, London/England, and *Prostitution Research & Education*, San Francisco/USA, 2009.

**ALSO, SEX WITH OTHERS** is no human right. Relationships with others isn't either. Most of all *using other people sexually* is no human right.

**WHY CAN'T LONELY MEN** simply learn to do what lonely women do – masturbate more?

21.

But think of all the disabled!

**W**ho are we talking about again? Oh, it's still men, isn't it? Usually disabled women's "right" to use prostituted men is not what this argument refers to.

Your comment actually shows contempt for all living with disabilities. Why would men with disabilities want to exploit women any more than others? Men with disabilities want to have sex with someone who is turned on by them as much as anyone else does. Do you think that no one could find a person with disabilities attractive, or what? If so, I think you should reconsider your view of people...

**MOST PERPETRATORS** of prostitution are *non-disabled* men. So it's pretty rude to use disabled men as an alibi for actions that are usually committed by non-disabled men.

**IF YOU HAVE** a disability yourself which hinders you in your sexuality, you should of course have a right to sexual devices that can help you satisfy yourself or have sex with a partner.

But you don't have any more right to buy another person's body to use sexually for satisfying your own

sexuality than anyone else.

**YES OF COURSE** I think of "the disabled" – I'm well aware that it's not unusual that disabled girls and women are used in prostitution. I think you should think of them too!



Well, it's better that men go to prostitutes than rapeing women!

**R**ape and prostitution being on the same scale, so far I'm with you! Both rape and prostitution are based on *sexualizing gendered power* = men's power and women's subordination are made into something "sexy", something to get aroused by.

And that's *exactly* why I don't believe that rapists stop raping by using women in prostitution. I believe the opposite. It's *the exact same view* of women in rape and prostitution; a man exploiting a woman to satisfy *his* sexuality – her sexuality or her will is subordinated. It's about the attitude of the perpetrator – that men have a right to women's bodies.

I'd say the risk is if we accept one, we get more of the other.

**BUT IN ANY CASE**, it wouldn't be very nice or sisterly to send the rapists on to other women – especially not to girls and women who already are in a particularly exposed situation.

# PATRIARCHY

**P**rostitution glamorizers tend to try to bring discussion down to the individual level, so that they're only about one particular person or one particular situation. This way it's harder to see oppression – in order to understand oppression we need to look at **patterns**.

This goes for all forms of oppression. It's not a coincidence when people with foreign-sounding names have more difficulties finding a job, even if it's impossible to prove for the individual case. To see everyday racism you need to look at both the individual examples **and** the whole picture – you need to see if occurrences form patterns.

## **SYSTEMATICAL COINCIDENCES**

When we react to an example of oppression of women, it's often dismissed as *coincidental*. To see through this, the Norwegian feminist Kjersti Ericsson founded the expression "**systematical coincidences**".

If we piece them together, all these oppressive "coincidences" form a pattern of girls & guys and women & men being **treated differently** because of their sex – and **getting different amounts of power** based on their sex.

That's why we can't understand prostitution without connecting it with all other forms of oppression of women, such as wage discrimination, unequal health care, rape, women's history made invisible, and all other examples which together form a societal pattern of **systematical power structures based on gender**.

## 23.

But hey – some women go to the Gambia to buy men!

**Y**es, prostitution is not only about oppression of women, but also class-based and ethnicity-based oppression. The fact that women – in circumstances where they on some level can be considered superior – can become perpetrators, confirms the analysis that prostitution is about *sexualized power*. Prostitution is oppression and should never be accepted – in any form!

**I HOPE YOU** bring up that example to take a stand against all prostitution. You're not trying to use the comparatively extremely few female prostitution tourists to make it appear as if men and woman are "equally bad", right?

'Cause that's *not the way it is*. Men are *not* being imprisoned in the brothels of the poorer countries of the world, drugged-down into being used sexually by one rich, white woman after another. Out of all prostitution tourism in the world, women stand for only a relatively minimal part, and for the least brutal forms.

## 24.

Actually, more men than women have experienced prostitution, it's just more hidden!

**T**here are a few studies of young people where more guys than girls have replied that they have "had sex with pay". But that doesn't mean you



can jump to this conclusion. Look around. The global pornography and prostitution industries mostly consist of women being sold to men. Women are the ones being used in the world's brothels, and mostly girls and women are being used in trafficking for sexual purposes.

It may also be added that no matter if women or men are being used, *perpetrators of prostitution* are almost always *men*.

And of course more research about *all* different forms of prostitution should be made, so that we can increase our understanding of how prostitution works.

25.

But you're turning it all on its head – it's women who are using men's sexual needs!

*The one who's paying is the victim, he's the one being used.*

Okay, let's forget about human trafficking, that fact that most prostituted women have suffered other kinds of sexual abuse as children, young girls being tricked into prostitution, drug addiction forcing women into prostitution and so on, and let's also forget its consequences for women – sexualized violence, STDs, cervical cancer, split personality, PTSD etc.... That is, let's ignore all forms of sexualized oppression which girls and women suffer before, during and after prostitution, and let's only look at a few particular men (most johns have other sexual relations as well) – then maybe it might look like a few individual men are being used. But that's

still not quite right. All perpetrators of prostitution are still using another person to satisfy his own sexual needs, *no matter* if he's going through hard times or not, right?

A prostitution perpetrator feeling lonely and horny still doesn't change the fact that prostitution, on a basic and global level, is about men's sexualized oppression of women.



Well, I've heard about women  
being brothel madams!

**Y**es, that's correct, but what's the background? The large international human trafficking organizations often force women in prostitution to choose between staying in prostitution or becoming "local supervisors" for a brothel. Human traffickers often do this strategically, one reason being that the men don't want to risk long imprisonment in case their activity is disclosed.

Sadly, many misinterpret the role of the women. The Swedish police have written about it:

*"The common factor for most of these women is that they themselves have been exploited for the purposes of prostitution for quite a long time." ...*

*... "The National Criminal Investigation Department is concerned at the fact that foreign women who are prostituted in Sweden are sometimes portrayed by figures in the judicial system as people who are operating of their own accord. As a consequence of this notion, investigations are often limited to the criminal activity that is committed in Sweden and the real criminal bosses in the organised networks*

*are not brought to trial. There is also a clear risk that the women's actual situation will go unnoticed. As a result, they are not given the support and protection they need and to which they are entitled. This limited understanding of the organisation of human trafficking and the structure of the networks also often results in failure by the authorities to prioritise efforts intended to prevent and suppress trafficking in human beings for sexual purposes.”\**

## 27.

The Swedish prostitution law only passed since those extremist feminists have managed to infiltrate the political system.

*Abroad, they laugh at how Sweden has let the radical feminists have their way.*

**M**y, it would be really cool if feminists had that much power! But prostitution is global oppression and not something that only feminists are struggling against. Didn't you know that Sweden has vowed to fight prostitution both through the UN and the EU?

The UN adopted a treaty of fighting prostitution and human trafficking as early as 1949. Year 1993 the Council of the EU decided that fighting prostitution should be included in the EU's police work. 1991 the Council of Europe adopted a resolution of fighting sexual exploitation, pornography, prostitution etc.

So I guess that either the "extreme feminists" (who-

\* RKP report 2007:6b. Situation report 9: Trafficking in human beings for sexual and other purposes 1 January - 31 December 2006.

ever they are?!) has taken over both the EU and the UN since decades back, or you don't know what you're talking about...



Won't you stop talking about **patriarchy!** In Sweden we've already achieved equality.

**W**ell, that's definitely a matter of interpretation! Of course you can interpret everything as if it wasn't about *gender* or *oppression*, but simply as us girls and woman having ourselves to blame: the fact that you as a woman have a lower salary is because women are bad at negotiating; if you're raped you should have thought about how you dressed/behaved/drank and so on; if you're abused you've probably been provoking him; if you raise your voice you're a nagging bitch; if you like sex you're a slut; if you want to meet a man you're desperate – and if you don't you're not normal; if you want to have sex with women it's because you've never got "real dick"; if you put on make-up you're a bimbo who's fallen for beauty ideals, and if you don't you're just plain unfeminine; if you demand equal rights for women you're aggressive, and if you shut up you're a typical weak chick – who only has herself to blame...

**AND THE FACT THAT SO MANY** other girls and women speak of having experienced the same things as you have, that's just pure coincidence, 'cause oppression of women doesn't exist in our country.

Is that what you mean?

# LEGISLATION

**D**uring 70 years, between 1847 and 1918, there was a **municipal regulation system of prostitution** in Sweden (as well as in large parts of Europe). Despite women going into prostitution out of poverty being a widely known fact, prostitution was still accepted as a necessary evil, and in practice more or less seen as a “profession” – for some women.

The intent of the regulation system was that society would be able to keep an eye on prostitution and decrease the spread of STDs, such as syphilis. Women in prostitution were required to go to regular controls (though of course there were no controls for men!). Anyone who refused, walked in the wrong areas or at the wrong times would first receive a warning and was then placed in workhouses for up to a year.

The feminists of those times tried to get the regulation system removed, as it did nothing but kick those who were already down, while at the same time giving the signal that government accepted prostitution. Then as now, feminists pointed out that **without buyers there is no prostitution**.

## LEARNING FROM HISTORY?

The lessons learned from *the regulation system* and *the two municipal brothels* being run in Stockholm during a short period of time in the 19th century were that 1. **when prostitution is seen as “work” it's more difficult for women to get out of it**, 2. that **the buyers/men are the basis for the existence of prostitution**, and 3. that **prostitution increases when it's accepted**.\*

\* (SWE) Dagny, issue 9-10/1902. *Fröléns konversationslexikon* 1914. *Nordisk Familjebok* 1915. *Morgonbris*, issue 2, 1924.

Sadly we live in a shallow and fragmented\*\* society. But if we learn from history, we might not have to make the same mistakes again.

### **THE SWEDISH PROSTITUTION LAW**

In 1999 Sweden was the first country in the world to “**criminalize the johns**” while not forbidding prostitution. The **perpetrators** are the ones criminalized – johns and pimps. By now several other countries have done the same thing – and also developed the law in different ways – among them Norway and Iceland (and partially Finland and England).

The Swedish law declares that it's forbidden to buy or even attempt to buy “sexual services”. Additionally, **procuring** is also forbidden, meaning profiting from (or in other ways partake in) someone else's prostitution. Sweden also has a separate law for **human trafficking**, but in practice many traffickers are sentenced for procuring.\*\*\*

### **A SOCIETAL SIGNAL**

The intent of the law is also to be as a societal signal: that society recognizes that prostitution is based in patriarchy and therefore does not accept the exploitation of the ones being prostituted.

The Swedish prostitution law has been compared to the law against corporal punishment for children, which has changed people's way of thinking – in past times, it was common to beat children for disciplinary

\*\* *Fragmentification* = to portray something without context or background, to instead present it in “fragments” detached from everything else, which makes it difficult to get an overview, analyze, and see patterns and structures.

\*\*\* National Police Board. Situation Report 10: Trafficking in human beings for sexual and other purposes. RPS 2009/2.

\*\*\*\* (SWE) *Tio år med lagen. Om förhållningssätt till och erfarenheter av prostitution i Sverige*, by Jari Kuosmanen, TemaNord 2008:604.

purposes.

A study from 2008 show that roughly 70% of the Swedish people support the national prostitution law (only 18% opposing it, the rest being unsure). Among women the support was almost 80%. \*\*\*\*

## LEGISLATION & OPPRESSION

Of course laws aren't enough for prostitution to disappear. Prostitution is part of oppression of women, and as we see it, *no law can make oppression disappear*. But we support the prostitution law, since it limits men's sexualized power, shows what prostitution really is, and functions as support in other kinds of work against prostitution.

Still, a lot more than one law is needed for any kind of real change to happen, and significant resources need to be put into what so often is the last thing on the agenda: more support for prostituted women.

# 29.

If regular prostitution  
was legal, it would be easier to  
catch traffickers.

**N**o, it's the other way around. In countries where prostitution is legalized the prostitution industry has grown – and big parts of it are illegal. One reason for this is the fact that pimps profit more from illegal prostitution.\*

\* *Legalizing Prostitution is not the Answer, The example of Victoria, Australia, by Mary Sullivan and Sheila Jeffreys, Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, CATW, 2001.*

*and The Legalization of Prostitution: Myth and Reality, A Comparative Study of Four Countries, by Nomi Levenkron, Hotline for Migrant Workers, Israel 2007.*

And of course it's easier to hide trafficking in a country where other kinds of prostitution are legal. It's more difficult, more expensive and riskier for human traffickers to operate in countries where all forms of "sexual purchases" are illegal.

## 30.

### The Swedish prostitution law doesn't help prostitutes.

**Y**es and no. A woman who says she wants to stay in prostitution will obviously not see the law as positive. But the law may indirectly help another woman, who wishes to get out of it, since society supports the claim that prostitution buyers are committing a crime against her.

The law may also be of some help to those being used in human trafficking. Thanks to the law, the police may investigate *attempted purchases* of sexual services. Sometimes this has led to early discoveries of trafficking. If purchases of prostitution *wasn't* illegal, the police wouldn't be authorized to do anything until they knew for sure that trafficking was occurring.

**BUT MOST OF ALL**, the law may function *as prevention*. The law affects people's views of prostitution, and hopefully it might make some young girls who are considering entering prostitution decide not to do so. The law has already made fewer men use prostituted women\*. Hopefully it might also make at least a few more men think it's not worth being caught as a prostitution perpetrator – if his punishment is severe enough. And the fewer johns, the fewer women used in prostitution.



**BUT LAWS ARE OF COURSE NOT ENOUGH** to truly help prostituted women get out of prostitution. For that, lots of support is needed. Particularly in the form of accommodation, since homelessness is one of the causes for prostitution.

\* (SWE) *Tio år med lagen. Om förhållningssätt till och erfarenheter av prostitution i Sverige*, by Jari Kuosmanen, TemaNord 2008:604.

*In a study conducted before the law, about one in eight men claimed to have "paid for sex". In another study almost ten years after the law was passed about one in twelve men claimed the same. Or 13,6% of Swedish men 1996 compared to 9% year 2008. The samples were too small for a completely valid comparison, but it does indicate that buyers of prostitution have decreased in numbers. The study from 2008 also asked for opinions on the law. Roughly 7 out of 10 approved of the law, but support was clearly stronger among young people (about 8 out of 10).*



The Swedish prostitution law  
has caused increased violence  
against prostitutes.

**N**o, it hasn't – not according to studies. Men's violence against women in prostitution seems to be just as widespread everywhere *no matter what the law says*, and no matter if it's indoor or outdoor prostitution. The small difference that research has detected implies that violence rates are slightly higher where prostitution is *legal* but not *regulated*\* – which is the opposite of what you're saying.

**STILL, PROSTITUTION** *in itself* means violence. All organizations working for the rights of prostituted women – whatever their opinion on prostitution is

\* *Study on National Legislation on Prostitution and the Trafficking in Women and Children. The EU parliament/Transcrime 2005.*

and wherever they're located in the world – agree that *prostitution is dangerous/harmful for women in prostitution*. Those who want prostitution to keep existing usually speak of “*harm reduction*”, i.e. that it's important to *reduce the damage* inflicted in prostitution.

***Violence is a part of prostitution.*** According to American studies the majority of prostituted women have suffered physical violence, sexual violence and threats during prostitution.\*\* Earlier Canadian studies showed that the mortality rate for women in prostitution were 40 times higher than for other women.\*\*\*

To me, it's completely incomprehensible that anyone could feel fine with only speaking of “harm reduction”. *Violence being an integral part of prostitution* should be enough ***in itself*** to make prostitution seen as unacceptable.

\*\* *Prostitution, Violence Against Women, and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder*, by Melissa Farley and Howard Barkan, 1998.

\*\*\* *Pornography and Prostitution in Canada: Report of the Special Committee on Pornography and Prostitution*, 1985.



When the law was established,  
prostitution simply went  
underground.

**S**treet prostitution was on the decline even *before* the Swedish law was passed.\* That's mostly about technological advancements – mobile phones and Internet were simply becoming more common. That's why prostitution has largely moved to mobile

\* (SWE) SOU 1995:15 *Könshandeln*.

phones and the Internet in most industrialized countries – *no matter* what the law says.

Prostitution having gone “underground” is not quite right though. Prostitution exists for the buyers, and they're expected to find it, so it can't be all that hidden, can it?



There are two people involved in prostitution, so why is only the man branded as a criminal?

*(The law is victimizing the prostitute)*

**T**hat question is a little weird, since prostitution isn't just about two people – why isn't the pimp/brothel owner included in what you're saying?

But if we ignore that – the law doesn't just differentiate between parties in prostitution. There are other circumstances in which only one party in a transaction is doing something illegal. For example illegal leases, or contracts where the landlord demands too high a rent. Even though both have signed the contract, only the landlord is a criminal. That's because the law sees who is using who. It's about power.

And no one claims that we're thereby “victimizing the tenant” or “taking away the tenant's agency”.

**BESIDES, I DON'T BELIEVE** in the puritanical idea of prostitution as a “bad sexual activity” and consequently: the idea that all involved are doing something bad. I'm against prostitution because it's sexual *exploitation* and *oppression*.

# STIGMATIZATION\* OF THE VICTIM

## Virgin & Whore

**T**he division of girls and women in the old pair of opposites "virgin/whore" is an effective way of oppression. It strikes against every individual girl or woman, as well as *dividing women as a group*.

The virgin/whore dichotomy has the function of establishing boundaries for women's sexual freedom, or what girls and women are allowed to do sexually. We're all expected to walk on a tightrope between these boundaries: you're supposed to have an extroverted sex life – otherwise you're "boring" – but if you do have one, you risk being branded as a "slut/whore".\*\*

Most girls and women try to work through this as much as we can. But, in reality, it doesn't really matter what a girl does – she might still be called a "whore" by any guy or man who feels like it. Even a girl who's never had sex with anybody might still be called a "whore".

### INSULTS & POWER

Insults are a way of *pushing responsibility onto the victim*. Girls and women being called "whores" is typical for sexual harassment; at home, in school, at work or out on town. Men use the same word for women in porn or prostitution: *whore*. To a sex perpetrator this

\* *Stigma* = branding mark ≈ being socially shunned and excluded.

\*\* *This is a master suppression technique (articulated by the Norwegian feminist Berit Ås) called a double bind – damned if you do, damned if you don't.*

\*\* *Fragmentified* – see page 36.

insult often works as a way of justifying his superiority and his sexualized violence – just as racist slurs justify racist violence.

### **BEING A VICTIM**

But in today's fragmented\*\*\* society which only concerns itself about *individuals*, it's of course harder to see such patterns.

On top of that, there's also the myth about *victims*. Being a **victim** today is often depicted as the opposite of being strong and dealing with things. This leads to many not wanting to see oppression – in order to avoid being seen as a (helpless) *victim*.

But the opposite of **being a victim** is **being a perpetrator**. Talking about victims means that oppression is involved. It doesn't say anything about *what the victim is like*; victims can be suffering to different degrees, victims can be strong or weak (often both at the same time!) and driven people making their own choices. **Being a victim is not a personal characteristic.**

### **STRONG AND WEAK AT THE SAME TIME**

As the working class was growing during the 19th century, it was natural for them to identify themselves as **victims of oppression**. The very fact that you were a victim was what gave you the strength to protest against the oppression!

Back then, there was no contradistinction between being a victim and being a strong, struggling person. They thought of it the other way around: the one dancing through life without any trouble doesn't have to fight and be strong. It's us – the victims – who are simultaneously strong and weak, vulnerable and driven and always struggling.

The ones benefiting off the victim myth are those who benefit off continued oppression.

## 34.

The only problem with prostitution is that it's seen as bad.

If only it was that easy! I heard this comparison to begging: Begging and prostitution are old phenomena, *stemming from an unequal society*. They're based on the difference between women and men, and between poor and rich. *Power and subordination*. You still might find a "happy beggar" who doesn't beg out of necessity but to "get out a bit" and "earn some on the side", but that doesn't change begging in itself. Begging *makes inequality visible* and *that's why* it's humiliating for the beggar. Just like with prostitution. Shame is put on the victim, no matter what she or he is called.

## 35.

If the stigma of the whore was removed, prostitution wouldn't be a problem.

No, that's not how it works. The *stigma* on "the whore" is typical of most kinds of oppression – *putting responsibility on the oppressed*. "Shame is glued onto the victims" – that's the beginning of a poem by Kjersti Ericsson about rising against oppression. *Blame the victim*. Otherwise we might see the perpetrator, and what's actually happening.

Prostitution also originates in a puritanical\* view of sexuality, connecting sex with dirtiness, shame and

\* *Puritanical* = advocating sexual "purity". Opposing openness about sexuality. Sometimes used as a synonym for "sex-negative".

guilt. Porn and prostitution *need* puritanism, in order to construct ideas of crossing boundaries. Many prostitution perpetrator also seek out prostitution because they view it as *shameful/dirty* sexuality.

That's why prostitution glamorizer's talk of the only problem with prostitution being the stigma isn't right. As long as the oppression continues, the stigma will stay.

And we don't "just" mean oppression in the form of prostitution, because as long oppression in the form of dividing women into "virgins and whores" still exists, so will the stigma.

36.

If prostitution was seen as work,  
the stigma would go away.

O r not...! In the Netherlands, Germany, parts of Australia, and Nevada in the States, where prostitution is already viewed as "sex work", women in prostitution are still just as stigmatized as they are here.

The ones *not* getting stigmatized there are instead the perpetrators – pimps/brothel owners and buyers – who now have been turned into respectable "business men" and their "clients".

37.

Feminists are victimizing  
prostitutes.

N o, we're not. There's a difference between sexual oppression and *making that oppression visible*. What feminists do is making it clear what pros-

titution is, who benefits from it, that prostitution is a part of a societal pattern and not just "an agreement between two individuals" etc.

**IF YOU THINK** feminists are "victimizing" women, you don't know a whole lot about feminism. Think about it for a while. Feminists work *against* oppression. We work in shelters for girls and women, support groups, feminist self-defense, and we work for political change – what feminists do is supporting each other so that we can **change** our conditions, so that girls and women **won't** have to be victims of patriarchal oppression any longer!

**ALSO, THAT SOUNDS LIKE** you think prostituted women are "others" – what makes you think prostituted women can't be feminists? There are many with own experiences of prostitution among feminists working against prostitution.



She isn't/I'm not the victim type!

**N**o, of course you're not "the victim type", 'cause that's just a myth – *being a victim is no personal characteristic*. But if you put it like that, you risk denying oppression instead.

That's why it's so important to disclose the victim myth. There are few completely helpless victims, despite what rape culture in the media keeps telling us. In real life, us girls and women do what we can to survive in a society created by men, for men. Even if we suffer repeated abuse during a longer period of time, like incest or battery, we do what we can to avoid abuse as much as possible – we're victims and



survivors at the same time.\*

So there's no "victim type" – it's a myth created by oppressors to avoid responsibility.

\* (SWE) *Bortom offer eller överlevare. Sexuellt våld, identitet och feministisk teori och praktik.* Liz Kelly, Sheila Burton and Linda Reagan in *Sexuella övergrepp mot kvinnor och flickor*, ROKS 1997.



Refuse to be called a whore!

*Or the opposite: I enjoy being a slut  
and I do what I want!*

**Y**ou know, I get why someone being called "whore" in school, or something similar, might want to raise a parole like "refuse to be called a whore". But that's letting yourself get tricked. First of all, it sounds like you distance yourself from prostituted women, and second, men can still judge women's sexuality – as long as *the division* in itself still exists.

**AND SURE, ENJOYING BEING A SLUT** might feel like a way to take the edge off the insults and allowing yourself to do what you want. But the virgin and the whore is a *pair of opposites* – one can't exist without the other. So in practice, calling yourself a "slut" doesn't mean you're enjoying your sexuality, but the exact opposite – it's agreeing to define yourself based on the puritanical, patriarchal views of sexuality that are dividing women.

**I'D PREFER *refusing all patriarchal divisions*** of women: *there are no whores and no virgins* – we're all girls/women and we define our sex lives just the way we want!

# Morals

## – what's that about?

**W**hen trying to question pornography or prostitution, you quickly learn to be met with responses like "**Are you a moralist?!**"

Such replies are simply given to make you seem old-fashioned and reactionary, wanting to silence you without having to discuss what you're actually saying.

### **PERSONAL AND SOCIETAL**

In fact, our "morals" are nothing but the values we base our thoughts and actions on. Each of us have our own, **personal** morals and our own values. Besides that, there are also **societal** morals, or *general* morals, consisting of the values which most people in a society share (or which it seems most can agree on). That's why societal morals have varied so much in different societies, cultures and ages.

### **SEXUAL MORALS**

This is all pretty obvious. But for some reason, it seems like many forget this when it comes to morals about **sexuality**. But why would sexuality be the only area without values?

Sexual morals are actually a collective term for *values* related to sexuality – personal or societal – which can be "liberated" or "sex negative" or anything at all.

So really, anyone who puts forward an opinion about how people should relate to something is a "moralist". And a lot of people do that – even those

who dismiss others as moralists...

The Swedish historian Hjärdis Levin wrote the following in her book about the history of sexual morality in society: "No one thought of the fact that dismissing all moralizing was another a form of moralizing".\*

What's good about understanding what morals are is realizing that neither our own nor our societal morals have to be fixed and permanent. Each of us can change our values. And societal values can be changed in the same way – that's why we keep the discussion going!

\* (SWE) *Testiklarnas herravälde. Sexualmoralens historia*, by Hjärdis Levin. Natur och Kultur, 1989.



Being against prostitution is just moralization – you're a moralist!

**Y**es, of course I have opinions and values – about a lot of things actually. Especially about *oppression*. Don't *you*?

**WHAT'S WRONG** with morals all of a sudden? I'm against lots of things out of moral reasons: animal cruelty, child abuse, exploitation, etc.

**IF ANYTHING** stands for *old-fashioned* morals, wouldn't that be prostitution? That view of sex reflects old societal structures, where the woman was "owned" by her man. Both purchased sex and marital sex was about the woman having to adjust herself and letting the lord and master command what to do. No way I'm okay with such an old-fashioned and misogynist view of sexuality!

# 41.

What two adults do in bed is none of the government's business.

Of course it is! That's why we have laws against battery of wives, and that's why rape – including marital rape – is forbidden in Sweden.

Men's sexualized violence against women is all around us, in many different forms, but it's usually at home – and often right in the bedroom – that girls and women suffer sexualized violence by men.



Those who oppose pornography and prostitution play right in the hands of the Christian right.

No, it's the other way around! Many studies (Swedish as well as international) show that prostitution perpetrators consume more pornography than others. And one American study shows that *the more religious and conservative a man is, the more likely he is to buy Internet porn*. Men in the Mormon state of Utah bought the most Internet porn.\*

So it's actually the porn & prostitution industry that has a lot in common with the Christian right: they're grounded in puritanism and double standards, and on the idea that sex is supposed to be on men's conditions.

We feminists are opposed to this view of sexuality

\* *Markets Red Light States: Who Buys Online Adult Entertainment?* by Benjamin Edelman, in *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, issue 1/2009.

– no matter if it's the version of the Christian right or prostitution glamorizers.



Now you're just pushing your morals onto me!

**O**f course I'd want you and everyone else to think that no one should buy other people! That's about basic human values.

But I don't want to push anything onto you. What's important to me is not what your – or any other individual's – opinions are. But I definitely claim the right to fight for a society that takes a stand against slavery in all its forms, and where women count as people – with human rights.



Anyone opposing prostitution wants to limit sexuality.

**N**ot at all! If we ignore everything that prostitution actually is (though that's of course not possible) and only look at the "sex" itself – is there *any* more limited sex than prostitution? For me, bought sex is both inhibited and dull. What could be more boring and limited than sex with zero freedom and spontaneity; being nothing but what the man has ordered and paid for, money in advance, and that's it?

**I'M AGAINST PROSTITUTION** for many reason, one being that I don't like the idea of commercialism taking over even human sexuality. I like spontaneous sex!

# SEXUALITY

A lot of people might instinctively think that sexuality is something purely biological. But actually, only our *sex drive* is biological – our sexual actions, our lusts, desires and turn-ons, are shaped as we go, both by our memories of earlier sexual experiences, and by the time and world we live in.

That's why many say that sexuality is a "social construction". Sadly many stop there – a lot fewer start talking about *who* is "constructing" sex, and *how*.

## WE LACK WORDS

Sexual liberals often talk about sex as something altogether positive. But that makes it hard to understand acts of sexualized power, such as *gradual overstepping of boundaries*, where something that at first feels positive might turn into violation by guys/men who are close to you. Neither are there any words for *negative sexual arousal*, which can make an assault hit even harder, if the perpetrator made you react sexually to the assault.

That's why it's important to struggle against *puritanism*, which has increased in Sweden as porn has gotten more widespread. We need to *find words* for all our sexual feeling – positive and negative – since *putting words* to our experiences also helps us understand them.

## THE JOURNEY IN OUR OWN SEXUALITY

Sexuality can be such a strong and powerful force in our lives. It can give you energy and strength, pleasure and lust, make your body and soul enjoy themselves, make you sleep well and enable you to do

what you want to do. But it can also be destructive and hurt you. Or just be a yawn-worthy in-between. And it can also be used by others.

This makes it even more important to reflect on our own sexuality. Why it is like it is, and whether or not that's the way I want it.

### **POWER AND SUBORDINATION AS TURN-ONS**

The sexual norm of our society is heterosexual. But no matter if we see ourselves as hetero-, homo- or bisexual we all learn to get turned on by an *idea of opposites*. All gender norms, everything portrayed as feminine or masculine, is *sexualized* – including the different degrees of power in society. In patriarchy, heterosexual men's position of power is woven into the basic view of what "sex" is.

Guys are born into a society where they learn that sex is based on their drives and their needs, while girls learn to see our bodies as something to be formed to awaken a guy's sexuality – i.e for someone else. He is trained to be a *subject*, she to be an *object*.

Right now we also live in a world getting increasingly commercialized, this including relationships between people. Even health care and treatment are now being discussed in terms of "goods and services".

Of course this also affects sexuality, so that as well is seen as something that can be "*consumed*", rather than as a *sexual meeting* between people – of short or long duration.

### **PROSTITUTION**

In a society with such a patriarchal trend of consumption, prostitution has a given place. The more the female body is objectified, the more it turns into "goods". And a body that can be sold belongs to the buyer.

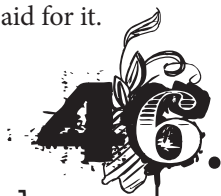
This is why feminists throughout history have op-

posed prostitution, objectification, the sexual norms of patriarchy, and struggled for women's rights to our own sexuality.



Men go to prostitutes because they want a woman who enjoys having sex.

Nope. It's a total oxymoron to claim that men buy prostituted women to find someone who really wants to have sex with them. If a man would want to be *sure* to find a woman to "enjoys having sex", he would never pay for it. He would look for a woman who does it because she wants to, not because she's paid for it.



Those who oppose prostitution always make it sounds like sex always have to be something nice, as if it was "magical".

(... Even though it's just an act like any other)

No, I don't think sex in itself is something *magical* (except for when it is! 🙄). But neither is it just an act like any other. Our sexuality is an interwoven part of our personality. Seeing yourself as homo- hetero- or bisexual or something else often plays some part in your *identity*, for example.

Our sexuality, turn-ons or turn-offs, includes our memories of earlier sexual experiences as we have



them. We weave our sexual experiences into our personality – no matter how memorable or forgettable those experiences might be.

But you can't get around sexuality being a part of our personality.



If she likes sex, and wants to earn money from it, what's the problem?

**W**omen's sexuality is not just about satisfying men – even if you as a prostituted woman might pretend that when faced with the john. Good sex on equal terms is about *mutual lust*, no matter if it's with a stranger or with someone you've lived with for over 30 years. Prostitution, on the other hand, is only about the "sex" which the man orders and pays for – no matter who she is or what she does or does not want.

That's the problem. Prostitution is sexual abuse, mostly by men using women. As a feminist, I oppose that!



What's the difference between prostitution and a couple taking it to the bedroom after the guy treating her to drinks all night?

**W**ith that question, you deny women having a sexuality *of our own*. It seems like you think women don't have a *lust of our own*, instead

becoming accessible to the desires of guys and men, given that he pays for it – in cash or drinks.

The Swedish journalist Annika N. Lindqvist put it like this:

*Prostitution (which in most cases consists of men buying women's bodies) builds upon stale old moralism and a denial of women's own sexuality.*

*A society with widespread prostitution isn't for us who do it gladly and for free with someone of our own choosing.\**

## 49.

If you oppose prostitution,  
you oppose sex.

**N**o, quite the opposite! If you like sex you should oppose prostitution. So we say as the Swedish author Louise Eek says:

*It's not considered edgy or hip to oppose prostitution as a phenomenon. It's a bit cooler to promote people selling access to their bodies. Me, I'm against exploitation, conscious or not. I also don't like cashing in on humanity. I prefer making love, fucking our brains out, having sex often or rarely, but doing it because we really want to – not because you're paid to satisfy the needs of someone else.\*\**

\* (SWE) *Kön till salu – Om Europas vägval i prostitutionsfrågan. Pocket-tidningen R, issue 2-3/2006.*

\*\* (SWE) *För prostituerade, mot prostitution. Op-ed article from the magazine Arbetaren, issue 33/2002.*

# Afterword

In this booklet we've tried to give replies to the most common arguments we've heard about prostitution. But to wrap it up we'd like to take this the other way around: *our own reasons to oppose prostitution, and support the Swedish law of prohibiting prostitution purchases.*

1. ***Prostitution is sexualized power.*** Power based on gender, power based on class, power based on ethnicity, etc.
2. ***The basis for prostitution is sexual abuse of children.*** The majority of all who are bought in prostitution have suffered other forms of sexual abuse before entering prostitution, and the debut age of prostitution is often around 14 years.
3. ***Prostitution hurts women.*** Women in prostitution suffer sexualized violence, and risk disease and psychological traumas. Additionally, all women are hurt by the idea of women being sexually subordinated and available for purchase.
4. ***Prostitution is a method of oppression.*** Men buy access to women and shame those being used. At the same time, the freedom of all girls and women is limited by the "virgin/whore" dichotomy.
5. ***Prostitution is imperialism.*** Western men rape women and children of the third world – some men travelling there, others buying victims of human trafficking at home. Neither is it a coincidence that so many women being used in prosti-

tution in, for example, Canada, South America, New Zealand and Africa belong to the native populations of those countries.

6. ***Prostitution steals women's right to our bodies.*** Boys learn that they are entitled to sex and to women's bodies, while girls learn to shape their bodies to something guys are turned on by. Men are expected to be subjects, women are expected to be objects.
7. ***Equality can't be achieved as long a men can buy women.*** A sexualization of patriarchal power structures is the opposite of equality.
8. ***Prostitution sabotages a sexuality based on lust.*** Prostitution is a part of the objectification of women and the commercialization/reification of sex.
9. ***Criminalizing prostituted women would be the same as making it illegal to be a victim of sexualized violence.***
10. ***Not criminalizing prostitution perpetrators is accepting the oppression described here.***



*Good Luck!*

***P.S. Hope you'll join the Feminist Movement now!***

## FURTHER READING

- \* **Global Report on Trafficking in Persons**, UNODC, 2009.
- \* **Legalizing Prostitution is not the Answer, The example of Victoria, Australia**, by Mary Sullivan and Sheila Jeffreys, *Coalition Against Trafficking in Women*, CATW, 2001.
- \* **Men who buy sex – Who they buy and what they know**, by Melissa Farley, Julie Bindel and Jacqueline M. Golding. *Research report from Eaves in London and Prostitution Research & Education in San Francisco*, 2009.
- \* **Not for sale. Feminists Resisting Prostitution and Pornography**. Red. Rebecca Whisnant & Christine Stark. *Spinifex*, 2004.
- \* **Policing public women. The regulation of prostitution in Stockholm 1812-1880** by Yvonne Svanström. *Atlas*, 2000.
- \* **Report by the Federal Government on the Impact of the Act Regulating the Legal Situation of Prostitutes (Prostitution Act)**, by Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend, 2007.
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- \* **Situation report 9: Trafficking in human beings for sexual and other purposes** 1 January - 31 December 2006. RKP report 2007:6b. National Police Board.
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- \* **Från våldtäkt och misshandel till prostitution: Att synliggöra**

**sambanden** by R. Amy Elman. ROKS 1996.

\* **I sexualitetens gränstrakter** – en studie av ungdomar i Göteborg med omnejd som säljer och byter sexuella tjänster, by Jonna Abellsson & Anna Hulusjö. Prostitutionsgruppen Göteborg, 2008.

\* **Kännedom om prostitution 2007**. Socialstyrelsen (The National Board of Health and Welfare), 2007.

\* **Kön till salu** – Om Europas vägval i prostitutionsfrågan. Pocket-tidningen R issue 2-3/2006.

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\* **Offentliga kvinnor. Prostitution i Sverige 1812-1918**, by Yvonne Svanström. Ordfront förlag, 2006.

\* **Pornografi och prostitution** – sexuella övergrepp som handelsvara by Gerda Christenson, in Ed. Lundström/Nordenfors: **Tystnaden är bruten**. ROKS, 2001.

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\* **Sedligt, renligt, lagligt : prostitution i Norden 1880-1940**, by Anna Jansdotter and others. Makadam förlag 2007.

\* **Rapport 2008:24 Sexuell människohandel**. En fråga om tillgång och efterfrågan. Brå/Brottsförebyggande rådet (The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention), 2008.

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\* **Varat och varan**. Prostitution, surrogatmödraskap och den delade människan, by Kajsa Ekis Ekman. Leopard förlag, 2010.



[www.kvinnofronten.nu](http://www.kvinnofronten.nu)

SISTERHOOD IS POWERFUL – JOIN US!

*If you have personal experiences of prostitution, and want to get in contact with others in Sweden for support, you are welcome to contact*  
**PRIS** – Prostituerades Revansch i Samhället:

e-mail: [natverketpris@gmail.com](mailto:natverketpris@gmail.com)

[www.natverketpris.se](http://www.natverketpris.se)

## **Write to us!**

*We would be happy to know how you liked our argument collection. That is, if you found it useful, if there are other arguments you wish you'd found here, and if there are things you want us to add if we make another edition – or if there is something else you want us to know about prostitution.*

Send us an e-mail:

[kvinnofronten@sverige.nu](mailto:kvinnofronten@sverige.nu)

**P.S.** *The full text can also be read on our website!*

# *Speaking of* **PROSTITUTION**

Have you ever found yourself getting nowhere in a discussion about **prostitution**? Ever felt like you lack arguments? You're not alone!

In this booklet, we've gathered the most common arguments out of those we tend to see out there.

We hope it can be of use to you when you're out discussing!



*Sisterhood is powerful  
– join the feminist movement!*

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