

The Punter: Why Men Visit Prostitutes and What the Men Think About the prostitute

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Next to my writing desk sits a box where I collect bad memories. Every time I have flashbacks, or “intrusive thoughts,” I write them down as quickly as I can on a piece of paper, throw the paper into the box, and shut the lid. The box is quite full. Today I pulled out some of the notes from my box, because I wanted to write about punters. And yes, in German the word is “Freier,” from the phrase for “setting someone free”—as in “giving free rein.” Understood in that sense, the term is a euphemism for sexual abuse, abuse indeed committed by punters, and one of many examples of our society’s acceptance of sexual violence against women, normalizing and minimizing it. Nevertheless, I do use the term “Freier” when I write in German, lacking other alternatives, and also because prostituted women use the term themselves to refer to their “customers.” In addition, the notion of harmful touch does resonate in the word itself. The English term “punter” captures this sense of the German word. I intentionally don’t use the term “sex buyer,” because in prostitution sex isn’t transferred from “sex worker” to “sex buyer,” like a commodity bought in a store. It is striking that very little is usually said about these people, who after all are ones inflicting this violence. Rather, attention centers on which women “should be allowed” to be involved. Then I hear about all these “self-confident, nice, likeable prostitutes” somebody knows—which means nothing, because I also know some “self-confident, nice, likeable” women who receive unemployment, which doesn’t keep me from criticizing the unemployment system for its lack of real support for people who need it. Criticizing prostitution doesn’t mean criticizing prostitutes; it means understanding the system of prostitution which punters create by their demand for it.

I was recently asked how to identify a punter, and I had to admit: if he isn’t standing in front of you in a brothel, waving a hundred-Euro-bill, you can’t tell who is one and who’s not. No, even I can’t identify them in the wild, not even after 10 years in prostitution. The reason, as we hear so often, is that they are quite normal men, but this doesn’t quite say it all. If you ask men if they have ever been to a brothel, they mostly lie about it (“I would never do that”) or they start telling you fairy tales like “I went there only one time and it was so bad that I never did it again” (if you hear this, RUN!). Punters are very diverse characters. They come from all walks of life, all occupations, all ages, all personalities—but they all have only one thing in common – more about that later.

About the punters

So, what can we say about punters? To begin with: all the stories about disabled men who need prostitutes to fulfil their sexual desires aren’t true. In 10 years in prostitution, I never met a single disabled punter. In addition, it is discriminatory to assume that no one wants to have sex with disabled partners. And that’s certainly not true for disabled women, who are targeted for sexual abuse in disproportionate numbers.

It is also not true that “many just want to talk.” In my entire experience, there was only 1 punter (read it: exactly one) who did. This make-believe of “just want to talk” punters obviously functions to create sympathy for men as victims (they always have to be strong and dominant, poor things) and at the same time sugar-coats what they really do in the brothels

Punters are very different from that. I had punters who wanted to fuck me at the window of a high rise and afterwards spit on me, had me crawl on all fours and squirt onto my face. I had punters—many of them—who asked: “What do you cost?” - admitting with that question that they weren’t buying just sex, they were buying a woman. I had punters who grinned at me in a revolting way when they saw that I was in pain (my first punter was one like that). I had punters who brought drugs with them, so they could use with me. I had punters who loved to violate my boundaries and go beyond what was agreed. There were punters eager to show me their cupboard full of weapons, when they were alone with me and their two huge dogs in a lonely house in the woods (surrounded by a two-meter-high fence and no cell phone connection), who enjoyed asking me over and over: “Are you afraid now?” Some were totally aware that I wasn’t consenting, but continued in spite of it. Some were perverts or pedophiles; some had already masturbated out in the hall of a brothel located in an apartment building (yes, women who were not in prostitution were affected; the female tenants were surely “grateful”), some asked me how old I was the first time I did it, or told me they were aroused by very young girls or children (“I work at a riding stable, there are very young girls, who get horny when you give them the right saddle”). Some felt obliged to offer to get me pregnant (for what reason?). There were punters who were so convinced about their sexual prowess that they claimed I should be ashamed to take money for it, because for me, “it must have also been a pleasure.” There were punters who negotiated prices again and again and, when I didn’t reduce the price, accused me of being interested only in making money, telling me I should “become human again.” Just as if prostitutes were some kind of social welfare station for men. I had punters who thought they would compliment me with objectifying comments like “nice tits.” I don’t know how often I was asked if I “like to fuck,” while I was staring at the ceiling or at my nails; I don’t know how often I had to hear that it was “easy money.” If punters saw that I was only able to go through with it if I took drugs or alcohol, they gave it to me. Many found it entertaining to torture me by fucking me endlessly, until every part of my body was in pain. One stood at the brothel door wearing a ski mask. Maybe he had a fetish for terrifying women as an “evil masked man” (that went wrong, anyway, when I came right out with a riding crop whip in my hand). Another one told me he had hired me, because, sexually out of practice, he had tried with a plastic doll--but that wasn’t so great, so he took me. One was a Christian and refused, after the condom slipped off, to give me his identification or contribute to the cost of a morning-after pill, because to do so would be “immoral and, beyond that, murder.” Another punter insisted that an orgasm was compulsory on my part (“If I want you to have an orgasm, you have to have one, the customer is king!”) and many apologized for not getting an erection, because I couldn’t have gotten anything out of it.

If you are thinking that I had stood on the streets, and am describing here the lowest end of the punter-scale, you are wrong. All these “nice guys” came to me in brothels in apartment buildings, or through escort. And by the way, customers on the streets aren’t only those with less money. Its more often the case that these men prefer to operate that way with few limits, and are sexually aroused by exercising power over people living in miserable conditions.

Accomplices – they know exactly what they are doing

If you take a look at the on-line punter forums, the picture is no prettier. There are men torturing young women, who don’t speak a word German, with electric shocks in basements, and are so pleased about it:

“She starts to shiver when she sees me!” The reaction of their punter-colleagues in the forums: “Respect!” There are men who book a forced prostitute and are pleased when she’s not yet “broken in” (“She still clamps her legs together, cute! Here you get real feelings, she’s not a machine yet. I took her anal until she couldn’t stand it anymore.”) Or you get to read about “breaking in” tips: “The first six months you should only book her as a slave until she’s gotten used to it;” “I am teaching her deep throat and believe me, she’ll learn it;” “She had no idea that according to her ad, she does anal and everything AO [without a condom], lol, of course I did it all anyway, because it was advertised;” “A year ago she didn’t do anal AO; we first had to teach her that she has to do it.” You can see that the sexual practices are getting rougher (jerking off into a face, spitting, fisting, cumshots, gangbangs, pissing on her, deep throat until she starts to retch). You can’t avoid the feeling that it’s not about sex, but about tormenting and torturing someone—a woman. Again and again you see questions asking how “resilient” the woman is, how much anal she can stand, how much cum she can swallow without retching, how much she can take and still keep quiet. “If she offers herself so cheap in a display window, she has to assume that a man will want more than what’s agreed at first!” They don’t care that in many cases she has no options. In one thread a punter reports that a prostitute had told him she had three owners (!), had to be ready to serve clients 24 hours a day, do everything without condoms, and was not allowed to refuse any practices. Further, she was only allowed to keep 30 Euro out of a 130 Euro “wage” each hour. A comment from an empathy-free punter: “Well, it causes a complete breakdown, you see it. But at least 30 Euros is a lot of money in Romania.”

About other women, wives and girlfriends

Punters don’t just talk this way about prostitutes, but also about other women (“German women annoy me, those fucked up emancipates”) and about their partners (yes, I’d guess about half of them have a partner). Some say they still have good sex with their partner, but that they need variety, like some self-styled bon vivant who consumes women’s bodies like varieties of good wine. Many don’t have sex with their partners anymore, say their wives “deny them,” that she’s a “prude,” and that it was her own fault if he went to a prostitute, because he was “forced to” by her.” Some told me that their wife refused sexual practices they suggested, and that they are so sad about it, but they need to live out their fantasies anyway. If you ask them why the women refused, the men describe such perversions that you don’t wonder their wives said no. The men plainly take no responsibility for anything (It’s the wife’s fault they don’t want sex or not the right kind!) and fully believe they have a right to sex, anywhere they can get it, by God, if the “old lady” doesn’t put out. Often they don’t show any guilt about it: once I was ordered for a house visit and the man was sitting cozily on his sofa. Hanging above his head was an over-sized picture of his family. When he noticed the look on my face, he told me happily that his wife was in the hospital after bringing twins into the world; he was very proud and wanted to celebrate--and because his wife couldn’t “right now,” he ordered me instead. Some punters told me that their wives had had something bad happen to them in their childhoods, that’s why they didn’t like sex now and, oh what a pity, especially no anal sex, oral sex with swallowing, fisting, or cumming into her face, so they had to go to a brothel. It’s obvious that it’s not abuse itself (the child abuse, the punter’s abuse of his wife, his abuse of prostitutes) that’s treated as the main issue, but the punters’ view of themselves as heroes for not enforcing their “rights” on their wives. Abuse of their partners goes so far as schemes to pull them in to having sex with prostitutes, too. How often did I hear “my partner is a bit bisexual, so I thought I’d do her a favor and order a prostitute, so we can have a threesome.” I would refuse, because I knew that the good wife knew nothing about her supposed bisexuality and was being pressured into things she didn’t want at all. Whether they spare their wives or involve them, the punters suggest they are doing their wives a favor with “nice” offers like this: “Hey, I would like to cum in my wife, and you lick it out while I’d fuck you without condom, is that a go?” That’s why men act so self-assured when it comes to prostitution, because

they think it's something they are entitled to. I've been in quite a few marriage beds and heard quite a few unexpected calls from the punters' wives ("Oh, I have to pick up the phone – yes, darling, that's nice, I'm looking forward to the evening with you") and I always wondered how routinely, unscrupulously and confidently they reeled out the story to their partners – why? If you do something you think you are entitled to, who needs to hide a guilty conscience--because you don't have one at all! They must not want to come out with the whole story only because it might get uncomfortable if the wife complains.

In an especially disgusting thread in a punters forum, you can read about a husband who routinely ordered prostitutes for house visits, so he could penetrate them with his wife's dildo and then put it back unwashed – as personal act of revenge on his wife who, according to him, owes him the sex, but just won't put out. Not to mention all the guys who do everything without protection, and then go home and carry on there. While both wives and prostitutes have to provide him sex, he'll still draw some precise distinctions between them. Often I was told: "You're too good for a brothel, you don't belong to here", which implied that there are women who aren't good enough (to be wives?) and who do belong in a brothel. But the punters' contempt for women includes both, partner and whore. Their contempt includes all women.

How to put all the pieces together? Punters are men who look at women like draft animals. You can hear it in this punter's own words: "I don't need to buy a whole cow when I just want a little milk." Punters also like to compare prostitutes with food or commodities: "At home I only eat vegetable soup, but I want to have pork roast, too" or "It's OK to drive an average car, but from time to time it's nice to have something sporty."

The nice punter

Again and again I am asked if there weren't nice punters, too, and yes, there are some. But it didn't matter how nice someone was, but what he did. I had one who wanted to hold hands all the time and then go out to eat with me. I hated these dates, because they lasted so long, and in bed, too. These "nice" punters--mostly they want to have "girlfriend-sex" which means closeness, intimacy, petting, kissing, and it's exhausting, because it oversteps personal boundaries. You have to act even more, and it spoils any real intimacy completely, because it is ordered fully on demand. It's not possible to keep anything for yourself, because when intimate gestures are feigned and sold, they don't belong to you anymore, they become part of a repertoire of entertainment and ultimately meaningless, separated from the real person. When punters are no longer a part of your life, intimacy needs to be regained and relearned. The abuse and abuse of oneself becomes part of what intimacy feels like, because you don't leave a "hard core" for yourself to which the punter has no access. It's like you belong totally to him. This one punter wanted me to pretend to be having an affair with him – he was one of the bon vivants who couldn't manage with just a wife and expressed concern that I had to serve other, disgusting punters. It never occurred to him that he was one of these disgusting punters, too. Punters don't think of themselves as punters, it's always the other ones who are bad--with exception of sadists who want to be remembered as the worst of the worst. He offered me a lot of money so that I wouldn't need to "do it anymore," but for punters nothing is for free, and they don't help you for free, either. For them, a prostitute is a public commodity and everyone wants to have a piece. At best, punters like to "help" by creating their very own little private prostitute. So I was expected to meet with him, but only with him, and without payment. He wanted to buy me on sale.

Men are so convinced of their right for sex that, deep down inside of them, they don't see why they should have to pay for sex at all. Put on a good act, then you must have had fun, too, so why should you be paid? --and if you don't act so well, then you didn't deliver the goods, so no pay for you, either. You can't win!

The punter's view of prostitutes is ambivalent: on the one hand, they are looking for a machine that treats all punters the same ("She has to do what she advertises, no matter who shows up"), refusing a person is not an option; on the other hand, they want to be someone special – either because they were so remarkably good in bed, or because, if they are sadists, they can beat a prostitute up especially well. What they never want is to be just like anyone else, number 8 or 9 on the daily list. No, they must be memorable; for them their ego is at stake.

Why men go to prostitutes

Several studies try to answer the question why men go to prostitutes. Unfortunately, German researchers forget that punters, when asked, answer according to social expectations ("I am a romantic;" "I like to try different things;" "I get no sex at home") and thus draw a mushy picture of themselves that doesn't reflect reality. In online forums, you will get much more hard-boiled insights!

So why do men do it? Some are just sadists who hate women and want to teach them a lesson in hard-core or hate-fucking. Some are poor wimps who need a prostitute to prove their masculinity, some are "romantics" aiming at a relationship. They all have one thing in common: they assume they have a right to sex, they have a certain contempt for women, and they are aligned with an image of masculinity that is toxic to the brim. And they all know or could know that these women don't have sex with them because they want to and of their own free will. They just don't care.

They order up like reading from a menu: one full-french service please, anal for dessert, and then they choose a certain body from which the whole menu is consumed. The feature of choosing a body is the proof that sex is not a service or work: it is not immaterial who performs the service, because it is not only about the sex, but about abusing a woman.

Even the "romantics" aren't really looking for intimacy. They have a certain fantasy in mind, and pay to get it in real life, no matter how that reality feels for the woman. In this respect they are like sadists, who also don't care about the woman's will. Prostitution doesn't work without force. There will never be enough women doing it willingly; a certain number will always have to be forced. Often the punters can't be sure if they have a forced prostitute in bed, and they have no interest in knowing. It's not the force that disturbs them but having to see it--because then their image is ruined. Sadists are even aroused by knowing about force, whereas "romantics" won't go to the prostitute anymore because their fantasy is destroyed, and others minimize it (recently seen on a forum: "So what is force? Every morning I have to get up and eat something, that's force, too.").

In the minds of punters, prostitutes aren't humans. If a woman says she is in pain, punters complain that "they are making it up." Punters want a women to whom they can do anything and still see a smile: a doll. According to a study conducted by Melissa Farley in 2011, two-thirds (2/3) of all punters know that many

women are forced by pimps, but don't care. Forty-one percent (41%) of them had direct knowledge that the woman was a victim of pimps, but went to her anyway.

From punter to perpetrator

There were punters who clearly felt my revulsion but went ahead, making nothing of it (for example, saying "Stop turning away when I want to kiss you" or "I have the feeling that you don't want to see any more dicks."). Some were aroused by my disgust, others didn't come back because the image they wanted was gone. It's about control, control over women. Some get angry if their fantasies aren't acted out well enough, others are gratified if the facade of the woman's self-control slips and like to beat her on top of that. The violence for which they pay is only one side of the coin; the other side is the violence which was not negotiated: rape, torture, and other physical violence.

It comes back to having a woman under their control, to have her do what the man wants her to do, and be what he wants her to be. And that's the core point of prostitution: everything is focused on the man's needs, sex is always available for purchase, and he doesn't need to do anything else to get it, he has free choice of women's bodies, and the prospect of rejection is unimaginable. Although punters like to hear that a prostitute can absolutely reject some clients (because it gives them the feeling of belonging to an elite group), they can't imagine themselves being one of them. Every time I refused clients, there was a big "No, no", something they hadn't considered possible until then, and to which they reacted so allergically it was as if I owed them something, as if I had denied them access to a public utility, as if I had broken the rules of the game.

If you think that I am speaking about an insignificant minority of sick men, you are wrong. Statistics indicate that one in five men in Germany go to prostitutes regularly, and three out of four men have gone to a brothel at least once. By some estimates, up to 1,2 million men go to a brothel every day in Germany. And these numbers do not include those who only watch filmed prostitution (= pornography); in a certain way, they are punters, too.

In one study, Melissa Farley revealed that punters commit rapes more often than men who aren't punters. That finding indicates that prostitution teaches men that violence against women is legitimated in certain circumstances. Not only do many women who have already been abused end up as prostitutes, but they become victims of even more violence in prostitution. After having been to a prostitute, the men's inhibition threshold for committing sexual violence is lower. Taken together, this means that: prostitution is the result of violence against women, prostitution is violence against women in itself, and prostitution causes further violence against women.

Prostitution affects all women

Because of its connection with violence, prostitution affects all women. If one woman can be for sale, all women can be for sale: how often did I hear from punters that they rather pay me than "anyone, who is also expensive, flowers, restaurants, and in the end you don't get any." Furthermore, punters often like to act out violent porn scenes in the brothel, then cast the practice as normal and harmless. Later they will suggest it to their partners, or even demand it from them.

Prostitution doesn't exist separate from our society; it is promoted and necessary to maintaining and reconfirming society's traditional roles: the man is active and dominant, the woman is passive and submissive. She is financially dependent on him, such that he can sexually control her and her needs don't have priority. It is no accident that those who support the complete decriminalization of prostitution repeatedly say that it's still better than marriage, because both, marriage and prostitution, rest on the same basic principle. It's a shame that we live in a society where sexuality based on equality is unimaginable-- where women aren't paid compensation, because no harm is done.

Instead, we live in a society which believes that men have a right for sex in all circumstances, even if a woman is forced. Men's desires, it seems, are more important than the physical and emotional well-being and sexual self-determination of women. That's what prostitution is: the opposite of sexual self-determination. The punters know this, and even get aroused by it. So, do we want to live in a society in which women have to swallow their revulsion, and at best (!) men don't care?

Punters don't look at women as women, only as objects, as bodies. They don't know how she really feels, why she prostitutes herself, what she really thinks and what a life she had before and if she wants to be here or not. It's all the same to them. None of them care about the woman's rights, her will and her feelings: that's what they all have in common. They pay for the non-existence of a woman's dignity, selfhood, and will. So, the question is: why do we need an institution which makes this possible?