



# SECRETS OF THE SACRED WHORE

**How a new view of prostitutes can change your life and the world**

by Bex vanKoot

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Slut...Whore. Where do these words hit you? In the gut, like a punch meant to take the wind from your lungs? A slap to the face to take the words right out of your mouth? A stab to the heart that leaves you bleeding and vulnerable?

Or have you been the one to hurl these lazy insults at a woman who didn't live up to your expectations, who got more attention that you thought she deserved, who had the audacity to live her life out loud without caring about your agenda?

When most women hear one of these words, it has been aimed at her for the exclusive purpose of making her feel humiliated. To feel fear and shame in her own womanhood. I hope that you have been on neither end of such an exchange. But the language of slut shaming is pervasive in our culture. It's possible, even likely, that you have been denying yourself and your partners the opportunity to experience the beauty of all that the sacred whore can offer without even realizing it.

Where do these ideas come from and how can we change them?

### The Virgin and The Whore

The dichotomy of the virgin and the whore is unlikely unique to the Christian religion, which is most commonly associated with it. But they are both important aspects of a society bent on controlling women. One myth naturally leads to the other. And myths they most certainly are. We often talk about virginity as if it is a medical, scientific fact, but this isn't the case. The concept of virginity has been constructed to suit the needs of our culture.

As Shirin Sadeghi explains in *Ceasefire Magazine*, "[A] woman's virginity is realistically a non-issue (and actually impossible to prove) but politically a powerful tool of containing women's independence and dominating a woman's ability to explore herself and her world." The concept of the whore, that women devalue themselves through the act of sex, especially the act of selling sex, serves the same purpose.

It is the other side of the purity myth meant to keep women in line. This understanding of what sex workers are and are not, among the many reasons to change our language around sex work, is the biggest game-changer.

### What a Prostitute Is (and Isn't)

There have been many movements aimed at attempting to redefine words of shame: prostitute, whore, slut. One of the

most notorious, popular and widely criticised of recent years are the Slut Walk marches that began more than three years ago and have been held annually since then all across the globe.

The first Slut Walk protests began in April 2011 after Constable Michael Sanguinetti, a Toronto Police officer, told a group of students at York University that "[...] women should avoid dressing like sluts" in order to prevent sexual assault.

"We are tired of being oppressed by slut-shaming; of being judged by our sexuality and feeling unsafe as a result. Being in charge of our sexual lives should not mean that we are opening ourselves to an expectation of violence, regardless if we participate in sex for pleasure or work. No one should equate enjoying sex with attracting sexual assault."



This was a spark that quickly began to spread.

Later that year as the Slut Walk movement gained the support of activists across the world, in September of 2011 the media erupted with news that the Phoenix Goddess Temple in Arizona, known for its work to promote sacred sexual healing, had been the subject of a large sting operation resulting from local media attention. Charges were laid against 30 individuals - 26 women and 4 men - believed to be associated with what police asserted was a brothel operating "under the guise of religious freedom."

One of the most common arguments from the community of "sacred prostitutes" was that this work was somehow more valuable and worthwhile than "secular" prostitution. The idea that many sacred sexual healers presented was that since their work was spiritual in nature, it should not be considered demeaning or illegal, although other forms of sex work not focused on spirituality should be.

Sex worker and activist Lilly Muse said it best in her post on the blog "Tits and Sass" when she said, "I hope more people see (particularly sex workers themselves) that all who choose this path have their place in terms of usefulness and value; we are all doing the goddess' work, no matter what we call it, where we do it, or whether we wear a thong or sarong. We must banish the judgment that sex work in the name of Spirit (or psychological health) should be completely disentangled from sex work in the name of rent, food, diapers, and Marc Jacobs. Sacred prostitutes and sex surrogates are not inherently superior to escorts; escorts are not better than strippers, strippers are not better than sensual massage providers, independent sensual masseuses aren't better than Asian spa workers. Ladies of the Night or Ladies of the Light, we are all in (and rocking) the same damn boat."

## **Selling Sex and Soul**

More recently, Lilly and other sex working activists have been taking on another common trope about prostitutes: the idea that a sex worker is "selling her body" rather than her time, as in any other freelance service industry.

On her own blog, Lilly asks, "Why is sex work the only work that is universally demonized for contracted use of bodily behavior? Plumbers, factory workers, teachers, and entertainers also use their bodies to work, albeit in different ways. As an escort, I offer my body as a temporary experience in itself, an opportunity for pleasurable exploration and, when appropriate, as a learning platform."

This was a recent tweet from @TheAriDee Sex workers don't sell their bodies. We sell tickets to experiencing part of our sexual expression. Our bodies remain Ours.

This distinction is important because the biggest problem I see around the language of prostitution is when the word is used not to describe someone who sells sex, but someone who sells out. Even the dictionary buys into this definition, describing a prostitute as, "a person who willingly uses his or her talent or ability in a base and unworthy way, usually for money."

This usage of the word makes it clear that our society still primarily believes that prostitutes debase themselves. And this attitude isn't unique to sex workers, but part of the rhetoric that commodifies the female body and maintains that any man who sleeps with a woman devalues her in the process.

## **Sex is a Performance, Not a Product**

So why is all this so important to your relationships with women? You don't need to pay for the services of a sex worker in order for your respect towards them to completely revolutionize your sex life.

How?

By giving up the idea of sex as a commodity. In *Yes Means Yes: Visions of Female Sexual Power*, Thomas Macaulay presents the essay "Towards a Performance Model of Sex", where he addresses this particular problem. If we continue to treat women as if sex is something that hurts them, we must fight at every corner to assert our right to enjoy those pleasures. If instead, sex is a shared experience where men and women both increase their potential to give and receive pleasure with each consensual sexual experience, we are all free to enjoy our sexuality together!