

World Association for Sexual Health 22nd Congress

Singapore, July 25-28 2015

Australian attitudes about heterosexual power relations when women participate in sex tourism

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Introduction & Objectives

Contemporary discussion about women buying sex in their home countries relies on theory and opinion due to scant empirical research on the topic. Some research about female sex tourism highlights that women do buy sex. This paper aims to explore some contemporary Australian opinions about female sex tourism.

Methods

A freelance journalist Nigel Bowen, published an article in *'The Drum'* – Rhonda and Ketut as the Faces of Female Sex Tourism (2013). The article generated 364 comments discussing the phenomenon of female sex tourism. A textual analysis of the commentary was performed.

Results

Tourist women who bought sex were described as 'tourists having their dreams fulfilled', 'more monogamous', 'brave in their search for pleasure' and, 'just as capable of exploitation', 'as disturbing as males' and 'receive the same disgust as men'. Tourist men who bought sex were described as 'perverts exploiting the locals', '[they] act like gluttons', 'dirty old men', 'sleazy', 'walking wallets', 'show blithe disregard...', and 'domineering and violent.' Opinions about the sex industry were most often viewed through an exploitative lens and most comments agreed that a double standard of the treatment of male and female sex tourists exists. Consequently, some comments placed racial and economic powers as stronger than gender power. Conversely, female sex tourists were also described as engaging in 'fair trade'.

Conclusions

Debate about women who buy sex reveals that much of our intellectual understanding of commercial sex is heavily influenced by views about male entitlement and that selling sex is inherently exploitative. In the main, those commenting on the article in *The Drum* agreed there is a double standard where female sex tourists are indulged and male sex tourists are condemned. Discussions about women buying sex prompted a divergence from constructions of the sex industry as singularly based on gender power to a more nuanced consensual adult exchange.

Source of Funding:

¹ UNSW CSRH, Sydney, Australia

None

Conflict of Interest and Disclosure Statement:

There are no conflicts of interests for this paper or project.

Keywords: sex work, female sexuality, public attitudes

Abstract Category listing:

Track 2. Behavioural, Social & Historical research (non-clinical)

Area 22. Money and sex (prostitution – pornography)

Bowen, N. (2013, January 22). Rhonda and Ketut as the faces of female sex tourism, *The Drum*. Retrieved from <http://www.abc.net.au/unleashed/4476716.html>