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Raymond, Janice. *Not a Choice, Not a Job*.

Dulles VA: Potomac Books 2013. ISBN: 978-1-61234-626-7

Reviewed by Ane Mathieson, Organization for Prostitution Survivors

The “post-feminist” generation will sleep a little less soundly after reading Janice Raymond’s *Not a Choice, Not a Job*. While men around the world are encouraged to bond over lap dances at business meetings or during visits to red-light districts, progressive-minded women are pushed to defend prostitution and its legalization in the name of women’s liberation. A seemingly endless list of pro-prostitution arguments is available in university gender studies courses, in glossy ads in the back of magazines, on major websites, in Hollywood movies, and in the lyrics of our top-forty tunes.

In contrast to the image of glamour projected by the sex industry, in *Not a Choice, Not a Job* Janice Raymond asserts that prostitution is antithetical to women’s sexual liberation; it is an industry driven by profit and male demand for prostitution, not by concern for the wellbeing of women. After decades of research and work as the co-director of the international NGO, Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, Raymond offers a full analysis of the prostitution industry. She discredits many pro-prostitution arguments, including one of the most pervasive which asserts that the prostitution industry is grounded in the empowered choices of women. She argues that the sex industry, a major lobbyist for the legalization of prostitution, has played a prominent role in embedding many prostitution myths into social and political discourses. Raymond shows that male entitlement and the choices of men, not the choices of, or concern for, women, control and shape this industry. Where many are confused, fearful of slander, or afraid of being labeled “prudish,” the text of *Not a Choice, Not a Job* reads with clarity in its unapologetic critique of the prostitution industry.

Raymond assails the sex industry for the behind-the-scenes role it has played in shaping prostitution dialogue and policy, pointing to the sex industry’s

link to sex work lobbies that have influenced major policy shifts at the governmental level. The legalization of prostitution, often couched in the proclaimed desire to make prostitution safer for women, is in fact, Raymond argues, motivated by male demand for prostitution and by the incentive to bring the illegal prostitution market into the legal arena for taxation and tourism. Raymond critiques with precision, as she patiently walks readers through government reports, conference recommendations and buried history to reveal the many promulgators of prostitution mythology, many of whom have a high monetary stake in seeing the industry legalized: the sex industry (often thinly veiled sex work advocates), the U.S. Military through prostitution colonialism, nations with strong prostitution economies, prostitution users, and even the WHO and IMF.

Directing readers' attention to liaisons between governments and pro-prostitution lobbies, Raymond explains how legalization and blanket decriminalization laws and policies grant legitimacy to buyers, pimps, and even to traffickers, but have done nothing to reduce the stigma and violence experienced by women. By shifting the understanding of prostitution from that of economic and sexual exploitation to a labor model, legalization advocates conceal the harms and violence of prostitution and trafficking beneath the pro-labor language of "sex work" and "migration for sex work." In this repackaging of prostitution, women are viewed as empowered agents, acting out of shrewd entrepreneurialism, rather than women surviving under the constraints of capitalism, sexism and racism. Readers are shown how countries advocating for legal policies that legitimize male prostitution culture, as is done in the Netherlands, Australia, and Germany, do so at the expense of the lives and rights of women and girls. Raymond shows how these countries, despite overwhelming evidence indicating the failure of legalized policies to improve conditions for women in prostitution, continue to reap significant tourism and tax revenue from the industry.

Raymond further challenges the prostitution industry by reframing the debate, positioning prostitution users and their role in creating and sustaining the prostitution industry, at the center of her critique. Prostitution discourse focuses predominantly on women in prostitution: the choices they make, the reasons they are in prostitution, the amount of money they earn. Raymond encourages her readers to reject the social scrutinizing of women and the degree of choice they make to be in prostitution; instead, she directs readers to the rarely acknowledged motivations of, and power held by, prostitution users, the pimps running the industry, and the politicians working to legalize prostitution. In one section, Raymond analyzes comments made by prostitution users about their use of women in the prostitution industry. These first-hand comments include boldly stated enthusiasm for violently degrading women, pleasure in the brotherhood bonding that takes place over buying access to women's bodies, a willingness to continue buying women who are clearly forced, and testimonials asserting prostitution as a male right to the bodies of women. While reading I felt an ethical urgency, perhaps the same carried by Raymond, to see the growing prostitution industry and prostitution users held accountable to the women they churn through. Raymond argues that the normalization of prostitution through legalization and its promotion is extremely detrimental to women. In the words of one buyer: "...I will be violent when I am cheated, when I am offered a substandard service...Sometimes [violence] is because the prostitute wants the client to use condoms. They force it on the client..." This culture, as evidenced by the words of prostitution users themselves, endorses inequality and sexualizes violence against women.

By weaving into her writing the words of survivor's and anecdotes from her own investigative research at brothels and in red light districts worldwide, Raymond grounds her research and advocacy in the lived experiences and knowledge of survivors of prostitution. From the testimonies of women assessing prostitution users, Raymond documents the extent of the suffering these women

have experienced. Raymond demonstrates the incongruity of a social discourse that justifies prostitution based on the amount of choice exercised by women in the industry while ignoring the significantly greater freedom of choice exercised by male prostitution users, pimps, operators of prostitution venues, and pro-prostitution governments.

This imbalanced scrutiny of women's choice becomes strikingly obvious when the reader considers that women in prostitution are usually from significantly lower socioeconomic backgrounds, are often women from developing countries, women and girls with histories of abuse and vulnerability; the overwhelming majority of women do not have the option to leave prostitution and are there under varying degrees of coercion. How meaningful can consent to prostitution truly be, the reader is asked, absent of meaningful alternatives? The discourse of "choice" has, as Raymond argues, "come to replace what is actually a strategy of survival for most prostituted women." Raymond's text asks the reader whose choices are we really defending when we defend prostitution. Is it the presumed choice made by women to prostitute, or is it the choice made by men to buy and sell women and children in prostitution? From this book readers will gain a critical analysis with which to debunk pro-prostitution myths, as well as the strong desire to challenge them.

In the opening of Raymond's book she asserts her commitment to accountable research; she combines her scholarship with advocacy, and applies her knowledge outside of academia to influence the development of policies and programs she believes will advance the rights of women. In the last chapter, Raymond follows through on this commitment, discussing policy alternatives to legalization that promote women's equality, and good practices for challenging the prostitution industry and curbing male demand for prostitution. Raymond draws comprehensive comparisons between countries that legalize prostitution with those, such as Sweden and Korea, that have identified prostitution as a form of gendered exploitation. From this analysis some countries have implemented

policy and legislation decriminalizing individuals sold in prostitution while criminalizing prostitution users. Raymond relates the successes of these models in reducing the number of prostitution users and in supporting, with robust social services, women in and exiting the industry.

By the end of the book I thoroughly understood the importance of the international legal struggles underway to regulate prostitution. In December of 2013, the Supreme Court of Canada struck down the country's three laws prohibiting prostitution. Within a year the Canadian Parliament will have written new policy possibly taking the country in the direction of either the Netherlands or Sweden. In considering the various legal frameworks from which to regulate prostitution, this book implicitly asks whether the reader wants to build a world in which the bodies of disenfranchised women and children are for sale, or one where all humans are valued as full participants of society? *Not a Choice, Not a Job* successfully turns what has become largely a "debate of words" into a conversation accountable to the lived experiences of women. I closed the book with the following thought: What if all the men spending billions of dollars annually on sexual access to women and children *chose* instead to invest that money into housing, childcare, drug treatment, counseling, and accessible education for women? If this happens, I may then begin to believe that women's liberation is on the horizon.