

I don't know when our society became so comfortable with devaluing other people based on their choice of career – I was pretty used to thinking of Americans as people who would just as soon judge you for the color of your skin as they would take a sip of water, but the subtleties of career choice bias is surprising. It first occurred to me when I was watching *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit* and one of the crime scene investigators found Wet Naps, hand sanitizer, and a toothbrush in a deceased prostitute's handbag. He said, "I didn't know whores used so many cleaning products," and he wasn't redressed by any of the main characters for his rudeness. It's like the producers and writers were okay with that thought process: she sells her body for a living; she must be disgusting.

Another example is from a Lifetime movie from the nineties that I recently watched. An elderly married couple had just found out that their daughter, who had joined a cult at age eighteen, was dead. Instead of describing the sadness of that fact, the characters were actually more upset that she had been (gasp) **a prostitute** for a living. I quote, "they just found out that their daughter was *A PROSTITUTE!* And she's dead. Can you imagine the pain?" I found this to be incredibly offensive and indicative of a potentially unhealthy obsession with women's sexual activities on the whole.

Someone compared prostitution with dealing drugs when trying to convince me that it should be illegal "on principle." When I told her that this didn't hold because while drugs are illegal substances under the law, sex is **not**. Why is it hard for us to understand this? Sex isn't illegal. If two people decide to have it with each other and exchange money afterward, who cares? The larger problems are with the violence and drug abuse that often accompanies this career choice. Also, when we make something illegal in America, we usually don't stop until we as a society make every effort to dehumanize the people who engage in that activity. Sex workers don't deserve our scorn, pity, or even mild disdain because of what they do.

For me, the truth of it is, we are ready to vilify women for their decision to make a living using their bodies *even though* there are plenty of people – and statistically, there may even be some in our class – who essentially do the same thing without getting paid. I know this is a stylized and constructed idea of prostitution and the sex industry, leaving out the violence and

drug abuse that often accompanies this career choice, but bear with me: in some sense, prostitution is promiscuity with a paycheck. If you have a problem with people have sex with veritable strangers, then some people will have to invariably take that up with the woman or man in the mirror.

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