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## **Women in the Sex Trade: Complexities of Employment and Oppression**

**Shamita Das Dasgupta**

**October 21, 2015**

Good afternoon everyone. This is Diane at Praxis International. I will moderate the session today. We are happy to welcome you. This is our first ALC keynote for our new class. This is the last keynote for class J who is celebrating their graduation tomorrow. In between those two classes we also have classes K and L. Thank you for joining us. Women in the sex trade complexities of employment and oppression. Prostitution has long been a target of anti-violence of women's activism. But the moral in sexual behaviors and experiences of women who engage in sex for money occur on a broad spectrum making it difficult to understand, research and to fight prostitution and trafficking. What are the divisions between anti-and pro-prostitution feminists? How do issues of survival, agency, violence and human rights intersect in the debates around prostitution? And what does all of this mean for our social change advocacy, we will be exploring those questions and more in today's keynote webinar. Before we continue, let me invite Liz to give some webinar reminders.

Hello everyone. I am delighted that you could join us today. I think this topic is fascinating. Before our speaker begins, I will just touch upon a couple of details to help ensure that you have a good experience on today's webinar. I believe that there will be at least a few people participating by telephone only on the session without being logged into the webinar. If that happens to be the case for you come a remember that your phone line will be muted. The way you can pass along your questions today will be to send an email to [liz@praxisinternational.org](mailto:liz@praxisinternational.org) for the rest of us who are logged into the webinar, you will see the PowerPoint

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has a funny fonts today. I apologize for that. I want to let you know that if you prefer to have a copy of the PowerPoint yourself it will display properly and you can just send a note to my email and I will get that to you. You will all be mindful about the content and provide the proper citation if you happen to use any of that information. Aside from that, I will remind you to use the chats box in either the public tab for the private tab if there is something you would like to chat and any point during our session. Let's start with just some hellos. It is a friendly way to begin a session. It is always nice to see who was on the line and what the weather might be like where you are calling from. If you get disconnected by telephone or webinar, rejoin it through your original process. Within a day or so this keynote will be posted to the ALC class webpage. That is all I have for now. I am going to turn the session back to you.

Thank you so much. You will recognize our speaker's name and her voice. She is usually the moderator. She is also participated in the intro webinars for new classes. So you would have heard her on that. Those of you in classes J and K met her in person at the community at the same -- advocacy training. She is a cofounder of [ Indiscernible ] the first ended -- organization to focus on violence on South Asian women. She is also a partner in the advocacy learning Center. She is the founding board president of Praxis as well. In addition to being a teacher, writer on that mother and grandmother, she is the author of five books including body evidence, intimate violence against South Asian women in America, mothers for sale, and the globalization and gestational surrogacy in India. Finally, she is a sister advocate in our work and movement engaged in the struggle alongside us to end violence against women. So welcome to you Shameta. So happy you are here with us today.

Hello. Thank you so much Diane and welcome to all of you. Thank you for joining our talk today. I think this is going to be an interesting one and a different one, not just for the topic, but also the format. We are hoping that we will have

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conversation . A number of feminist advocates are on the line. So we should have a lively discussion on this. I just want to start with locating myself in this work. I have been a lifelong advocate , and I have been in this country for as long as -- I don't want to date myself. A very long time let's say. I started going back to India, which is my -- the country where I was born and lived for a few years, I started going back basically to see and be with my family and also to see what is going on There. Once I began to connect with feminist organizations There and organ -- and advocacy organizations, I found that there is a huge movement and a very vital movement that is going on around women who are engaged in the sex trade. My first introduction to this was, I went -- I went with them, one of the group, to a very old what is called red light district. Eyewitness -- I had witnessed very young girls as young as eight years old standing in rows on very narrow streets and smoking cigarettes and trying to be enticing. These are babies really. I was horrified and shocked . I started becoming involved and every time I would go back to India I worked with this particular group which is known as [ Indiscernible ]. You know this group already because you have probably received the folders about young girls who live there in their shelter homes. So you have a little bit of instruction to them. I started working with this group and started going to these red light districts over and over again. And I'm going to say red light district because I do not have a better phrase for it. I started working there and interviewing women and just talking to them and asking them what is going on with them and their allies. This group -- this girl for a number of years and I decided maybe I should do some formal interviews and save a document these. From which came the book after nearly 4 years of interviewing and maybe a year of writing which is now known as mothers for sale. That is the basis of my story. That is how I am located. Later on after I wrote that one, I decided that I needed to write another one on sexual health because most of these women were in deep distress with their health and did not know how to protect themselves or what was going on. There was no sexual health care for them and they were very vulnerable. I wrote together with our bodies and ourselves, I wrote a book so that women can have them. That is the background of my story. That is the start

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of my interest in this. Let me just go a little bit further from that. Much of what I will talk about is how do we see prostitution? At what is going on there? Because most of us advocates the knee-jerk reaction is that it is violence against women and that is the way it should be perceived, which I completely agree with, but what do we do about that? So let's start with the media. Most of us have the idea that -- most of us have ideas about prostitution from the media. The popular media present images of the sex trade and women who are engaged in it as a fun event, a fun job. In the 1970s a woman named Xavuer Holland there -- Hollander wrote a book called happy Hooker and it later came out as a movie. The idea was that prostitution is fun and adventurous and a way of satisfying women's actuality, and much of it was like a byproduct of the feminist movements freeing of women's sexuality. It could be anything. But there was something else that was going on there. That it was a good way for women to make a lot of money. But women engaged in sex trade will get out of it when they meet missed her rights -- Mr. Right and they will live happily ever after. There is very little emphasis or attention paid to the stigma that was associated or the violence that was associated with that. Most of this was overlooked as or dismiss Mary's summarily as -- dismissed very summarily as uptight society and conservative ideas of controlling women's sexuality. So of course the idea was women are going to have fun and this is one of the ways of having it, however, society tries to curb this. And you know that from all the pictures that you see. I think one is leaving Las Vegas and the others are from pretty women -- pretty woman and another one which is the Beverly Hills Madam. and she is drinking and making a lot of money and so on. Even though she gets caught it does not seem like she gets too bad a deal. So that has been basically the experience that is portrayed in the media. Interestingly, all the media does that, but is that the reality? And from that comes the idea which is the

-- that how do we recognize who is a "prostitute". I will say the word because most of us don't want to use that and -- but I will say prostitute at this time just to debate the word and challenge it in different ways. Let's think about who is a prostitute. How do we define and know somebody is a prostitute if we see them.

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In less they are -- the less they are prepared -- so who is a prostitute? In fact, if we think about it and most of the pro-prostitution feminists have written about from the middle-class standpoint and a good woman standpoint, we should be asking, are these women like us or anyone we know? Do we know women engaged in prostitution? Do they come to our dinner parties? What is happening? We should be asking who are these women. Where do they come from? Are they victims of a bad institution, or a willing participant? What do these women really want, and more importantly, had should -- how should general society understand them? Because often all of these things, many of the young girls and women who dress in revealing clothes are called sluts.

That is prostitute. Girls and women who behave in sexually suggestive or aggressive manners are equated with prostitutes. What about women who are -- have multiple sexual partners? What about women who accept money or exchange certain benefits for sexual partners? What if someone accepts gifts from sexual partners? Does this make them prostitutes? I think that is a bit of an issue and bit of a controversy. In almost every language, there are references to women, beautiful women as objects of desire. Often they are seen as wars -- . So what does that mean? If all women can be viewed as prostitutes and who are these women? Diane, we had thought we could talk about this a little bit. If you have a question or should we go on to the next?

Either way. It is so interesting to me just around the discourse of this and how it gets framed, and I think about the mainstreaming of some of the language related to prostitution. Using and "ho" and "pimp my ride" the way that had has -- it has become part of our discourse. Particularly, thinking about the use of ho and young women in particular using it when addressing other young women or girls seemingly referring to anyone who is perceived as being sexual or "to sexual"

Or even sometimes a dominant male identifies women or girls he is having sex with as my hos. what does that mean? How do we differentiate that from who is

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a prostitute and who with someone being identified in society as a prostitute? The demarcation becomes blurred at times. It is almost like every woman, every girl can be a prostitute. It is interesting. I do have an answer -- I do not have an answer at all, but just the idea of how society seems, the drop goal -- patriarchal society views all women as that unless we fit into a particular definition that it puts out as "be good woman" I look at some of the definitions laid out here, to sell services or promiscuous. Two things that seem to be important is promiscuity and selling service. Both of those seem to be identified or mark a prostitute. However, if you can't deconstruct -- if you can't deconstruct those, what does promiscuous mean? How many sexual partners must you have to become promiscuous? And what does selling service mean? Does it only mean money or could it be for drugs -- food or drugs? >> I am thinking of a friend of mine who talked about getting a new kitchen in her house. Sleeping with her husband because part of the reward was then getting to have her kitchen redone.

That even is more scary right? Because in a sense what we are saying is that the married woman, a woman who is married, can also be put in the category of prostitute because she is exchanging sex for something else. Whatever the benefits are. And it could be protection, support, any of those. There is an exchange going on here. Again, that might end up being -- put her in that category. Very interesting Diane. Let me move to the next one and give you a definition.

Prostitution definition. Certain factors appear essential to the existence of prostitution. Especially a moral code that frowns on certain promiscuous practices by females but tolerates a different standard for males. And at the same time rewards those women either by money or other means to either choose or are forced to violate the social codes. That is -- to meet that is an interesting quote. You can be a prostitute, but you actually benefit from it. Those benefits may not be available to people who stay within the goodness code of society. By the way, both researchers have done a lot of work on prostitution. So here are a few facts. What this is showing is that, look at the number of prostitutes. We are talking

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about anywhere between 40 million, look at the number of prostitutes. We are talking about anywhere between 40,000,040 2 million prostitutes in the world. We're talking about

a really almost a couple of small countries that could have fallen from the definition of good women. 40 million women. And mostly they are young, 13 through 25. And 80% is female. Pimps are very important and even in the US it has been estimated that 1 million women are involved in prostitution. Yet, the only state that has legalized prostitution is Nevada, and in the last few days we know of Lamar Odom through -- who went into a coma in a brothel in Nevada. This percentage to me is even more interesting. 9.1% of men in the US confessed to have paid for sex with a prostitute. That's pretty large.

There is a question about one of these statistics. What do they grouped -- do they grouped children with adults?

Yes. These statistics are readily available.

But in terms of not separating out those below the age of consent or children from adults in that statistic.

Interestingly, what they are saying, that happens to be, and they are not saying who is being pressured or sold, they are just saying that three quarters of the 42 million happens to be between the ages of 13 and 25.

I would think age of consent laws, they can vary globally.

They are not actually saying what the source of this is. That -- they are not saying these people are forced or not force. That is the group. We will go into that a little bit later. I know -- I can see Jenny saying that she has never seen this that. -  
- Statistic. I think if you Google it you can find it. You can go to this foundation

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site . >> I missed when you were talking about the definitions, and I think it seems really shocking, but I know in our day to day work we talk to women all the time that fit the definition of prostitution but don't think of themselves as prostitutes. So women who -- what I was talking to last week was saying she is standing waiting for the bus and a guy came by and said you could look -- you look like you could use a ride and she said yes and then when he was driving her somewhere he kept asking about [ Indiscernible ] with a signal to him that she was financially vulnerable.

Your phone is really talking out -- not working.

It has some distortion.

Okay. I am on my landline.

Now it is okay. But something happened before. It is okay now. >> I think we interrupted you. You were talking about someone asking for bus money?

She accepted a ride and he said, could you use some extra money? And she said sure and so she accepted money from them for sex and it's an example of the many women that we talk to on a regular basis to -- who would not think of themselves as prostitutes, but I think are included in this number.

Okay. That makes sense.

I think it seems huge, but I think on a daily basis there are women who are trading sex for money or drugs or something that may fit that, be part of the 42 million, but who may not be the stereotypical example that people think of or someone who even thinks of herself as doing -- being a prostitute.

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Right. That is what makes this question, and we talked about it a little bit, exactly what defines a prostitute. Is it a clear definition. We talked about that a little. That may go to the next one. One of the things that you brought out just now is that there is no monolithic prostitute or prostitution. This is also something that I found out in my work, that there are many -- the most visible and the most work that is being done in research and with advocacy work is at the street level. Women who are engaged in the sex trade at the street level. That is where most of the work is happening. But there are women who are engaged in sex in the upper class, very highly paid call girls, and women who are flying prostitutes which means homemakers that make money on the side or the day something and they might engage in prostitution for a little while and there also men who engage in prostitution. There he interestingly, the majority -- men who are engaged in prostitution are mainly also serving men rather than women. Of course there are women who might engage in buying sex for men, but the majority are still men. Why do women enter the trade is a big question and always was for me. I also have to say that I have worked mainly with women at the street level. So what I saw was mainly compulsion, coercion, financial coercion or family coercion or something else. Or they were supplementing family income. But they were all at the street level. I have not really worked with women who are entering it for other reasons. For example, I knew about it from other researchers, some of them enter for adventure or fun or they tend to be able to travel because they are engaged in exchanging sex for certain benefits. Or advancement, which happens to be -- a lot in areas where there are Taurus -- pour risks -- tourists. they may engage in prostitution for immigration, particularly where there are military installations. Western military where they are engaged in what's called R&R. that is one of the ways of saying prostitution. Countries where foreign tourism is high and there always seems to be high demand for prostitutes. For example, often governments depend on the income of the sex trade. For example, Thailand. It is not openly supported, but there is an unspoken support for it. We can think about many other reasons. You said just

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now that -- do you want a few extra bucks and this woman said why not. These are little pieces that come out of that.

The other thing that we see in the United States on a regular basis is around entertainment, certainly the sports industry. We know when the big sports events happen in particular, like the big football games, that there is an increase in sex tourism in the United States. >> In the United States and people out of the United States going to other countries. Western countries particularly going to other countries. For sex tourism. Both are high. So here is a basic debate. Is a prostitution or sex work? This is the crux of the whole debate. The people who say this is prostitution because prostitution for being a prostitute is a permanent change in self identity. Whatever you are doing, that is defining who you are. They also feel that women are victimized, therefore, they should be called prostituted women. Most feminists and activists go with that. They agree this is the way it should be labeled and talked about. But -- this is not actually contradicting or dressing the idea that this is sex work. Selling sex is not real work, it is not actually work, it is dehumanizing and because it is sex it is something different than just work. Because it is something intimate. Selling sex is dehumanizing the individual and it is really defined by patriarchal norms. Who is selling and buying are very patriarchal. That piece I'm going to go into it in a little more detail later. Let's look at the other side. Sex work. Who says this is sex work? >> -- Most of the women I have worked with told me absolutely clearly that I must identify them as sex workers and the trade as sex work. Being a lifelong feminist activist, my idea was that is not what I want to say. But I had to because again, as a feminist, whose voice do I listen to? Whose voices do I amplify as an advocate. That is what I need to do. So I stayed with the -- using the term sex work and sex worker. But most of these women say this is an occupation. It has got nothing to do with my identity. I am a woman, a mother, somebody's daughter. And it is just that I am selling sex and it makes me some money, but it is not my identity. It is an occupation. They also said something

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that was interesting. This is something that I do because of "choice" this is recognizing a woman's agency. Really interestingly, Manny say that -- if women are free agents selling sex they can make a contract. On like a wife. They cannot make a negotiated contract of the than getting married and exchanging benefits for sex. But sex workers make it every day. With every individual . It is a contract. You pay me this much and this is what I do. It also challenges the patriarchal standards of what is good and bad in women . And the last one that I think is very interesting, the last bullet point, is it critiques the social position of girls and women in society. If women feel that there is no other choice for me, I don't have a choice and this is the only way I can make money or I can make enough money or this is a viable occupation for me, it tells us something about society that does not offer women viable jobs. So this is an interesting debate that has happened and gone on between people who are completely against sex working and in -- people who say this is an occupation just as much as carpentry or anything else. If I teach, I am selling my brain. So it is no different.

It is so interesting to me. Because one of the things that makes me think of, if this is what society values me for any way as a sexual object , as you say with your brain or some other thing, then I am going to capitalize on that. And that is what I will do for my work. >> I think it's a really interesting position to take. I am not convinced that that is so. I feel very uncomfortable about that, but I see where this argument is coming from. Although I do think that when you teach or do carpentry, there is a skill needed. You have developed a particular skill to do something. Whereas, prostitution or selling sex needs nothing else but the structure of a female body. And to me , how can I equate carpentry and sex work. I don't know how to come to a conclusion about that. It is a difficult piece for me at this time.

The thing is, it acknowledges the context of society in which is happening. Society is saying this is my value, so I am not involved in trying to change that context, it is what it is, and I should be able to use that in some way. >> Women

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are also saying , the fact that women engage in prostitution, it is a critique of society. We will have to think about that. It is worrisome to me.

Ideally, there would be all sorts of options and if this was a choice within the spectrum of options, like I could become an attorney or do this, then that would be a very different way of looking at it. >> I thought that , let's look at what happened in history. What has been happening. The idea of heterosexuality and prostitution are both institutions in society. We really need to look at it and see what is happening. The history does show that male sexuality throughout history , ancient times to now, has always needed a social space to display and prostitution has been the basic social space. If you look at old cultures there is something different. We're talking about trees -- Greece etc. All of these are -- what would be considered now prostitution or prostitutes in these old cultures. There is a very big difference because most of these groups had to develop a lot of skills. Skills that were not open to the majority of women in society was open to women who actually did not go by the traditional routes and became a geisha. They could sing and dance and many of them actually were poets. They could read and write, which was not allowed to women -- too good women in their societies. So there was actually a very different kind of roles these women played. They also are not necessarily engaged in sex with their clients. A lot of clients and seems -- it seems came to them to engage in actually a conversation. To engage in debates with an intellectual of the opposite sex. Not that this is always. Women had the right it seems to say no and to design their own contract. That social space completely changed with colonization and the world wars that happen. The colonization mainly because as Western civilizations started going into countries of color , what is known now as Third World countries, at those times those are the countries that were rich in many ways. That is where they started using women and using women as objects. Part of the way was to degrade the whole community was to use women as objects. The same thing happened with World War II. Women were seen as vessels or ways of just unburdening mail tension -- men's tension . That space completely changed so

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that the way women engaged in prostitution change. In modern society it has been reformulated again. Capitalism and heterosexuality I think have become very important. That is, what we know now as capitalist hierarchy, patriarchy, male power is about what we can buy -- buy. It is a purchase of commodities and that includes women. If you have money, you can buy something. That is one of the reasons that objects do not have access to the same resources, the money. It is one group that has the money back and purchase objects, but the objects don't have equal access to the mode of purchase. That is part of it. The other part of it is normal sexuality for men it is exploration and adventure and doing something, but for woman -- women it has been constrained and it is confined. Modern framing has actually made women who are adventurous and want to do many things are want to experience many things, many ways of their own sexuality, automatically become defined as prostitutes. The same thing with marriage. Mail definition of sexuality, and a marriage women cannot negotiate contracts, they cannot negotiate how sex can happen or not happen. If you think about it, marital rape -- marital rape has only very recently been acknowledged in this country, yet how many men have sexually assaulted their wives within marriage have been prosecuted. It is almost never. Women actually do not have the agency and power. To control their lives and sexualities within marriage.

>> This is making me think of a woman that I spoke to this morning though -- whose husband batters her. She can trade sex for not being victimized with other kinds of physical violence, which then makes me think of this experience that I had a few years ago. I went to go on vacation -- a West African country for vacation and they were shipping, it was one of the major ports for the slave trades from -- that what between West Africa, England, the Caribbean, and the United States. Until the mid-19th century. This is a huge industry. The horrors of how that all worked were newly revealed to me. Seeing it in person had an enormous impact because there was a very small number of white European men and like 40 men who would come into the ports and build these enormous sports -- -- and had firearms and could please great numbers of people and would then choose certain women. Even though they called them the governor who ran

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this operation, Kiewit choose certain women -- he would choose certain women it would say that's the person who should be brought into my bedroom and they had a special trapdoor where they would bring women into this guys bedroom. If she did it agreed to have sex with them, they would put her out into the courtyard and just leave her there to die in the heat as an example to the other women. So this trade for avoiding worst violence, which is like the woman I was talking to this morning, she makes that calculation for herself on a regular basis. If I have sex with them, then he won't beat me up.

Powerful story. I am trying to keep a little bit of room at the end so we can have a discussion on what we do about this as advocates. What should be our position and how do we work on this? Just a very quick theoretical position on prostitution. The first one is called radical feminism, the people who promoted this is [ Indiscernible ] and according to them, all prostitution is about male sexuality. And the inequity of socioeconomic power between the genders. Men actually in prostitution one of the things that is seen is men have entitlement to access women's bodies it will in whatever way they want to. So female sexuality and prostitution is constructed by men and managed by men. Even though, I can see Kerry is saying about madams, -- Amanda is talking about madams. We think of -- most of the time the madams are very small time managers or they are carrying on under somebody's guidance. They are making money for somebody else. They are -- there are madams, but they tend to be small time. The big money and the big trades are dominated by men, particularly, the sex trafficking that happens. Female sexuality and prostitution is for male desires and has nothing to do with the women's realities or the realities women face in prostitution. A are quite different. Women in prostitution have little choice, and because of that and most of them are trafficked into prostitution, we have to consider it as violence against women. That is important for us to recognize. With others the Reformation focus is, there are bad things and there are -- though should go out, some women engaged willingly, there is no monolithic prostitution, so some engage in it willingly and others are forced, but we need

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to stop the exploitation or violence against women in prostitution, but allow women to have agency to choose what they need to choose. The third position is, yes all points of entry -- there are different points of entry but all are legitimate and leave people alone. Interestingly, all three positions have some recommended solutions. Radical feminist say there is no option . Abolishing prostitution is the only option. Bring about social change and and the idea that human beings can buy other human beings -- sex. Information on the other side says exploitation must and but provide women with supported laws and protection, etc. and leave them alone. But the -- at the same time create opportunities for women. If some women want to leave prostitution they are able to do so. The legitimate occupation is again, don't do much about it but provide support and protective legislation. All of them, every position does not consider prostitution of young girls, it is always considered that girls under the age of consent, that as violence against him. -- Them. But for the rest, the third position says take out all the and stop all the wrongs that have happened, coercion and exploitation etc. and hands off otherwise. >> There was a question earlier that just came back up for me. Is there a United Nations position on this? Hasn't been taken up under human rights?

>> I know in trafficking there is a strong stance, but that is probably a question for another time.

You are not aware whether the UN has a stance on prostitution?

It's [ Indiscernible ] a bit. The best that they have done is to say that it should be decriminalized . That is how much I know. We will talk about the criminalization versus other positions.

There has been some interesting conversation among participants around the intersections of this with gender oppression. Good conversation going on.

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I wish I could see all of it. The first position is what's called capital position which is a coalition against trafficking on women. That is abolition. This cannot exist. Whereas, the other one which is global alliance against trafficking in women is a second one which is a reaffirmation position. The third one started in the US and Australia, coyote, call off your old tired ethics. Women have a right to sell sex like any other marketable skills so leave them alone. Make sure they are not exploited or hurts, but nothing more than that. So again, if you look at -- and this I know Diane you actually put around quotes around sex positive and negative. The position one which is the coalition against trafficking, is that it has to go. Prostitution has to go and it is gender violence. They have been named sex negative feminist because they never consider the idea of sexual pleasure of women with agency and so on. Whereas position number two and number three, I have a feeling feminist would disagree with that. They would say we actually consider women sexuality and that is why we're saying it. Because this is not about sexuality it's about negative sexuality. Position number two and three on the other hand is that there must be diversity. Feminist have to accept diversity and sexuality. Let's not go one way or the other. Let's stop violence and exploitation and let's make it possible to -- for women to make decisions. That is a pretty difficult situation given the gendered inequities and violence that are already embedded in societies. So the crux of the debate is that little fish going up on its own. Free will. Do women have free will to engage in prostitution? And it is kind of a heavy text, but the biggest question and this comes from an early feminist rising, do subjugated people have free will to choose anything? Do they have free will? And if we consider women's position as oppressed, than do women have free will to choose prostitution? The second question I think is more critical. This is something I actually encountered myself when I was talking to women in sex trades, that they all talked about, most of them started this work or were sold into the sex trade as very young girls. But the ones, a large number of them are in their 30s and 20s and say I don't want to leave this. This is where I make my money. So a woman has -- who has been sold or forced into prostitution and later decides to remain in prostitution, is she freely choosing

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prostitution as her job? Can she do that? No what it -- what about somebody who has been already marked in society as a prostitute? There is a lot of stigma attached to her. There is a lack of alternative on living in society. A community that is poor, how do she choose? Does she have free will to choose? What kinds of pressures are on her to make her not choose appropriately? So the free will question becomes really complicated as we go through this. In terms of class and race and sexuality. Where does free will emerge in these situations? Can we make informed free will decisions? All of these are very complicated questions that need to be figured out, and how do we do that becomes my question. Do any of you have any ideas?

Of how we --

Do women have free will to choose? [ Indiscernible -- multiple speakers ] >> I can't help but go back to the roots of our social change advocacy when I think about this. How -- we're really talking about subverting all systems of oppression in order to be able to answer any of these questions. They are impossible to answer in the current circumstances. And I am thinking that, before that happens, they are still looking at it as a monolithic and it may not be the answer either. For different people, there may be different answers. >> There was some conversation coming up about what it might look like if the system of oppression didn't exist. Would there be a way that this might look different if that were the case? If it were not so tied into capitalism and patriarchy and male supremacy, but the fact that in our current system those all exists, is there a way that prostitution or sex work can exist within that in a way that is in fact empowering?

This is a question I really struggle with. Can women in the condition that we live in with lack of opportunities and violence everywhere, how do we say that we have a free will to choose anything.

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>> Everything -- [ Indiscernible ] I have friends who have jobs they are not passionate about and not connected to the human spirit, but they have the job because they get paid and they are fine with that.

And as women we tend to have jobs that we are subjugated to men anyway. I was actually in a meeting earlier and I got a disturbing --

You're breaking up again.

The news in our local CPS office basically all of the women doing the work, all of the people who are doing the day-to-day work are women, and the two bosses are men.

That is true for almost everything. Everyplace you go. This is exactly the crux of the problem.

When I think about domestic workers in that circumstance and undocumented women, and the exploitation that is part of that and the lack of alternatives.

And often it is associated with violence. So is marriage by the way. That is what we work with. Marriage does not guarantee you safety from anyplace. So how do we -- [ Indiscernible ]. What it does, it shows how rampant violence is in prostitution. And so it is in other areas of life also. That I think is quite telling.

I think there is this idea that -- [ Indiscernible -- multiple speakers ] that -- I think this ties into some of the Reformation that if there was a way, if we were all

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engaged or if there was work being -- widespread work around Reformation, would this be as rampant?

Right. I don't know. It's hard to visualize.

Right. And we don't know. But what their lease be some sort of -- at least be some sort of records. I know we see women on a regular basis to in one way or another are engaging with our programs because they have identified themselves or been identified as women who have been sexually assaulted, and then when law enforcement gets involved and they hear that the woman has traded sex for drugs, they kind of have this difficult time wrapping their heads around how they could be great -- raped. so if you are in any way doing sex were, -- work, you are setting yourself up in a way for these other forms of violence and how that is just so widely accepted. In some ways, at least now through our movement, while obviously the oppression of women still exists, at least there is this awareness that for the most part men are not going around saying IP that my wife -- beat up my wife . Is there a way that it would not be so overt. It is so overt -- police officers will not say to us at this point I hope that they understand that this guy is beating up his wife, but that it is not against the law or there's nothing they can do.

>> There is a policy level with what is happening where. This is a survey from policies and counties in 2009 . The country's -- Afghanistan and Denmark in Japan , Egypt, USA and Germany. Various people. All of these are involved. 39% of the country's it is completely illegal, and others there are limited legality. The same with population wide Sioux Falls and what category. 2.5 billion

illegal and so on. Here are the legal solutions that most people struggle with. One says criminalize everything. Criminalize prostitution but make sure that selling and buying of sex, those are the legal. This means that the women who are engaged in prostitution as well as the people buying it can both be

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prosecuted. Some variation is that -- to criminalize only buying sex and some say only selling sex. The other side is legalization which approves of all aspects of prostitution. Change society, human attitudes, no soliciting outside and so on, but legalize everything. Don't punish anybody for it. Sweden did something interesting. They went from partial criminalization which is buying of sex became illegal, and they talk about 80% decrease in trafficking. That is a dramatic decrease. But I am not sure what happened when that happened. How do they engage women in occupations and those questions. The other part of criminalization, criminalize the core layer is -- the trafficking and sex tourism and sexual assault. On the legalization side, don't legalize it but decriminalize it. Make it into it the most a misdemeanor. Don't do any criminal penalty. Everybody talks about criminalizing child prostitution. That is something there is no controversy about. It is not at all clear to me in reading which works best. Sweden is a pretty interesting community, but social circumstances are very different and the socioeconomic condition of the country is different and I am not sure how that works -- would work in other countries.

Can I go back to your comment about Sweden. Is it an example of the intersections with capitalism for example? What makes Sweden different in a way that would potentially not make it a model?

Eco-Sweden -- because Sweden has a very thriving economy. It is a very confined area, very little -- low poverty rate, low immigration so there are not many people who are coming into the country. The population is pretty stable. And the jobs and everything else. There a good -- very good social benefits. Healthcare etc. is universal. All of these things provide some kind of safety net for people. This is not true for other countries where there is no safety net to support individuals. The poverty rate is higher and population is higher and mobile. It is very difficult to equate the same social conditions or the model in other social conditions that are not similar to Sweden. That is a problem.

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This is making me think of the quote around changing the conditions that give rise to it.

Right. This is exactly what this is all about. What do we do? How do we work around -- let's assume we want to end prostitution, what do we do about this? This is where I'm going to invite you to talk about it. One of the things we do know, we need to and trafficking which is the supply pathway to track -- prostitution. There is no controversy about that. It is definitely violence. Because women often don't know or are sold. There is no choice and all of this. But what about the other pieces? How do we make occupations that support women and that provide women with viable jobs where women are comfortable. Even now, the main responsibility of childcare is with women. I note that I talked to women to are in the sex trade and say if I work in a place, first of all I make very little money, then -- right now I can choose the time a work and -- I work and if my child is sick I do not have to work that particular day, how do I do that if I have a job that is low-paying and I am going to lose it or have very long hours, there is no childcare available to me. How do I -- we need to look at financial equity at this point. That means that a particular group might have more need -- it needs not being met by the job. What about skill development and flexible timing for women are adequate parental leave -- were adequate potential -- parental leave? These are complicated questions and we cannot ask women to leave a particular "occupation" where they are able to make money and say we don't have any alternative for you but I think this is bad for you to do and you need to get out of it. Unless we can provide them with a viable occupation, how do we work around this issue. Had we and this particular problem. Because my feminist teachings come back saying that this needs to and. I don't know how to go about doing it. I would like some good discussion on that if you have time.

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We also invite participants, if you're having thoughts or reactions or insights are questions related to this, go ahead and chat that in. We say similar challenges talking about violence against women generally, which is, it is these big things that need to change to really stop it. So to save we want to create conditions in which women would be freely choosing and then deciding whether they would choose at all, prostitution as an option, if we lived in a society that had as you were describing adequate jobs and housing, what would look different. In terms of changing those conditions. It is very big to tackle. >> And I really like the slide because for me there are those speak, -- huge how do we change the entire structure of societies and then there are these pieces that feels like that -- how do we focus on the parental leave issue which is not something that I find so much on my radar, but it's such an important part of this and certainly the work be used -- please -- the workpiece if there are other options it really make sense for women, then we would have a better grasp on whether this is really a choice. Do people have free choice and agency to make that choice. So to me it gets me thinking more about, how do we think about that in our day-to-day work, not just how do we match a woman who comes into us with a job that is already out there but as a movement, how are we think about really expanding the types of work that might be available to women.

I am thinking to -- as well of a couple of things. I am a white woman, privileged middle class. I am participating in this discussion and speaking from a particular position. I have not been prostituted or been a sex worker, so when we think about the voices that we hear and are examples of the conversations with the women you talk to, and I also think about people's approach -- approaching the sometimes us harm reduction. Are we working on these long-term goals of ending oppression and providing healthcare while at the same time something like sex workers organizing. Where is that happening and in what ways and how are they being paid and who has control over that. Can these have -- can these things happen simultaneously. Or laws in other countries, is there still something we can learn from that.

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Absolutely. I think that is the issue. We need to unpack and look at and analyze everything and make strategies. What works and what does -- what does not work. How do we do that? I think those are the pieces. One of the things that we do at the advocacy learning Center is to analyze the problem. We connect and hear what is going on with women who are engaged in this. What is happening in their lives those are the pieces we have to think about. I think it is difficult . When I started working in it I thought I have new cloak -- no idea what to do with this. I still don't. I don't know where to go. I think all of us have the tendency to say, I need to do something about this. I need to talk about it, change society, change the conditions, and the best I could do was to say okay, tell the truth, tell the truth of their lives. That's the best I could do. >> It is interesting for me. It was hard and difficult. I am hoping that somebody will have this absolutely fantastic idea .

I think what you have done as well, which is bringing those were -- hearing those voices and bringing those voices forward because sometimes we are hearing that sex work is good for some women and I won't deny that there are sex workers who are saying that, but that does not negate it being harmful for many women.

Right. Particularly, sex workers are tied to trafficking and that is where women come into this. There is no doubt in my mind. And that is one of the most and this and violent pads -- ways I have seen.

We were not able to dig into the trafficking aspect of this, but perhaps in a future keynote. Thank you for sharing your knowledge and you're thinking enter questions with us. Thank you to all of you for being with us .

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Thank you everyone. I want to thank everyone for being here and sharing the time with us.

>> Thank you all and most especially to [ Indiscernible ] for posting and moderating the discussion today. And to those of you who had resources to contribute in the chat, that is always much appreciated. I will remind you that keynotes occur quarterly and the next time we will be together will be Wednesday Wednesday, January 20. So make sure that you have your next year's calendar and it is filled out with the important events that you will be attending. Until then, we will have many conversations with you, but we will close for today . Take care everybody. [ Event concluded ]