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SEX Advertising Does Not Create Trafficking, Ending Advertising Will Not Stop It

Posted by [Audrey Ference](#) on Mon, Oct 31, 2011 at 2:05 PM

How many times do we have to have this conversation? More times, apparently. Last week, Groundswell.org, a multifaith social justice org, ran an ad in the *New York Times* asking Village Voice Media to stop publishing sex ads in Backpage.com because there have been ads advertising sex with minors or trafficked people. To quote from the ad:

We appreciate your efforts to put in place new measures attempting to screen for ads featuring minors. However, we do not believe that these measures are doing enough to adequately solve the problem, and we share the opinion of the nation's 51 Attorneys General that the best way to eradicate your company's connection with the sex trafficking of minors is to shut down the Adult section of your Web site, as Craigslist did.



Here is the tldr version.

Just one trafficked person is too many, they argue, so the whole thing should be shut down. It was the same argument that convinced Craig Newmark to **shut down the erotic services** section of Craigslist last September.

For multiple reasons, it seems that Village Voice Media's Jim Larkin and Michael Lacy are not going to be so easily convinced. As David Carr wrote in yesterday's *Times*,

Like a lot of newspapers, Village Voice Media's chain of 13 weeklies has struggled through the terrible economic cycle and big changes in advertising spending, so the revenue from Backpage.com, much of it unrelated to sex, has played a critical role in its survival.

But for Larkin and Lacy, it's not just about the money.

Both men see the debate as a free speech issue.

"We have always had a very libertarian approach to advertising," said Mr. Larkin, adding that classifieds represented 30 to 35 percent of their business. "We don't ban cigarettes, we take adult advertising. We take ads that sell guns."

Sure, fine. I'm not one of those "Larry Flynt is a hero for defending our first amendment rights" people, but fine. To my mind, the bigger issue is here:

From their perspective, the claims of their opponents are wildly exaggerated and all the money being spent trying to wipe out advertising would be better spent on the root causes of the problem, including drug addiction, poverty and family abuse.

"There is a lot of mythmaking around the issue and I think it's a way of avoiding the real problem," Mr. Lacey said.

It's all well and good for these multifaith leaders to want to stop trafficking, and I agree with them that even one person being sold for sex without their consent is too many. Trafficking is horrible. Nobody is saying that it isn't. But it just doesn't make any sense to me to go after advertising spaces—spaces that sex workers who choose to be in sex work need to make a living—instead of looking for solutions that would actually, you know, STOP HUMAN TRAFFICKING.

Do they really think that people determined enough to force a child to endure repeated, brutal rapes so that they can make some cash are really going to shrug their shoulders and give up the trafficking game

because they can't advertise their services in a crappy free magazine? Hi, the internet still exists. You might make it infinitesimally harder to connect buyers and sellers of child sex, but it is literally ridiculous to think that will stop or even slow human sex trafficking.

If we are really serious about stopping trafficking, we need to start caring about the lives of sex workers. Decriminalizing prostitution would go a long way toward shining a light on all sex for sale and ensuring that all people selling sex are able to work in a safe environment. In a resolution for decriminalization, the **Society for the Study of Social Problems** lays out the many ways allowing sex workers to legally do their work would help to end trafficking:

WHEREAS the criminalization of prostitution and other forms of sex work negotiated between consenting adults perpetuates violence and social stigma against sex workers, including by law enforcement, and prevents trafficked individuals from seeking medical care or protection from law enforcement and holding custody of their children; and represents one of the most direct forms of discrimination against women, trans individuals, and other gender minorities;

WHEREAS the criminalization of prostitution and other forms of sex work denies sex workers basic human and civil rights, including healthcare and housing, extended to workers in other trades, occupations, callings, or professions;

So why isn't Groundswell.org placing full-page ads in the *Times* demanding that prostitution be legalized? If it would save even one child from trafficking, it's worth it, right? Oh, wait, no. Sex work is immoral and wrong and so we don't actually want to help people who choose to make a living that way.

In his article, Carr relates a story about his time at the *Twin Cities Reader*.

At the time, we were under fire for publishing ads for strip clubs, escort services and massage parlors. The staff and the publisher at the time, R. T. Rybak, were keenly attuned to the community and always looking for points of difference from City Pages, our weekly competitor. With support from the staff, Mr. Rybak announced that we would no longer take ads that "objectified" women, a bold move. It was thought that beyond the good will we earned in the community, other, nonracy advertisers might find our paper to be a more suitable platform.

The *Reader* goes on to be demolished by its sexy-ad-accepting competitor, but Ryback still thinks not running "racy" ads was the right thing to do. And perhaps *there* is the real nut of it all. It's not just that Groundswell and other anti-trafficking groups that focus on advertising want to stop trafficking, though of course they do. They also want to stop legitimate sex workers from having a place to advertise. That's the undertone of Carr's story—that we'd all be happier if those gross ads that "objectify women" (unless they put them there themselves, I guess?) went away. Ew, these porn ads that pay our bills are so beneath us and our important, moral journalism.

And that is why I don't trust this particular breed of moral crusader, whether it be Kutcher or multifith groups or anyone else: I have yet to see any evidence that they give two shits about the health and safety of nontrafficked sex workers. If you really care about ending trafficking, and if you really care about making sure that all people regardless of profession can do their work in the safest possible way, and if you really care about human beings, whether they sell sex or not, you'd be out there campaigning for decriminalization instead of bugging Village Voice Media about their advertising. You'll forgive me if I don't hold my breath for that one.

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Nice work Groundswell! Together we can end prostitution FOREVER.

Posted by [yo yo pa](#) on October 31, 2011 at 3:56 PM | [Report this comment](#)



So the writer's solution is to do nothing? As far as he's concerned, its going to happen, so why keep wasting time trying to stop it? Or, its only a few children being raped, so what's the big deal? Or, make it legal for adults and that will stop the men who desire and prefer young children from wanting them? Seriously, does he really think that making adult women more accessible will stop these sickos from craving little girls or boys?

This solution will work for helping consenting adults, but Groundswell is trying to stop UNCONCENTUAL sex with UNWILLING often beaten, threatened, drugged children who are being raped by males who crave sex with young girls or children. He's mixing apples and oranges, which in this instance are both still illegal.

Posted by [Tiave Jefferson](#) on October 31, 2011 at 5:16 PM | [Report this comment](#)