



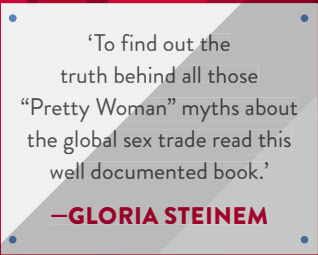
# THE PIMPING OF PROSTITUTION

abolishing the sex work myth



FOR SALE

**Julie Bindel**



'To find out the truth behind all those "Pretty Woman" myths about the global sex trade read this well documented book.'

**—GLORIA STEINEM**



## The Pimping of Prostitution

“The first step in recognizing a big injustice is often an end to blaming the victim - say, to stop assuming that most poor people are lazy, or that battered women could just leave, or that our prisons are so racially imbalanced because the imbalance is deserved. To find out the truth behind all those “Pretty Woman” myths about the global sex trade read this well documented book by Julie Bindel.”

—Gloria Steinem, *feminist, journalist and social and political activist*

“This book is comprehensive, authoritative, personally revealing, and a clear headed rage against a tide of modern double think. It will help feminism untangle itself from all the knots of faux progressiveness about prostitution, which is repackaging sexual abuse as empowerment. Bindel is a fearless, uncompromising voice who deserves to be universally heard.”

—Janice Turner, *Times Newspaper columnist*

“A profoundly impressive piece of reporting and polemic into a commercial industry. You may love Bindel’s work, you may profoundly disagree with it. But it will never leave you indifferent, and it will always make you question, which is why there should be more of it.”

—Rose George, *Author and journalist*

“No one in Britain knows more than Julie Bindel about prostitution - the politics, the debates, the myths, the scale, and the damage to individuals and to the culture that sustains it. Every word in this long-awaited book is worth reading. It combines scholarship, activism, personal narratives and political analysis. It is a mighty challenge to the pessimism of ‘the oldest profession’ and above all it offers hope of a society free of sexism and sexual exploitation.”

—Bea Campbell, *writer, activist, and author of The End of Equality*

“An excoriating response to those who say prostitution is inevitable, that it is work like any other, and that prostituted women need labour rights and state regulation, not abolition. Bindel exposes gender inequality at its most brutal and violent in this intelligent, well-researched and well-written critique. Agree or disagree, I’ve no doubt it will become a core text for the study of patriarchy and its consequences.”

—Karon Monaghan QC, *leading human rights and equality law practitioner*

“This book is persuasive, clear, revealing and very powerful. It brilliantly exposes the outright abuse and misogyny at the heart of a worldwide system in which men and boys control, buy, sell, rent and use women and girls. And it answers back to any apologist, male or female, who defends men’s renting and use of women in the worldwide system of sexual exploitation.”

—Bidisha, *Writer, critic and broadcaster*

“This is a critically important book on a critically important subject by one of our most courageous and incisive social critics. Read it and understand that there is no human right to prostitute women and girls that prostitution is about power and profit, degradation, pain, fear and exploitation. Julie Bindel has made the argument: we have a duty to echo it. Essential reading.”

—Dexter Dias QC, *human rights lawyer and author of  
The Ten Types of Human*

“For decades, Julie Bindel’s journalism has helped us see the pathology of patriarchy. This brave new book tells the stories not only of the incredible women who have survived prostitution but the men who choose to buy and sell women’s bodies. Bindel peels away the liberal veneer from the pro-prostitution lobby and its academic supporters to show how a feminist analysis of the sex trade is essential to give meaning to the culture’s claim to support ‘human rights.’ With the voices of prostitution survivors at the core of the book, Bindel’s reporting provides the context to understand the routine abuse in the sexual-exploitation industries.”

—Robert Jensen, *Professor, University of Texas at Austin, School of Journalism,  
and author of The End of Patriarchy: Radical Feminism for Men*

Julie Bindel

# The Pimping of Prostitution

Abolishing the Sex Work Myth

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*This book is dedicated to the late Denise Marshall, as a small gesture of gratitude for everything she did to end men's violence towards women and girls throughout her too-short life. Denise was the finest feminist and friend who saved lives and changed hearts and minds. I am sure that her legacy will be to inspire new generations of feminists to be the best they can.*

# Preface

I have been an active feminist campaigner against male violence towards women since 1979. For the past two decades of that time, I have focused much of my energy on fighting for the abolition of the global sex trade, alongside other feminists, many of them survivors of the sex trade themselves.

For me, prostitution is a human rights violation against women and girls. Not everyone shares this understanding. We are now at a crossroads, with a number of countries around the world under pressure to either remove all laws pertaining to the sex trade (including those governing pimping and brothel owning), or to criminalise the purchase of sex (known as the Nordic model). However, the polarised debate on the sex trade, being played out within academia, media, feminist circles and human rights organisations has reached a critical point.

No other human rights violation towards women and girls is so grossly misunderstood. While domestic violence has often been, and sometimes still is, assumed to be the fault of the victim ('She was nagging him', 'She failed to understand his moods'), there has been a significant improvement in the way that those experiencing it are supported and the perpetrators called to task thanks to feminist campaigning and interventions.

Rapists are often seen as men who ‘couldn’t help themselves’, or who were coerced into committing such crimes by the behaviour and dress sense of the victims. But increasingly, again as a result of feminism, rape is viewed as an expression of misogyny rather than one of uncontrollable sexual desire.

Not so prostitution. In recent years, despite the increasing numbers of women with direct experience of being prostituted coming out as ‘survivors’ of the sex trade, the dominant discourse is one of prostitution being about ‘choice’ and ‘agency’ for the women involved. The human rights abuse involved in the sex trade, according to the liberals, libertarians and many of those who profit from selling sex, is when men are deterred from purchasing sex, and not when they rent the orifices of a woman for sexual release. The women selling sex, according to this logic, are the victims of pearl-clutching moralists who wish to take away their right to earn a living.

Indeed, supporting women to exit prostitution has been described as ‘an affront to human dignity’ in one academic paper,<sup>1</sup> authored by four academics, three of whom have been campaigning for total decriminalisation of the sex trade for a number of years. The war that rages between feminists such as myself who seek to abolish the sex trade, and those who see prostitution as a valid choice, is fuelled by the widely held belief that feminist abolitionists wish to ‘rescue’ ‘fallen women’ and ‘demonise’ the men who pay for sex.

The redoubtable feminist writer Andrea Dworkin once described herself as a ‘radical feminist: not the fun kind’. I use this phrase to distinguish myself from those neoliberal ‘choice’ feminists who have absorbed the argument about ‘sex work’ being empowering. These fun feminists ensure that they never upset men, and appear to be happier tearing down tried and tested theories of patriarchy and male power being the driver for the sex trade than they are asking how prostitution can be sexual liberation for the prostituted. I and other abolitionists are accused by

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<sup>1</sup>Cusick, L., Brooks-Gordon, B., Campbell, R., & Edgar, F. (2011). ‘Exiting’ drug use and sex work: Career paths, interventions and government strategy targets. *Drugs: Education, Prevention and Policy*, 18(2): 145–156. DOI: [10.3109/09687631003776901](https://doi.org/10.3109/09687631003776901).



the fun feminists of being ‘whorephobic’, since they claim we hate the women in the sex trade instead of the pimps, buyers and brothel keepers.

I became an active feminist partly in response to the police investigation and media coverage of a serial killer who operated in the North of England during the 1970s. Peter Sutcliffe, named ‘the Yorkshire Ripper’ by the tabloid press, turned out to be an ordinary, married man living in a suburb of Bradford. The Sutcliffe case brought attitudes about women in general, and prostituted women in particular, out into the open, which in turn led me to join forces with some of the most passionate and committed antimale violence activists in the country.

The public was led to believe, thanks to the police leading the case and the media reporting of the murders, that Sutcliffe hated prostitutes, when in fact only a minority of his victims were involved in the sex trade. The mythology that built up around the killer meant that police excluded a number of cases of women found murdered in England because they did not fit the profile. It also served to perpetuate the notion that women in prostitution somehow deserved their fate, and that rape and murder were merely occupational hazards.

During the 1970s and into 1980, Sutcliffe killed at least 13 women and left seven others for dead. The body of his first murder victim—28-year-old Wilma McCann—was discovered in 1975 and, from the beginning, the West Yorkshire Police were guilty of dragging their feet and bungling the investigation. Complacent police officers overlooked vital clues, and inadequate technology was used to collate the thousands of interviews and intelligence reports they gathered. Amid all this, Sutcliffe just kept killing—with hammers, screwdrivers and knives—and police were no further forward by the time the body of his fifth murder victim, Jayne MacDonald, was discovered in June 1977.

MacDonald’s killing was described by police and press as a ‘tragic mistake’. The previous victims had all been labelled as prostitutes and therefore, in the eyes of many, complicit in their own demise. But MacDonald was 16 and described by police as ‘respectable and innocent’. Victims were duly divided into deserving and undeserving women.

Officers made a plea to the women of West Yorkshire to look out for strange behaviour in their sons and husbands. But they failed to listen to one of Sutcliffe’s surviving victims: a 14-year-old girl who had had a good

look at the man who chatted to her about the weather before striking her about the head several times with a hammer. When the girl reported the attack, she saw the photo-fits compiled by other survivors and told police it was the same man. They dismissed her because she was not in prostitution, and it was assumed the Ripper was only interested in prostituted women. On 30 June 1977, an open letter from the *Yorkshire Evening Post* to Sutcliffe said: ‘Your motive, it’s believed, is a dreadful hate for prostitutes—a hate that drives you to slash and bludgeon your victims’.

When MacDonald was murdered, I was 15 and already thinking about feminism. I had been outed at school as a lesbian, and the misogyny I experienced from boys taught me that girls were judged as either slags or lezzers, and that boys were the ones doing the naming and shaming. Sexism within popular culture was neither subtle nor occasional in the 1970s, and I learned that sexual violence was endemic in reality and widely viewed as entertainment.

In 1979 I moved from my home in Darlington, in the North East of England, to Leeds where I met a group of radical feminists who were campaigning against male violence towards women and girls. At that time, the main focus of the group was to challenge the appalling attitude of police and journalists towards the victims and potential victims—and all women were potential victims—of this serial killer.

One night in November 1980, I was followed while on my way home from a lock-in at the pub near the YWCA hostel where I was living. The man who followed me was of medium height with a dark, full beard, wiry hair and black, piercing eyes. I was 18 and new to Leeds. I ran into another pub to shake him off. Friends persuaded me to report it to the police and I completed a Photofit, but it was obvious they were not taking me seriously. The next day the body of the final victim, Jacqueline Hill, was found less than half a mile from where I was followed. When Sutcliffe was arrested and his photograph published, my Photofit was almost exactly like him.

Sutcliffe’s victims were named as deserving victims, sluts, slags and whores. I heard it from men on buses and on the streets. In the open letter of 1977, the murderer was asked how he felt knowing that he had killed an innocent, respectable victim rather than a prostitute. Surely he felt remorse about mistakenly killing Jayne McDonald?

During Sutcliffe's reign, I remember the jokes ordinary men in the North of England used to make about this serial killer before he was caught. 'There's only one Yorkshire Ripper', football fans would chant. 'Ripper 12, police nil', was one particular jibe during Leeds United football matches where the police were penalising unruly fans. 'Give us a kiss, love, I'm not the Ripper' was a regular crack heard in nightclubs around the country. In the 1980s, a group of anarchists named themselves The Peter Sutcliffe Fan Club because they saw him as the ultimate rebel.

In 1990 I was one of the founders of the organisation Justice for Women, a feminist campaign group that mainly challenged the convictions of women who had killed an abusive male partner. In 1992 I received a letter from a woman called Emma Humphreys. Emma had killed her violent pimp, Trevor Armitage, when she was 16 years old and had been in prison since 1985, having been convicted of his murder. In her letter, Emma described the violence and brutality she had endured at the hands of punters and explained that the night she killed Armitage he had threatened to rape her.

As a child, Emma had witnessed her mother being beaten by her stepfather, who also sexually abused Emma. When she was 12, Emma ran away. She slept rough and was abused into prostitution on the streets. When she met Armitage, a sex buyer on the streets of Nottingham, Emma was drinking heavily and self-harming. One night, when Armitage had threatened to rape Emma yet again, she stabbed him. Too traumatised to take to the witness box and represented by lawyers with no understanding of the effects of sexual violence, Emma was convicted and sent to prison, which was effectively a life sentence for under-18s.

Emma wrote to me seven years into her sentence, and for three years I, and many others, campaigned for her release. On 7 July 1995, Emma had her conviction overturned and was released from the Court of Appeal. The following day, most national newspapers carried front-page stories on Emma's campaign, showing a smiling young woman leaving the court surrounded by hundreds of cheering supporters.

Prior to getting to know Emma and the details of her nightmare in prostitution, I had heard of and been involved in debates and discussion

about the sex trade, but Emma's story moved me to the point that I began to prioritise campaigning against the sex trade within my feminist activism, writing and research.

In 1996 I was one of the organisers of an international conference in Brighton, UK, on violence and abuse of women, the brainchild of feminist academics and well-known campaigners against male violence Professors Jalna Hanmer and Catherine Itzin. At the conference I met speakers from all over the world who were pioneers in the fight against the international sex trade. Some of these women were survivors of the sex trade. Each had the same goal: to abolish the system of prostitution. However, Austrian pro-prostitution lobbyists at the event tried to disrupt one of the sessions, claiming we were ignoring the voices of 'sex workers'.

At the conference were feminist anti-sex-trade campaigners such as Andrea Dworkin, Janice Raymond and Norma Hotaling, founder of Standing against Global Exploitation (SAGE): a San Francisco-based centre offering services to help women out of prostitution. Hotaling had also founded the world's first John School in 1995, a re-education programme for men attempting to buy sex on the street.

Fiona Broadfoot, a survivor of prostitution whom I had met during the organising of the Brighton conference, chaired a workshop on the violence of prostitution. With her was Irene Ivison, author of *Fiona's Story*, a book Ivison had written about her daughter Fiona, who was murdered in 1993 at the age of 17 by a punter, having been exploited into prostitution by her older 'boyfriend'. Ivison had not known that Fiona had been prostituted for three weeks before her death, although she had spent the previous three years battling with police and social services to try to stop the abusive relationship in which her daughter had been involved since the age of 14.

The following year, in December 1997, I co-organised a conference entitled 'Prostitution: Violence against Women and Children'. A small group of pimps brought along prostituted women and tried to disrupt proceedings. They were thrown out. Emma Humpreys had been released from prison two years earlier and spoke at the conference about her experiences. Also speaking was Angel, a volunteer at SAGE who co-ran the San Francisco John School with Hotaling.

As the conference began, two men approached the registration desk and began peeling off money from large wads of £50 notes. In a deliberate and cynical pantomime, the men were dressed in stereotypical US ‘pimp’ attire: long fur coats and fedora hats. With them were two women, dressed in stereotypical ‘prostitution’ clothing. Almost as soon as the four were seated in the conference hall the women, who described themselves as ‘sex workers’, began to heckle and loudly protest at the title of the event, shouting that ‘feminists have no right to tell us what to do with our bodies’. They were quickly asked to leave.

Humphreys movingly described her own experiences of prostitution and called for sex buyers to be criminalised. She died a few months later in the summer of 1998, three years after her victorious release from prison. A few weeks before she died, Humphreys was raped by a man who dragged her into her flat as she was fumbling for her keys. For her, it was the last straw. Deciding to report it to the police, Humphreys spent the next few weeks taking too much medication and drinking in an attempt to calm her nerves about making a statement. One morning, having been unable to contact her by phone, I let myself into her flat and found her dead in bed. The inquest into her death ruled that she had died by ‘misadventure’, but I knew it was the pain of living with the legacy of prostitution that had killed her.

At the time that Humphreys died I was in the final stages, alongside Jalna Hanmer, Fiona Broadfoot, Irene Ivison and others, of setting up the first UK-based John School in West Yorkshire. The conference and the John School signified the beginning of the abolitionist movement in the UK and I was at its forefront. I linked up with a small number of survivors of the sex trade and we set out to challenge the bigger, louder pro-prostitution lobby. However, by now the ‘sex workers’ rights’ movement had entered academia.

In 1998 a conference was held at East London University entitled ‘Sex Work Reassessed: A National Conference’, including a workshop called ‘Cause for Concern’. At the workshop were various speakers including Jo Doezema, a ‘sex workers’ rights’ activist and academic, and a nameless man who spoke as a sex buyer. They spoke against any intervention with ‘clients’, and argued that the John School would cause harm to women in the sex trade because educating men about

the realities of prostitution would further stigmatise the women. Then I announced who I was and pointed out that the police had agreed to the demands of the John School founders to stop arresting the women, at least for the duration of the pilot. Doezema said she did not believe me.

Taking its name from the workshop and made up of more than 20 agencies across England that provide support for women in prostitution, Cause for Concern was founded in order to convince policymakers and criminal justice agencies to oppose the kerb crawler scheme. Around 500 women linked to the agencies signed a petition against it. This all happened a month prior to the first John School being held but, nevertheless, our opponents seemed to know that we were holding sex buyers accountable.

The first meeting of Cause for Concern, held in Leeds, was chaired by the then director of the Bradford Working Women's Project (BWWP), at which Fiona Broadfoot had volunteered before leaving to set up her own support organisation: a telephone helpline called Street Exit that she ran from her home.

BWWP was notorious for being very pro-legalisation. I had invited the director to speak on a panel at the 1997 conference on prostitution, and during her presentation she made it clear that any police intervention would not be welcomed by her organisation. She specifically mentioned the legalised regime in the Netherlands as a good practice model.

Iverson, Broadfoot and I decided to ask if we could come along to the meeting of Cause for Concern to answer questions on the scheme, and hopefully put the members' minds at rest. Julia, who described herself as a street sex worker, used a large flip chart to list her weekly expenses and expenditure, arguing that she needed a job that would pay at least £600 a week to be able to give up selling sex. At that time, my salary as Assistant Director of a research unit at Leeds Metropolitan University paid less than half of the amount Julia said she needed.

The three of us had clearly failed to make an impression on the meeting and we left feeling dejected. Afterwards we heard that Broadfoot had been dismissed as 'not right in the head' because of a family tragedy that had prompted her to escape the sex trade. It was common knowledge in West Yorkshire that Fiona's cousin Maureen had been murdered by a sex buyer, George Naylor. Naylor had previously been jailed for 11

years in 1984 for killing Deborah Kershaw, also a prostituted woman, two months after the BBC's *Rough Justice* programme helped free him early from a 15-year sentence for raping a 60-year-old in her home in 1995.

Following the 12-month pilot of the John School, I embarked on a two-year project funded by the UK Government's Department for International Development to develop and deliver training for non-governmental organisations (NGOs), social workers and law enforcers in several Balkan countries on anti-trafficking initiatives.

It was the year 2000 and the UK had only recently woken up to the fact that women and girls were being transported from poor and conflict-ridden countries into brothels in Western Europe. I had been attending the annual Police Vice Conference of England and Wales since 1998, as one of the few civilians among at least 200 police officers specialising in crimes relating to the sex trade. Head of the Metropolitan Police Clubs and Vice Unit, Inspector Paul Holmes, would give a detailed presentation on the various surveillance jobs that had led to a number of dangerous traffickers being arrested.

I had also recently been invited to speak at an anti-trafficking conference in Albania, at the invitation of Vera Lesko, founder of Vlora Women's Hearth, an innovative project set up by Lesko in 1997. Lesko set up the Hearth because she became aware that the main economy in Vlora was from trafficking women and girls out of Albania. As a result of her work, Lesko had been physically attacked in public on several occasions and, following threats to her family, felt it necessary to send her daughter to live with relatives in Italy.

After the seminar, Lesko told me that she was sick of projects setting up safe houses for young women who had been rescued from traffickers 'and only teaching them to do macramé and what to do with half a kilo of minced beef. Those girls need a gun and a driving licence', she told me with a glint in her eye.

My project in the Balkans was my first introduction to the pro-prostitution politics of international human rights organisations based in unstable countries and regions. I had understood but disagreed with the arguments put forward by the 'sex workers' rights' lobby in the UK (for

example, the English Collective of Prostitutes and Scot-Pep<sup>2</sup>), and at the Brighton conference had heard a number of presentations from international speakers on the false distinction between forced and chosen ‘sex work’ from organisations funded to combat human trafficking.

During the course of the project I spent time in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro. My scoping trip to Sarajevo, Bosnia, included a trip to the offices of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, where I met the head, Madeleine Rees.

Rees is the human rights lawyer who campaigned alongside Kathryn Bolkovac, the whistleblower who exposed DynCorp, the private contractor providing US personnel for the UN mission in Bosnia, who were not only sexually exploiting trafficked women but were also on the traffickers’ pay-roll. Rees told me, during a tense meeting in her baking-hot office, that our training was not needed in the Balkans, as there were local NGOs that knew the terrain better than internationals. However, when I pushed Rees, it became clear that she and her colleagues did not like the fact that the training included sessions on the harms of prostitution, and how to curb the demand. Although our training sessions did go ahead, the local anti-trafficking human rights organisations circulated petitions calling for our training to be boycotted, stating that the trainers were ‘conflating prostitution, which is a choice, with trafficking, which is clearly a human rights violation’.

During the two years I spent travelling in the Balkans and encountering similar attitudes to Rees’s, I decided to stop doing research on trafficking into the sex trade and focus on local and national sex trade and the women caught up in local prostitution. Trafficking is merely a process in which some women and children are prostituted. Prostitution itself is the problem.

Having decided to leave academia to pursue journalism, in 2003 I contacted the then features editor of *Guardian Weekend Magazine*, Katherine Viner, whom I knew from the occasions she had asked me

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<sup>2</sup>Scot-pep.org.uk. *Promoting safety and rights, fighting for social justice and inclusion*. Retrieved 15 June 2017, from <http://www.scot-pep.org.uk/>.



to write the odd opinion piece for the paper. I told her I had read some fascinating and disturbing research by two British academics, Julia O'Connell Davidson and Jacqueline Sanchez Taylor, on female sex tourism in the Caribbean. I told Viner that the only coverage I had seen on this topic to date was either making monsters or idiots of the women, or dismissing it as a bit of a laugh.

I was delighted when Viner gave me a commission to travel to Jamaica and investigate female sex tourism from a feminist perspective, and I knew that with the 4500 word limit I could do it justice. However, I was met with a wall of resistance from some feminists prior to my trip, who told me they were worried that by drawing attention to the fact that 'women do it, too' and also pay for sex, it would provide a get-out clause for male sex buyers. This attitude shocked me. My intention was to investigate the exploitation of young, impoverished black males by white, relatively wealthy Western women. I assumed that if the women were paying for sex either directly or indirectly, there would be a pimp industry to support it. I was right.

In Jamaica, I found that wherever there were female sex tourists, there would be third-party exploiters ready to sell the 'beach boys' and broker the deals. I also found that while the women justified their treatment of the young men by using racialised and class-privileged mythology, female sex tourists are, in most respects, unlike the men who travel to poor countries to buy women and children, in that they rarely, if ever, inflict direct violence on the men. The men are not frightened of the female sex tourists, and there is far less stigmatisation faced by men who sell sex in this way compared to women in prostitution. My article, published in July 2003 as a cover story, made such an impact that it inspired the playwright Tanika Gupta's *Sugar Mummies* that was staged at the Royal Court Theatre in 2006.

One year later, as I was packing up my desk in the university, ready to enter the unknown and rather scary world of full-time freelance journalism, I had a visit from Denise Marshall, CEO of Eaves for Women, a feminist charity that provided services for women who had experienced male violence. Two years earlier, Marshall had set up the Poppy Project, the first service in the UK to support women trafficked into the UK sex trade. Poppy was an acronym for 'Pissing off Pimps and Punters, Yay!'

but Marshall told the Home Office, which funded the service, that it was named after one of the first victims of trafficking referred to Eaves.

Marshall told me she needed me to come to Eaves on a part-time consultancy basis for six months to build up some research capacity within Eaves, and to write a response to 'Paying the Price', a government consultation document on how best to deal with prostitution in the UK. I stayed at Eaves rather longer than six months. When the charity went into administration in 2015, weeks after Marshall died of stomach cancer aged only 53, I had just submitted my final piece of research under its name.

Marshall was an innovator and a fierce abolitionist. Together we built up a successful research unit within Eaves and I led on a number of projects, all of which caused consternation among the pro-sex work service providers and academics.

In 2008 Eaves published 'Big Brothel: A Survey of the Off-Street Sex Trade in London'. It was the largest study on the indoor sex trade in the UK to date. We gathered information from 921 brothels in the capital, and to do so my co-author Helen Atkins and I recruited male volunteers to help with the research. They telephoned brothels posing as potential sex buyers, with a list of questions including 'What nationalities are on offer tonight?', 'Do the girls do anal?', 'How about oral without a condom?', and 'What age are they?' The idea was to find out as much as possible about how the brothel owners and managers marketed the women and what was being sold. Had we gone in wearing suits and carrying clipboards to ask research questions, it is likely we would have been told where to go.

The pro-prostitution academics in the UK and beyond went berserk on seeing the national publicity on our findings, and quickly put together a letter, signed by 27 academics, slating its methodology (unethical), aims and objectives (ideological) and conclusions (*Carry On Criminology*, according to Dr Belinda Brooks-Gordon).

The following year I was part of an international research team interviewing men who pay for sex, led by the psychologist and feminist academic Dr Melissa Farley. At that time, I was in the middle of frantically fending off a potential libel case. I had received a letter from notorious prostitution apologist Dr John Davies, then of Sussex University/

University of the Witwatersrand who, through his lawyers, threatened me with litigation unless I paid £5000 to a 'women's charity of his choice'. I now suspect that the charity was Sompan Foundation through which he defrauded the British government of £5 million (some of which was used to pay prostitution apologists): a crime for which he was recently imprisoned for 12 years.

In 2009 I began a study on women exiting prostitution. During my time interviewing the men who create the demand and the women on the supply side, I realised just how persuasive the misinformation and mythology surrounding the sex trade is. Talking to the sex buyers, it became apparent that many of them delude themselves that the women they buy actually enjoy the sex of the transaction, and believe that most prostituted women actively and happily choose to earn money through the sex trade.

Since 2009 I have continued to investigate and write about the sex trade. This work continues to be my main priority as a feminist campaigner.

Over the years I have been accused of being a Christian moralist, a prude and a man-hating monster. I have also met and worked with the finest abolitionists and human rights campaigners in existence. One thing I can say for sure, from everything I have learned about the global sex trade, is that it is built on the exploitation of women by men, and that it could not exist without the institutionalised oppressions of gender, race and class. I wish to see an end to prostitution because it is both a cause and a consequence of women's subjugation at the hands of men and I am, after all, a feminist. It is surely right and proper that I do my bit to dismantle this monstrosity?

As Dworkin said: 'I have spent 20 years writing these books. Had I wanted to say men are beasts and scream, that takes 30 seconds'. I hope this book gives a fair account of the struggle by those harmed by the sex trade, who we will see make up the majority of those involved, and that the popular tropes about 'choice' and 'freedom' within the sex trade are challenged by the testimony of its survivors.

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# Introduction

During a powerful speech on the future of feminism in 1995, the writer Andrea Dworkin asked the audience to:

remember the prostituted, the homeless, the battered, the raped, the tortured, the murdered, the raped-then-murdered, the murdered-then-raped; ... I want you to think about those who have been hurt for the fun, the entertainment, the so-called speech of others; those who have been hurt for profit, for the financial benefit of pimps and entrepreneurs. I want you to remember the perpetrator and I am going to ask you to remember the victims: not just tonight but tomorrow and the next day. I want you to find a way to include them—the perpetrators and the victims—in what you do, how you think, how you act, what you care about, what your life means to you.<sup>3</sup>

The debate on the sex trade has reached a new nadir. Globally, groups are being funded to lobby for decriminalisation of all forms of

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<sup>3</sup>Speech at the Massey College Fifth Walter Gordon Forum, Toronto, Ontario, in a symposium on 'The Future of Feminism,' 2 April 1995. First published by Massey College in the University of Toronto, 2 May 1995. Copyright ©1995, 1996 by Andrea Dworkin.

prostitution. Most, if not all, of the major funders describe themselves as human rights-based organisations. So-called ‘sex workers’ rights activists’ are marching in the streets, waving their red umbrellas (a symbol of the ‘sex workers’ rights’ movement) and shouting about the rights of women, and men, to do what they wish with their bodies.

Feminist abolitionists, many of whom are sex trade survivors, are attempting to counter this dominant discourse, and are pushing for the introduction of laws to criminalise those who pay for sex and to decriminalise those who sell it.

There is no issue as contentious between feminists, liberals and human rights defenders as the sex trade. Radical feminists tend to argue that prostitution is both a cause and consequence of male supremacy, and that if women and men were equal, prostitution would not exist; it also means that if women and men are ever to become equal, prostitution must not exist. But for liberals who believe in an essential freedom to buy and sell sex, or for human rights campaigners who see access to sex as a human right, abolition is simply not an option. While acceptance of the sex trade has become mainstream, the idea of ending it has become even harder to imagine.

## The Laws on Prostitution

Currently, a number of countries around the world are in a state of flux in terms of legislation and policy around the sex trade. Several countries—including Ireland, Northern Ireland, France, Norway, Sweden and Iceland—have introduced a law criminalising those who purchase sex, while also decriminalising those who sell sex. There are calls from abolitionists, including many survivors of the sex trade, to introduce this model globally. On the other hand, the pro-prostitution lobbyists are calling for laws similar to those currently in place in New Zealand.

In July 2016, the UK Parliament’s Home Affairs Committee published an interim report on prostitution, which looked favourably at decriminalisation of the sex trade. It also made clear that the committee members, chaired by Keith Vaz MP (who three months later was exposed by a tabloid newspaper as a sex buyer), were unlikely to

recommend introducing a law to criminalise those who pay for sex. The Committee said the report was ‘not yet persuaded that the abolitionist law is effective in reducing, rather than simply displacing, demand for prostitution, or in helping the police to tackle the crime and exploitation associated with the sex trade’.

The way that governments regulate the sex trade sends out a powerful message about how seriously we take the issue of sexual exploitation and violence against women more generally.

## **The Two Models**

### **Legalisation/Decriminalisation**

The pro-prostitution lobby adopted the term ‘decriminalisation’, and stopped using ‘legalisation’ during the early 2000s. This was around the time that New Zealand introduced the Prostitution Reform Act, which decriminalised its sex trade (2003) by a majority of one vote; and when it became official that the legalised regime in the Netherlands had been an unmitigated disaster (the same year).

An increasingly popular response to the question ‘What should we do about prostitution?’ is to decriminalise the entire market, and remove all specific laws relating to the sex trade. It is also argued that prostitution should be treated as any other job. Under this regime, third party profiteering from the sex trade should be freely allowed and this approach is advocated by the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, Open Society and Amnesty International.

The difference between the decriminalisation and legalisation of prostitution is that in a decriminalised context, prostitution is treated like any other business and subjected to same of the same regulations. Alternately, the legalisation of prostitution means that the State ‘recognises prostitution as a lawful activity’ but requires the licensing of brothel prostitution and may retain criminal laws against other forms of non-brothel prostitution, such as street prostitution.

What unites full decriminalisation and legalisation is that neither regime would result in either a reduction or an end to the sex trade, but sets in stone the notion that prostitution is an inevitability, and

that there will always exist both a supply and demand. They also make pimping, brothel keeping and sex buying legal.

## The Nordic Model

This law was first introduced in Sweden in 1999. It is a set of laws and policies that criminalises the demand for commercial sex, and decriminalises those selling sex. The Nordic model has two main goals: to curb the demand for prostitution and promote equality between women and men.

The Nordic Model has since been adopted by Norway, Iceland, Canada, South Korea, Ireland, Northern Ireland and France. Governments in Israel, Latvia and Lithuania are considering the law, and in 2014 the European Parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe passed recommendations that the law should be implemented as the best way to tackle European prostitution.

Myths about the sex trade include saying that prostitution is necessary, inevitable and harmless. I will show clear evidence that these beliefs, propagated by the 'sex workers' rights' movement, are based on misguided neoliberalism and fallacious mythology.

## My Research

During my research I conducted around 250 interviews in 40 countries, cities and states. I talked to survivors of prostitution, current 'sex workers' rights' activists, pimps, sex buyers, brothel owners, AIDS activists, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender groups, police officers and feminists opposed to prostitution. I interviewed regular members of the public who knew very little, if anything, about the sex trade. All of these people had a strong opinion.

I went where my views put me firmly in the minority. At an academic conference on prostitution policy and laws in Vienna, Austria, entitled 'Troubling Prostitution', I was one of only four delegates out of 185 who appeared to be troubled by it at all. The other 181 held the view that all aspects of the sex trade should be decriminalised.

In Leeds, UK, I spend a freezing cold evening close to the ‘managed area’ on which Daria Pionko, a 21-year-old prostituted woman, was fatally wounded. As we go to press, a 24-year-old man believed to be her pimp is awaiting trial for her murder. I spoke to residents, police officers, other journalists and the women themselves. No-one tells me ‘yes’ when I ask if such zones will reduce the danger to those operating within them.

I visit legal, state-sanctioned brothels in the USA, Germany and the Netherlands. At the Porn Awards in Los Angeles I meet Siouxsie Q, founder of *The WhoreCast: Sharing the Stories, Art and Voices of American Sex Workers*, and the next morning, in a cafe in Hollywood, I talk to a man who is a former victim of sex trafficking.

In Vancouver, Canada, I am taken on a tour of the deprived Downtown East Side by Courtney, a young Indigenous woman who works for a rape crisis centre. Hundreds of Native women and girls disappeared from this area, some of whom were murdered by serial killer Robert Pickton, who fed his victims’ body parts to the pigs on his farm.

In Gujarat, India, I travel to a village built on prostitution and meet a man who is pimping his wife, sister, aunt and mother.

In Dubai, UAE, I discover that what is supposed to be a shelter for trafficked women is, in my view, a holding pen run by the government until the victims can be deported back to their home countries.

In Sweden, where women’s bodies are not for sale, I share home-cured salmon with Carina, a ‘sex workers’ rights’ activist who tells me she is so appalled at the views of feminist abolitionists that ‘I could never even speak that word “feminist” from my mouth’.

In Istanbul, Turkey, I speak to men queuing outside one of the city’s legal brothels, but am warned off by security who tell me that ‘only men are allowed here’.

At the central police station in Bergen, Norway, is the very first Exiting Prostitution unit. I am shown around by police officer Jarle BJORKE who goes into schools and asks the students, ‘Is it a human right to buy somebody else’s body?’ Norway criminalised the purchase of sex in 2009, and BJORKE tells me that understanding how this came about is simply a matter of the citizens ‘knowing right from wrong’.

At Den Haag, the Dutch Parliament, I meet the abolitionists who are finally able to speak out against the sex trade in the Netherlands. I am told that hostility from so-called feminists towards anyone who criticised the sex trade prevented any debate on the topic.

During a trip to Cambodia, I hear from some of the prostituted women who live on a disused railway line in Phnom Peng with no water or sanitation. With them is a board member of Women's Network for Unity (WNU), a local NGO that is funded to present the women as 'sex workers' rights activists'.

In Northern Ireland, undoubtedly the most devout part of the UK, I hear the story of how the abolitionist law, introduced by the Democratic Unionist Party's Lord Morrow, was enacted by 81 votes to 10.

Boston, Massachusetts, is home to a vibrant abolitionist movement. I have brunch with fast-talking Donna Gavin, Sergeant Detective and Commander of the Boston Police Human Trafficking Unit, who tells me that the pimps targeting young, vulnerable women are becoming more brutal and sadistic than ever.

I tour the legal brothel site in Zurich, the business capital of Switzerland, and interview passers-by in sight of the drive-in brothel.

A group of feminist abolitionists in Seoul, South Korea, take me on a tour of the indoor red light district in Cheongnyangni, where I see men of all ages going in and coming out of window brothels. It is 5 p.m. Perhaps they were popping in for a quick one after work.

A tuk tuk driver in Phnom Peng drives me around the prostitution sites, where I talk to British sex tourists, the young women they are buying, and groups of prostituted women in the park, identifiable by black face masks.

In a suburb of Amsterdam I stay the night at the Happy House B&B and have dinner with Xaviera Hollander, who co-authored a book entitled *The Happy Hooker* based on her experiences as a prostituted woman turned pimp. During dinner, I asked Hollander, a passionate believer in legalisation, if she thought pimping could ever be eliminated from the sex trade. 'The average hooker, the most simple-minded hooker who sits behind the window and just plies her trade', says Hollander, 'is like a sheep and will follow the orders of her pimp'.