

WHY WOMEN MUST GET OUT OF MEN'S LAPS

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2002

The Herald

He's a greedy piece of work, this consumer of other live human beings.

Glasgow needs to be thanked. Through consistent and effective feminist organising for the equality and dignity of women over a 30-year period, a new lexicon has reached responsive politicians who are willing to ban lap-dancing because of its affront to the integrity of women.

Objectification is recognised for what it is: the dehumanising of a subordinated group for the purpose of civil and sexual dominance. Commodifying the sexuality of women is recognised for what it is: the abuse of women's bodies as if women were products for mass consumption. Lap-dancing is seen for what it is: living pornography.

The struggle for this consciousness has been long and hard. It is joined now by the Glasgow City Council, and a licensing board. The recognition that sexual exploitation is incompatible with equality is shared by a community of people in the mainstream. This community has demonstrated courage by refusing to give in to the pressure of those who organise lap-dancing and the johns who consume it.

The primary issue is the status of women, who are inevitably demeaned by being treated as less than fully human, as objects who can be used and misused. It is only when defending sexual objectification in prostitution and its sister phenomena (lap-dancing, stripping, pornography) that women get to be "consenting adults". Giving up one's body for money is the signature of a woman's consent.

In California a man named Lawrence Singleton raped a teenage girl and cut off her arms. As a final gesture he threw a \$10 bill at her nearly dead body. She had consented, he said, and he clearly expected his largesse to prove consent. Had he not cut off her arms, the \$10 might have bought him an acquittal.

When the Marquis de Sade assaulted and poisoned prostituted women, the exchange of money was (and still is) widely regarded as consent. When the Marquis was prosecuted for egregious violence by one of his non-prostitute victims, her willingness to accept a money settlement showed her bad character and that she deserved what she got. She did more than consent: he abused her because she wanted him to . . . so that she could get the money.

The same algebra occurs every day in contemporary US courts. Money for sex cleanses the man; the woman who takes the money is consenting to, or has invited whatever happens to her.

Glasgow City Council and the licensing board refused to accept this patriarchal axiom. Instead, the concern was the well-being of all women, including those who did lap-dancing: commercial sexual exploitation was seen as a gateway to violence against women.

Men did not get to use money to justify exploiting the downtrodden. And though the people I consider to be exploitative will claim that middle-class women are racing to sex emporiums, the fact is that lap-dancing is for the poor, the abused, the hopeless. The work so-called is more deadening and boring than any assembly line in any factory, and then there is the question of vulnerability: the naked are vulnerable, the clothed waving pounds are not. And men are so big and strong.

The one argument for lap-dancing is the economic one. Even though women do not consent to poverty, women are poor, none the less. Lap-dancers are described as self-employed. They pay the boss £80 a night and 15% of the tips they make for the privilege of being sexual commodities. They are said to make a whopping £25,000 a year.

Every woman, said the women's movement, is one man away from welfare.

Lap-dancers require considerably more than one man. Women working in the same jobs as men still get paid less than their male counterparts. But no-one would expect to see an epidemic of male lap-dancing. Some forms of degradation are female-only. As with most so-called sex work, the lap-dancers are closer to indentured servitude than to capitalist pigdom.

It is hard to imagine a time when men will run out of ways to exploit women's bodies for sexual entertainment. Lap-dancing is the craze du jour, a hair-breadth away from prostitution, or conjoined with it. It might be better to bring back bear-baiting as a public spectacle than to make each man's lap a kingdom on which the glamorous serfs will perform as dancing girls to bring him the pleasure of the pornographic nude in action . . . and for him, all for him. He is king of the world.

The sexual proletarian has to convince him that she is on his lap, of all the laps in the universe, because she wants to be. His lap is special, don't you see, as each and every time she goes through the ordeal of making him twice his natural size. Virginia Woolf did not imagine that the man would have mirrors of this sort . . . live, naked, dancing lap-women . . . with which to enhance and enlarge himself.

He's a greedy piece of work, this consumer of other live human beings. He thinks the females exist for him and the new game in town is that they come this close, so very close, to his erect penis without touching it and then he gives them money. In the game, as the rules are written, he flirts with the continuum between impotence and masturbation. Of course the implicit logic is that the females do touch it if he wants and then the women get more money (at that moment) and cross a line; no longer dancers, they become prostituted women, the genuinely marginal women to whom anything can and will be done.

Lap-dancing is a rung above the bottom. Prostitution is the bottom.

The fall is inevitable because lap-dancing is foreplay in lieu of the main event. The men are excited by the novelty of having female strangers so close, purely sexual, expecting nothing but a few bills. The men are excited by the rush of having naked, living pornography so close. The men are excited by their own agency, the domination of "the girls" by money that they have and "the girls" don't. Each individual man is king of the world as he flashes cash.

In order to advocate or consume lap-dancing a man must think he is a fascinating sexual figure; thus it is plausible for him to argue that he is fulfilling the woman's need to be naked and undulating for him. The arrogance of the assumption is staggering. The sheer boredom of man after man after man should be self-evident, but apparently, along with celebrating his own sexual charisma, the man thinks that women have no brains, no hearts, no lives worth living. He's enough. He is reason enough to condemn her to a degraded life.

To accept a woman as a sexual commodity means the man has no brain, no heart, no life worth living.

Think about it: the average idiot (included in this category are the prominent men who use lap-dancers) has a right, which he and his cohort presume, to use up the life of a woman, to have her touch or not touch at his behest, to have her naked and gyrating, to appropriate her sexuality for money . . . but not only her sexuality, also her vitality, her energy, years of her life. It's as if the bear has been let out of the cage because finally a bunch of bears has been taught to lick, not bite.

The women are throwaway women, and most do end up in outright prostitution, visited by these same men, now playing a harder, more forceful, more depraved game. In lap-dancing, as in prostitution, the male has the illusion of having bought the female body . . . it's his for three minutes, or five, or 10. He has the illusion of having a right to buy that body.

He has no responsibility for what happens to that body after he is done with it. She is an "it", her body standing in for her humanity. One has to ask: are men really this stupid? Then one grasps the sinister principle that has allowed all the banal boys to turn into nasty but gratified men: commodifying a human body is the base principle for all forms of systematised cruelty: trafficking in women, selling slaves in the Sudan, using violence against another group, identified by race or gender or national identity or class.

The big, brave men who want lap-dancing could use some lap-slicing in its place.

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The Herald (Glasgow, Scotland)*