

The Truth About the Struggle for Progress: Prostitution vs. Women's Rights

by Yvonne Armenta

The truth is hard to find, but it is not impossible. There are many who do not bother to find the truth because it is too much of a challenge, but with the right resources the truth can be found. The truth is found by looking deeper into a topic of interest, coming up with a question about it, doing research and on the way evaluating the credibility of the sources. It is also important to find someone who disagrees, examine that counter claim and be open to change in opinions. There are many topics about which the truth can be difficult to find.

A topic that causes a lot of controversy but is rarely talked about is that of prostitution. When we think about the struggle that women have gone through in America, the question of whether or not real progress has been made with the way society treats women comes up. In the mid 1800's and early 1900's, women in the U.S. were struggling to be seen by society as equal. Before the 1900's women were denied essential rights that we now have today such as voting, property rights and not being allowed to gain an education past high school because no universities or colleges would accept women. Along with that, once women married, they were no longer counted as a human being; they were only represented by what their husbands were. As time passed however, a society controlled by men began to see the potential of women and how they could contribute to society. Women are now allowed to vote, they have property rights, and when they marry they have the choice of whether or not they want to take their husbands last name. Thanks to the hard work of women, modern day women have

rights that allow them to be an essential part of society. Prostitution however shows us a dark side that many refuse to acknowledge. Over time we like to think that full progress has been made, but it is obvious that as the years have passed there has been some progress made with the way that society treats women, given the fact that there are more laws that protects them, but there is definitely no full progress that has come from all these years of struggle; women, specifically in the sex industry, are viewed as toys, being victims of harassment and discrimination by society everyday.

Women who work in the sex industry are being sexually harassed and discriminated against on a regular basis. An example is the case of Johanna Breyer; she is part of the San Francisco Task Force on Prostitution and a co-founding member of Exotic Dancers Alliance, and she believes that in the sex industry women are not getting paid what they are supposed to and that being harassed is one of the many problems they face. She goes on to say, "So women are continuing to pay to work and management is continuing to profit unfairly off the women who dance" (Breyer). Breyer has personally experienced this, "I was personally sexually harassed for three and a half years while I worked at a certain club in the city..." (Breyer). There have been many attempts at a solution to the problem of pay equity and sexual harassment, but as we can see these attempts have not worked. There are those who believe that if these women ever feel like they are being discriminated against or sexually harassed, that they file a complaint of some sort, but these women should not have to do that. If full progress had been made with the way women were viewed in a society, there would be no need for it. These women are not being taken seriously and society views them as sex toys who only serve one purpose, and they fail to see that they are humans as well.

Women in the sex industry are arrested for prostitution every year, often by officers who are only there to harass them any way they can. A national arrest chart on prostitution related arrests states that in 1994 the number of arrests for prostitution was 97,600. In 2004 this number was 86,100 and the numbers have been going up and down throughout the years. Gloria Lockett who is also part of the San Francisco Task Force on Prostitution, gave a testimony in which she told her story. She was a prostitute for 18 years and in those years she had been arrested many times. She talks about one instance when she was in the streets and her friend who was also a prostitute was talking to a guy that Lockett knew was a police officer. Lockett informed her of this and her friend talked to the guy anyway and got arrested. Then a few weeks later, Gloria Lockett got arrested for pimping. She shares her opinion saying, "They [the police] harass the women on the street and they love it, and you can tell the police, why are you bothering me? Why don't you go down around the corner and bother somebody else. I'm not doing anything. You know I'm not doing anything. And they say yeah, I'd rather bother you than somebody else, because I know nothing's going to happen" (Lockett). Police officers who are supposed to be the law enforcement are the ones breaking the laws. If they do not take their jobs seriously and respect the law, then that makes others feel like they don't have to either, and they begin to think that harassing a prostitute just because they can is okay. They not only take advantage of their work situations but their social class as well because police know that these women don't have money and they are less likely to file complaints. There will never be full progress made if the law enforcement doesn't follow the laws they are meant to enforce because they believe they can get away with harassment and therefore will never see women as

other than people they can manipulate and play around with.

Women are not the only ones in the sex industry. Men are just as much part of it as women are, but because we live in a society where women are portrayed as sexually interesting, that's the only thing we focus on. In a testimonial given to The San Francisco Task Force, Vic St. Blaise says, "Unfortunately, the law does not discriminate. The police may...but male workers are no less susceptible to the law than female" (Blaise). In this testimonial, Vic St. Blaise, a male prostitute, talks about the way that society sees women as more of an easier target because they can easily be spotted. Society only focuses on female prostitution and fails to see that there are males doing the same thing. For so many years it has been only women who are most likely to work in the sex industry, and now it is also mostly associated with women, so the only ones who are more easily targeted and are victims of harassment are women prostitutes. That discrimination was supposed to be left behind.

There are many who argue that full progress has been made with the way that society treats women. They argue that women can now vote and that they are allowed to do jobs that men do. Some see this as a way of empowerment and this can be true, but to say that everything regarding the role of women in society is better, and that women can do anything they want, is false. Beyonce, for example, is known by many as a strong woman and in her song "Run the World" she says, "Girls, we run this motha (yeah) [4x] GIRLS! Who run the world? Girls [x4] who run this motha? Girls [x4] Who run the world? Girls! [x4]...My persuasion can build a nation this hour / Our love we can devour / You'll do anything for me." This gives us the illusion that full progress has been made when it comes to the way society views women, and if they are being oppressed

it is because they choose that lifestyle. It is obvious that girls do not rule the world, and as much as that may make women feel empowered, it is not the truth. If women ruled the world, prostitutes would not need to do what they do and they would not be discriminated and sexually harassed everyday by men. Having the mentality that progress with women's rights is over deters further progress from continuing.

This is the truth: Women are still oppressed in modern society, especially women in the sex industry. They are treated like they are worth nothing. Someone who simply bases their opinions on one experience would not know the truth about prostitution. To find the complete truth, one must use primary sources such as testimonies, videos and secondary sources such as newspaper articles and interviews. People have to be open to change in opinions and use the scientific method in order to ensure that their facts are true. Examining the counter claim is also an essential part of this process because if someone doesn't know the other side then they are being ignorant. Though there is progress that has been made with women's rights, like women being able to vote and having property rights there can always be more done to improve the situations of many women today. When society believes that there is no further progress to be done with a societal ill like prostitution, then we stop trying to fix the problem. This is because we start to believe that there is no problem and begin ignoring everything that's wrong. To stay grounded on reality we must understand that progress never ends and that things can always get better. There are people that have to realize the things that go on around us and the issues that happen everyday not only with prostitution but with every other societal issue.

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