

Why Men Should Support the Decriminalization of Sex Work

Men who purchase sexual services are not likely to want consensual adult sex work to be a crime. However, all men should support the decriminalization of sex work for the following reasons:

Safer Societies

Where sex work has been decriminalized, there have been fewer reports of violence against women, rape, and STI transmission. Decriminalization also allows vulnerable people to access more help from government services and law enforcement. Sex workers and clients are able to report crimes committed against them, which makes all of our communities safer.¹

Existential Rights

No matter how someone feels about another person's choices, freedom is a fundamental principle of modern humanity – especially for those living in true, contemporary democracies. Our shared values include allowing individuals to have self-determination as long as they don't harm others. A society that prohibits consensual adult activities is not a free society.

Moral Consistency

Nearly all men have watched pornography at some point in time.² Presumably, most men don't think that pornography should be banned; 67 percent of American men aged 18-49 think pornography is morally acceptable.³ The U.S. Supreme Court protects pornography as freedom of speech – which makes sense legally and rationally. Is paying another consenting adult for sex really more ethically questionable than watching someone being paid by a third party to have sex on camera?

Honest Transactions

The adage “everyone pays for sex one way or another” exists for a reason. In the dating world, many people pay for a date with the desire that it will lead to sex. Perhaps fewer hearts would be broken if people were legally allowed to buy and sell sexual activities. Unfortunately, when the transaction becomes explicitly stated, it is demonized and outlawed.

¹Lucy Platt, Pippa Grenfell, Rebecca Meiksin, et al., “Associations Between Sex Work Laws and Sex Workers' Health: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Quantitative and Qualitative Studies,” *PLOS Medicine* 15, no. 12 (December 11, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1002680>.

²Jonathan Liew, “All Men Watch Porn, Scientists Find,” *Telegraph*, December 2, 2009, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/sex/6709646/All-men-watch-porn-scientists-find.html>.

³Andrew Dugan, “More Americans Say Pornography Is Morally Acceptable,” Gallup, June 5, 2018, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/235280/americans-say-pornography-morally-acceptable.aspx>.

Disentanglement from Sex Trafficking

Public discourse and media representations lead people to believe that most women engaged in prostitution are victims of sex trafficking. However, most people who offer sexual services for money are choosing to do so.⁴ In order to stop the terrible crime of human trafficking, it needs to be disentangled from consensual adult sex work. Decriminalization takes sex work out of the black market. Clients should have peace of mind knowing that they are paying for a service that is being willingly and legally sold to them.

Destigmatization

Proponents of the prohibition of sex work villainize clients and sex workers. Clients are characterized as creeps, or worse yet, rapists. Sex workers and clients are shamed and dehumanized. More than one in ten men have explicitly paid for sex at least once in their lives.⁵ People do not deserve to be stigmatized for their choice to engage in commercial sex.

Gender Equality

Feminists who advocate prohibition are aligned with patriarchal, puritan interests. Real feminists understand that men and women are free to do with their bodies as they choose. The quest for equality among the sexes is inversely related to eliminating laws about bodily autonomy, including prostitution.

Health and Wellness

Sensual touch is a fundamental part of the human experience and individual well-being. There are people with physical or mental disabilities or other impairments that hinder them from finding a sexual partner without an explicit transactional arrangement. When it is a voluntary arrangement, people deserve not to be stigmatized or criminalized for engaging with the sex industry.

Privacy

Privacy is a fundamental American right. It is impossible to prohibit adult consensual prostitution without invading the personal privacy of citizens. Outlawing the activity encroaches on one's private choices, and worse, it enables law enforcement to invade people's privacy. We should not have laws that allow the state to spy on us in an effort to see what we are doing sexually behind closed doors, or online, with other consenting adults.

⁴"Understanding Sex Work in an Open Society," Open Society Foundations, accessed July 14, 2020, <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/explainers/understanding-sex-work-open-society>.

⁵Martin A. Monto and Christine Milrod, "Ordinary or Peculiar Men? Comparing the Customers of Prostitutes With a Nationally Representative Sample of Men," *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 58, no.7 (July 2014), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624X13480487>.