

The Perils of Demand-Side Economics

They may sell it as liberation but it still looks like humiliation

Once locked inside the steamy wrappers of *Hustler* and *Penthouse* magazines, pornography today is as in your face as it can get, whether it's a billboard on the side of the bus or display ads saturating the pages of popular free newspapers.

The caravan of women in their birthday suits may represent the latest craze in designer esthetic, but how nudity sells clothes remains a puzzler. Pop culture may be pushing the line that it's the hip way of making a counterculture statement, sort of a back-at-you slam of the religious right, but not everyone accepts the logic there, either..

In fact, there may be a lot more going on than meets the naked eye here. While their brothers are losing themselves in the latest Nintendo release of *Grand Theft Auto*, young women of Generation Next could well be getting primed for a world in which the women's workplace is no longer in the financial district but the red-light district - and of course, its home version.

Whether it's sex tourism in Third World countries or a lap dance in North Beach, the growing demand for horny women these days is fueling a search for available bodies.

The only questions remaining to be answered are where they will be found and at what cost.



Recent cover of a New York fashion magazine .

Embracing Sex Work

On the question of prostitution, those who lobby for its decriminalization say women should have the right to freely exploit their sexual-erotic possibilities, whether it's for fun, profit, or just to make ends meet.

Proponents say the violence involved in sex work would for the most part be eliminated when the profession is legalized. That's because the trade would no longer have to operate underground.

Arresting prostitutes has created a wedge between the victims and those who are supposed to be protecting them, which undercuts

any effort to improve conditions. Simply by ending this historic antagonism, the argument goes, it will be easier for sex workers to come forward, report crimes, and get help from the police.

On the other side of the debate are those who say this vision of safe and healthy sex work defies reality. Examining prostitution where it has been legalized, the verdict is in: Drug dealing, organized crime and violence, far from decreasing, have turned neighborhoods into war

zones and garbage dumps.

Most girls and women enter the trade at age 13, abolitionists note, which hardly amounts to a career decision. This induction typically follows either a sexual assault, coercion by a pimp, or the result of homelessness and poverty.

(Despite the existence of battered women shelters for women nationwide, these facilities provide only 10-30 beds each, forcing the vast majority of homeless women to compete for space in the larger H.U.D. funded adult shelters. Although the latter provide 100-400 beds in many cases, the lion's share of the accommoda-

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MUNI Does Dallas. An ad on the side of a 44-O'Shaughnessy bus spotted last December. According to the City Attorney via Muni, the First Amendment protects advertisers rights to get as prongraphic as they like, as long as the copy meets the rules of the so-called Miller Test for what can be considered obscene.

tions are allocated for homeless men. Although technically illegal, H.U.D. and its service providers defend such discrimination by citing annual counts of the homeless.)

In addition, those who know the business well concur that at least 80 percent of prostitutes (and probably more) are controlled by third parties. Most of the money earned in sex work, therefore, goes to someone else, and it's that someone else who stands to gain the most from decriminalizing the profession, not the women.

The abolitionists further point out the obvious - that legalization means johns will start coming out of the woodwork. Simple supply and demand economics dictate that where there's an increased demand for a product, more mer-

chandise has to be secured from somewhere. That's why trafficking in sex slaves from foreign countries is demonstrably higher in nations where a policy of tolerance has been adopted.

Enter the Netherlands

If you've never been to Amsterdam, you should go. There's a lot talk about tulips, the canals, and the Van Gogh Museum, but most people go there for the drugs and sprawlingly famous red-light district.

Rows of shop windows line many quaint, teeming alleys, where girls in their very early twenties show off their figures behind plate glass doors that lead to bedrooms in the back.

Sometimes a Mercedes eases

its way down the street, ferrying one of the shop owners, a virile-looking gentleman who appears to be just returning from a week in Monaco. He makes his money renting individual windows to prostitutes who pay him \$100 a shift.

Naturally, the red-light district is open 24/7, but it's mostly at night when bands of men troll the aisles. They're from Germany, Britain, Italy, Brazil, Chicago - everywhere. Eavesdrop and you'll hear them commenting matter-of-factly on the selling points of each girl.

It was exactly a decade ago that the Netherlands first took the initiative on global sex trafficking when it held the presidency of the European Union. That wasn't a shock, given that trafficked

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women (or, to use the Dutch term, "migrant sex workers") represent a bread and butter issue for Holland.

Its tourism industry depends on a constantly refreshed supply of beautiful flesh from outside the country, since Dutch girls themselves aren't big on selling themselves. The government also taxes prostitutes' earnings at a rate of about 18 percent, using part of the money to provide them with free health care and (if they publicly register) retirement pensions.

In 2000, when the Convention on Transnational Organized Crime was negotiated in Europe, the final draft of the sex trafficking language turned out to be a blow to the Netherlands. The Dutch had argued that there was a difference between migrant prostitution workers and trafficked women. Commonly referred to as the Palermo Protocols, the treaty's definition of what constitutes a trafficked woman did not make that distinction. Instead it said that consent of the victim is irrelevant.

The Protocols were eventually signed by 80 countries, including the United States under the Clinton Administration. The Dutch responded by filing suit in the European Court, arguing that travel for the purpose of prostitution was a protected right under free trade agreements. The court agreed, which may account in part for the staggering number of foreign women trafficked annually into EU countries - more than half a million, analysts say.

According to Janice Raymond, who co-directs the U.S. based Coalition Against the Trafficking in Women, the Netherlands does have its own laws prohibiting the employment of trafficked women. She says that hasn't stopped the crime, however, as victims are coached by traffickers to tell brothel owners that they are inde-



Message ads in local weekly newspapers can run from \$100 to \$300 apiece, quite a haul for their publishers.

pendent migrants when they sign up to rent the windows.

And yet everyone knows, Raymond maintains, that "they didn't get there on their own steam."

Despite its liberal stance on prostitution, the Dutch government has tried to close down a third of its brothels in Amsterdam, Utrecht and Rotterdam in recent years because of their links to organized crime. Many of the owners retaliated with lawsuits, or simply started new companies.

"These guys are like phoenixes," says Raymond. "They rise from the ashes."

Meanwhile, in the United Kingdom, two Albanian traffickers of Lithuanian women were recently sentenced to five and seven years in prison, respectively, according to the BBC.

The men were apprehended as part of Operation Pentameter, which rescued 84 trafficked women and children, 12 of whom were aged between 14 and 17. Both men pleaded guilty to trafficking for sexual exploitation, causing or inciting prostitution for gain, and two counts of controlling prostitution for gain. British authorities also confiscated hundreds of thousands of dollars from their bank accounts.

Raymond's group has called on the United States to revise its own rules for dealing with traffickers, which she says are not in compliance with international law. Congress passed the Trafficking victim's Protection Act (TVPA) a few months ahead of the Palermo Protocols, and much to the activists' chagrin, included the Dutch language of "force, fraud, or coercion" that had been rejected in the Palermo Protocols.

That's why enforcement has been anemic to date. Prosecutors for the U.S. attorneys claim they can't get juries to believe the testimony of trafficked women, since the alleged victims are in the country illegally and might have initially agreed to their transport.

Raymond counters that their testimony isn't needed to demonstrate that they were forced into prostitution, since the Senate ratified the Convention on Transnational Crime after passing the TVPA.

S.F. Advocates Weigh In

Local prostitution researcher Melissa Farley concurs with Raymond.

"It's not just the kidnapping of an innocent victim in Moscow with a gun held to her head. That's just incredibly naïve."

Most trafficking scams begin

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with bogus job offers, she says, and some women are well aware that they are being smuggled into foreign countries. That doesn't mean they waive their protections against rape, kidnapping, imprisonment and forced sexual servitude. The brothel owners, guards and other handlers are all guilty of the same crime.

"Women are not just trafficked in the abstract," says Farley. "Women are trafficked into prostitution."

Dechen Tsering, of the San Francisco based Global Fund for Women, says most sex slaves come from rural areas in developing countries. "There are villages now in Nepal and in China where it's the women doing everything," she explains, and with the migration of men into the cities to find work, the villages have become more vulnerable to trafficking schemes.

Tsering, who is the Global Fund's Program Officer for Asia and Oceania, estimates that over \$7 billion is generated annually in initial sales at the first stage of

trafficking, and another \$32 billion as the women change hands from one pimp to another.

To combat the situation in the source countries, Tsering says the Global Fund has made 287 grants since 1987 worth \$3 million dollars. The group has allocated most of that money to indigenous women's organizations that incorporate anti-trafficking activities into their services.

Part of the problem lies in the wealthier countries, where a lack of conscience is responsible for sex tourism and other trafficking schemes. Tsering cites Japan as an example, explaining that many corporations have a policy of sending male executives on sex tours to Cambodia as a bonus for good job performance.

Tsering blames widespread government corruption and dependency on international banks for much of the poverty in the developing world today. "Some of the groups that we work with are trying to expose this corruption," she adds, "at great risk to them-

selves."

The international banks, which are funded by taxpayers in the United States and other industrialized countries, have traditionally functioned under the guise of international development. In reality they may be doing more harm than good. While government officials in the recipient nations benefit personally from the bank loans, the repayment schemes usually stipulate austere cuts in spending for health and human services, as well as privatizing national industries.

The latter provision allows multinational corporations to enter the country (a.k.a. globalization), and this is the trend that has been repeatedly linked to the destruction of local economies.

Advancing Prostitutes' Rights

On the local scene, San Francisco's permissive attitude towards prostitution dates back to the raucous bordello days of the Gold Rush.

It was in the 1970's that Margo St. James established the first prostitutes' rights group, called COYOTE (Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics), which has hammered for legalization ever since. COYOTE identifies itself as a member of the International Committee for Prostitutes' Rights, an umbrella organization formed in Amsterdam in 1985.

St. James also initiated the annual Hooker's Ball and ran for the Board of Supervisors twice, almost snagging a seat in 1996. More recently, she founded the St. James Infirmary, described as a peer-based occupational safety & health clinic for sex workers. The clinic is supported by the Exotic Dancers Alliance (which represents strippers and other entertainers in

COYOTE member Carol Leigh made her debut in San Francisco with the political satire of **The Adventures of Scarlot Harlot**, a one-woman play which played throughout the Bay Area in the 1980s. Leigh currently manages BAY SWAN, Bay Area Sex Workers Advocacy Network, a website which advocates on behalf of prostitutes.



Photo by Tracy Mostovoy

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North Beach) and receives funding from the San Francisco Department of Public Health.

Years earlier, COYOTE's first foray into providing social services, an agency known as CALPEP, floundered when reports surfaced that the executive director had hired her former pimp as personnel director. The agency provided AIDS education and counseling to prostitutes. During the 1980's, receiving millions of dollars from the Centers for Disease Control.

Former prostitute Norma Hotaling was one of the whistleblowers in that scandal, forming her own agency in 1993 called SAGE (Standing Against Global Exploitation). She received help from a San Francisco police officer and was eventually honored by Oprah, whose Angel Fund awarded SAGE one hundred thousand dollars.

In 2003, Senator Diane Feinstein secured an additional \$1.3 million congressional earmark for Hotaling's group. SAGE sees over 300 women and men each week and still has a long waiting list for services. The agency provides substance abuse programs, mental health counseling and vocational training to prostitutes, as well as medical services in conjunction with the Tom Wadell clinic.

Hotaling says many of her clients are women in their thirties and forties who have been "aged out" of the trade, and now find themselves without other job skills.

She has testified before the House Monetary Trade Committee and the Helsinki Commission on the subject of trafficking, and was a featured speaker at the American Psychological Association's annual convention a few years ago.

Since Hotaling spent years revolving between the streets and jail, it's not surprising that her philosophy regarding the sex trade

diverges from that of the cocktail party-hopping St. James and other pro-sex activists agitating for legalization. The movement, according to Hotaling, is much smaller than people realize.

"So that whole camp has created a politically correct way of thinking about prostitution," she said in an interview ten years ago (with this reporter). "And then

"The DMSC Collective in India receives millions of dollars a year for AIDS prevention from Bill Gates. This group of mostly women pimps promote legal prostitution while they control a multi-brothel prostitution/trafficking complex that houses 60,000 women and girls in Kolkata. Pimping other women is one way to get out of prostitution."

Melissa Farley, writing in *The Nation*, August 2005.

I came along, and I think have been raining on their parade ever since."

Despite the differences between the two factions, both sides agree the treatment of prostitutes at the hands of law enforcement needs improvement. Kathleen Kim, a teaching fellow at Stanford Law School, represented some of the 120 trafficked women arrested in a federal raid in the Sunset District in 2004.

"Basically the clients are

manhandled," she says, explaining that such operations have the effect of re-traumatizing the victims. All the women's personal belongings are removed in an effort to "preserve the integrity of the crime scene."

The women themselves are hled on immigration charges, though not in jail.

Kim believes the feds would accomplish more by establishing a relationship of trust and cooperation with foreign prostitutes in advance of the raids. In place of heavy-handed prosecutorial zeal, a more humanitarian approach might in the end yield stronger cases against the suspects.

One Shelter from the Storm

There's only one housing alternative in the city for recovering and victimized prostitutes, and that's one of five in the nation, collectively providing less than a hundred beds.

SAFEHOUSE opened in 1998, housing ten women, and Debra Salan said her organization still spends considerable time generating private contribution, since 11% of its government funding has been cut in the last three years. Under the Care Not Cash program of Mayor Newsom, homeless women, including prostitutes, are eligible for lodging in city-funded

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For more information:

Coalition Against the Trafficking in Women catwinternational.org

Global Fund for Women globalfundforwomen.org

Prostitution Research and Education prostitutionresearch.com

SAGE sagesf.org

BaySwan bayswan.org

Chron. Reporter Accused of "Ruining the Party" with Four-Part Series on Sex Slavery

Last November, Meredith May finished work on a four-part series examining sex slavery as it played out among San Francisco's 90-plus massage parlors, as well as in South Korea, which she visited in early 2006.

Running on the front page of the *San Francisco Chronicle* last October, May's story tracked the odyssey of a young woman who was trafficked into the United States, eventually landing into a state of "debt bondage" at a Geary Street brothel.

"It really touched a lot of nerves," May says of the series, which generated over a million hits on the newspaper's website. About 500 bloggers were also posting comments within the first week.

During her visit to South Korea, May observed an unexpected level of materialism among young Koreans. "The pressure to look rich

is outlandish," she says, and young girls are going to great lengths, in some cases prostitution, to get the money they need to buy a pair of



S.F. Chronicle Staff Reporter
Meredith May

American sneakers or a Louis Vuitton handbag.

Back in San Francisco, May followed a team of inspectors from the Department of Public Health, the

City Attorney's office, the Department of Building Inspection, the police and fire departments, and Mayor Newsom himself as they made unannounced visits to five alleged brothels.

At one stop, the team got no further than the lobby before they found a man having sex with a masseuse on the couch.

Of some 400 emails May received from readers, about half said they were moved by the story. Among the other half were regular customers of the city's massage circuit, who claimed May was "ruining the party" by stirring up so much controversy. The series also stimulated emotions within the Korean community, with about half of those writing in thanking her for bringing the issue out from under the rug. The other half accused her of stereotyping Asian culture.

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Single Room Occupancy hotels, known as SROs. However, because these facilities operate on the harm reduction model (i.e. allowing residents to take drugs in their rooms), women often become targets of violence and other predatory behavior at these locations. While the city is in the process of creating a woman-only SRO residence in the south of market area, that building will house only a very small number of applicants.

Salan would like to see SAFEHOUSE acquire a larger facility that provides transitional housing to 30-40 women, while converting the current 5-bedroom family residence into a long-term alternative for women who are suffering serious trauma from repeated or devastating sexual assaults. She

notes that about a third of her clients never recover from their ordeals, and placing them in more permanent assisted living situations has been a real challenge.

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