

BOSTON Herald.com **Keeper** ★★★★★
 to clean your Mac
NEWS & OPINION e to clean your Mac

Legal prostitution would be safer

By Daniel Akst | Thursday, April 14, 2011 | <http://www.bostonherald.com> | **Op-Ed**

Remember Chandra Levy? How about Natalee Holloway? Nothing is more effective at triggering a media frenzy than the disappearance of an attractive young white woman. That's what happened when Levy, a Washington intern, vanished in 2001 and Holloway disappeared in Aruba four years later. Sadly, things are different when the woman has accepted money for sex.

Police have so far found the bodies of four young white women, all prostitutes, in scrubby dunes on the beaches of New York's Long Island (five and possibly six more sets of remains are unidentified). The women had been missing for months or even years.

It's hard to see what change in law might save someone from being in the wrong place at the wrong time. But some of the Gilgo Beach deaths might well have been averted if we could just get over the idea that laws against prostitution make the world a better place for women.

Prostitution is distasteful to many people, of course, but that is no justification for laws against it, since on that basis Brussels sprouts and loud neckties might also be banned. The difference is that prostitution is supposedly harmful, and so the government bars people from trading sex for money.

Yet the worst thing about prostitution is the risk of violence and abuse to which prostitutes are subjected by the very laws that drive the trade underground. In our eagerness to legislate virtue, we are endangering the lives of women.

It's been said that prostitution degrades women. But it's even more degrading to suggest women need society to make such choices for them — or to force prostitution into the shadows, where women are excluded from the protection of the law and subject to exploitation.

Many people take the illegality of prostitution for granted, but the United States (aside from Nevada) is one of the few Western nations that make it a crime. And selling sex for money is safer in a regulated setting, as reported by women in legal brothels — in Nevada, the Netherlands and Australia — that have screening, surveillance and alarm systems.

"Sex workers can be victimized anywhere," says Ronald Weitzer, a George Washington University sociologist who has studied the subject, "but in general they are less vulnerable where their work has been decriminalized and where they no longer operate in a clandestine manner."

It's too late for the women found in the dunes. But their deaths can inspire us to save others by decriminalizing what they did for money, no matter how much we may disapprove of it.

Article URL: http://www.bostonherald.com/news/opinion/op_ed/view.bg?articleid=1330676

Related Articles:

Feds: San Diego prostitution ring broken up
</news/national/west/view.bg?articleid=1331725>

Alleged perv: I just 'wanted a massage'
</news/regional/view.bg?articleid=1328696>

MacKeeper ★★★★★
 Learn how to clean your Mac
[Click here to clean your Mac](#)

[Contact us](#) | [Print advertising](#) | [Online advertising](#) | [Herald history](#) | [Send a news tip](#) | [Electronic edition](#) | [Browser upgrade](#) | [Home delivery](#) | [Mobile Edition](#)

[Save on Boston Herald Home Delivery](#)

[Jobs with Herald Media](#)

For back copy information and more information on other collectible copies please call 617-426-3000 Ext. 7714. [Click here for Celtics, Patriots and Red Sox back copies](#)



© Copyright by the Boston Herald and Herald Media.
 No portion of BostonHerald.com or its content may be reproduced without the owner's written permission. [Privacy Commitment](#)