



May 16, 2016

The New York Times
620 Eighth Avenue
New York, NY 10018

To the Editor

Re: “Should Prostitution Be a Crime?” (New York Times Magazine, May 8, 2015)

There is no question that women should own their power, their autonomy, and their own bodies. These are principles for which the member-led National Organization for Women has fought for the last fifty years.

It’s also why NOW, like Human Rights Watch, and many more organizations do, in fact, support decriminalization for individuals who are selling sex on their own terms or exploited at the hands of boyfriends, pimps and traffickers—a point that is either inaccurately stated or misleadingly glossed over.

What readers need to know as they consider this issue is that full legalization, as advocated by Bazelon, opens the door to expand opportunities for promoters and buyers of commercial sex, while denying the reality of the far greater numbers of women and girls (and men and boys) in prostitution for whom selling sex is the *least* empowering choice they have had to make. It ignores the fact that the movement that wants to hold abusers accountable is also a survivor-led movement that is grounded in the documented trauma and harm by those who engaged in prostitution have experienced and are living with every day.

Until we attain valid equality for women—a world with equal opportunity, equal pay, living wages, and a genuine social safety net—too many women, many of them mothers, will have little choice but to engage in prostitution to survive at great risk to their mental and physical health and even life.

What’s authentically feminist about this?

Sonia Ossorio

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