

SISTER OUTSIDERS

What you won't hear inside the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry

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PARTYING AND PLAYING AT PIGGY'S PALACE MEN'S SILENCE ABOUT MEN'S VIOLENCE

Mainstream media like CBC, *The Tyee*, *Vancouver Sun*, and Seattle's weekly *The Stranger*, easily uncovered the fact that former Port Coquitlam Mayor, Scott Young, and hundreds of other people had attended events at Piggy's Palace, the party venue operating for several years at Pickton's pig farm. I asked some of those Vancouver rock/punk bands playing in the 1990s what they'd heard about Piggy's Palace. I was relieved to hear my friends say they had refused to play there because, as one said "even though we'd played some shitty places, we'd heard Piggy's was totally sketchy -bikers, blow, you name it."

Others describe Piggy's Palace as "rough", "very very badass." One man interviewed in 2003 by *The Stranger* said: "There were lots of women, who looked like hookers.... The party spilled all over the grounds and there were people in the house and in the trailer doing the wild thing. I recall walking by a shack with a 40-watt light bulb hanging over the door and machinery was running inside. Here, I got a death chill. The hairs raised on the back of my neck and my feet froze to the ground. I didn't want to be there anymore, so I left and walked home."

This is what is most chilling to me: literally hundreds of people, from East Van rockers to off duty cops to the Mayor of Port Coquitlam, knew that Piggy's Palace and its proprietors were trouble - specifically trouble for prostituted women. Yet the venue remained in operation for years without intervention by neighbours, police, or concerned members of the public.

Former Mayor Scott Young's disregard for women is already public, evident in his guilty plea for an assault on his ex common-law partner and for breaching a no-contact order intended to protect her. But what about the bands who decided that, despite the "rough crowd" and the rule to "check your knives and other weapons at the door," playing repeated gigs at Piggy's Palace was worth it because the money was good? A few Lower Mainland bands' websites still list their Piggy's Palace gigs in their band bio. One even has the gall to highlight the notoriety of the Pickton case.

The media was able to find people willing to paint the grisly picture of what they witnessed before vowing never to visit Piggy's Palace again. But where were those who saw what was happening and then vowed to help put the heat on local authorities to shut Pickton down? As a frontline rape crisis worker, I rejoice when I receive a call from someone wanting to help a woman who's in danger. I am ready to rally my team and encourage the neighbour or friend to respond, to help the woman escape, and to fight back.

So yet another facet of the story is missing from the Missing Women's Inquiry - the everyday men who partied and played at Piggy's Palace and how their refusal to come forward early makes them complicit in this gruesome tragedy.

While the Missing Women's Inquiry draws some public attention to the role of police procedures (and their failures) in the investigation, as a community we should be obliged by our humanity to really consider how Pickton was able to murder so many women over such a long time, and how the case ought to press us all toward progressive change.

Instead, the Pickton case has been used to promote the full decriminalization of prostitution. Prostituted women should never have been criminalized or put in the position of selling sex for money - but to call for the decriminalization of johns and pimps based on the Pickton case is completely illogical. Full decriminalization will not protect the women that johns like Pickton might pick up on the streets as is often argued. Pickton was a wealthy man and could very easily have 'hired' women openly operating as 'adult entertainers' or 'escorts' from the back pages of the *Georgia Straight*. Indeed, as Piggy's Palace venue was operating as a registered non-profit agency, buying women's bodies purchased through licensed escort agencies could have been written off as costs of doing business. But Pickton and those who co-hosted the parties purposely sought out the 'unlicensed' and desperate women on the streets of the Downtown Eastside who would risk the sketchy trip to the PoCo pig farm. How will these women benefit from the decriminalization of johns and pimps? Surely we want no woman pressed into this?

Jacqueline Gullion
Collective Member of
Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter

WHO'S MISSING AT THE MISSING WOMEN'S INQUIRY?

Juliane Okot Bitek
The National Congress of Black Women Foundation

We're missing at the Missing Women's Inquiry because no one has thought to look for us. We're missing because we've been forgotten, misplaced, replaced, unbelievably and unseen. We're the uncounted dead and the walking haunts, stumbling through the streets or holed up on a thin mattress barely able to see through the haze.

We're missing. We're the girl children, old in leering ogles of men who hand us colourful pills to pop. These men have seen us before, teenaged and new in our bodies, tinkling laughter, bright eyed and impossibly colourful. Pop, pop and now we're gone, broken like doll parts glued to blue cars in the fall.

Look. These are our faces in the posters. Look again. We're haunting every face in the inquiry. How many of us missing for every woman's face up? How many names that poster faces can not reveal to us, now silenced by photography? Pop. Did you see her? She was just here. Did you see her?

Now she's gone, as if she was never here, and there's no photograph to say so. There's no mother wailing in the silence, so we could know. There's no tragedy, they say, when there's no body. We're missing at the Missing Women's Inquiry.



Silence. Listen.

Pop, pop, pop. There goes another one.

We're the new women, floundering in desperation, unsure of the promise of our bodies. There's a turn here, a smile, a quick caress on the wrist and then a quiet pop. Gone.

We're desperate mothers. Our sighs get picked up the air and falls trees in November. She was here once, wasn't she? Now she's gone.

We're the hitchhiking girls, summer dresses, short-cropped blonde and a cigarette in the thumbing hand. Wasn't she here once? There's a long highway lined with the quiet pops of extinguished lives - we're missing there, too.

We're the soft ones, the toughened-by-life ones, the crazy types, the ones you think no one would have had a second look at. We're missing, too, at the Missing Women's Inquiry. We're the aunts, holding our sisters up, tying their bellies with strength and prayer. We're the daughters, the nightmare that pervades this land. We're missing, and we're not going anywhere, until you learn to chant our names. We're missing. We're missing. We're missing. We. Are. Missing.

shut out ... but not shut up

WHO DOES DECRIMINALIZATION LEAVE OUT?

Meghan Murphy, *The F Word*

Decriminalization is touted, by many, as the most progressive way to address prostitution. From our local left-wing politicians to feminist academics to the media, this option is often presented as though it is the only one. Arguments in favour of decriminalizing prostitution tell us that this model will help women, that it will provide agency and options, and that it will empower women and improve lives.

These arguments don't tell the whole story.

Decriminalization, is, in fact, a misleading label. Placed in opposition to abolitionists – who advocate for the decriminalization of prostituted women, while criminalizing only the pimps and johns – those who advocate for decriminalization are essentially arguing for legalization. Decriminalization is commonly used as a way to describe efforts to decriminalize pimps and johns and is commonly presented as the only model that supports the decriminalization of prostituted women. This is not nearly the case.

Decriminalizing the women has always been the starting point for abolitionists and radical feminists. Women have always been the foundation for radical feminist action. Abolitionists have been the only ones to turn the lens onto male demand in terms of addressing prostitution and violence against women while maintaining unwavering support for women who have, because of various injustices, had to turn to prostitution. The legitimization and normalization of the idea that men should have the legal right to access women's bodies 24/7 is what decriminalization advocates are fighting for. If not for that, they would surely be aligned with the abolitionist movement.

As a result of the Missing Women Inquiry it has become glaringly obvious that women went missing because they were living at the margins. That these were women who were made invisible by an inequitable society. Poverty and racism ensured that these women could disappear and that the state wouldn't bat an eye. We allowed this to happen, as a society. It isn't only the RCMP who is to blame, though they must be held accountable.

By refusing to support social programs and social safety nets which support women, we allow women to remain at the margins and we force them into desperate situations. Decriminalization won't change that.

Decriminalization will help women in positions of privilege, women who have a certain level of "choice", and women who hold power in our society. It will help the johns who want to buy sex freely and without shame. It will help the pimps who want to consider themselves to be "legitimate businessmen".

But who won't it help? Who is missing from the rhetoric of decriminalization? Who, once again, is placed at the margins of this debate?

Many argue that women in prostitution choose to be there. And perhaps some do. Perhaps, within the limited options we have, as women living in a capitalist patriarchy, some women choose prostitution. And so what? Are we willing to sacrifice all women in order to please a few?

Under the decriminalization model, those women who are engaged in survival sex work are left to fend for themselves. These aren't the women who will be in your supposedly "safe" brothels and these women are not the high-class escorts beloved by Hollywood movies. These women are not the women you talk about when you talk about women making an "empowered choice" to do sex work.

Women have long been treated as commodities, but between colonialism and capitalism, it is Indigenous women who have suffered the most under this model. Over ten years ago, Jackie Lynne wrote: "The sexual domination of First Nations women has remained unabated to present-day due to patriarchy's stronghold," and it would seem that nothing has changed. Within the discourse of empowerment and of "choosing" sex work, we leave out the context of both an intensely racist and sexist society as well as the context of poverty. The "empowered women" who speak about decriminalization as though it is the key to women's freedom may well be looking for liberty, but in doing so they leave behind all of their sisters.

There are other options. We don't have to settle for harm-reduction. If we can't demand more for women and if we can't demand an end to abuse then what are we fighting for?

As progressives, we must demand change with all of society in mind, but most of all we must demand change which privileges the most disempowered. Decriminalization is the dream of those who have given up.

fierce love for women, and her deep commitment to sisterhood as a feminist principle. She believed women are not a homogeneous entity. Instead she encouraged us to look at ourselves as whole beings and to recognize difference between women, which can only strengthen the women's movement.

Lorde argued that allowing each other our differences and at the same time recognizing our sameness is essential to the movement. Her argument had the obvious intention of a challenge, but a challenge brought in solidarity with the women's movement. Challenging each other without destroying each other is necessary and that challenge from outside to the center is an extraordinary gift.

We chose Lorde's concept of the Sister Outsider as the title of our broadsheet because, although we are sisters in the struggle and sometimes outsiders even to each other as women, all of our sisters are outside the Missing Women's Inquiry. Lorde also cautioned us against saving our righteous anger and tone to direct only at each other but to remember who the bigger enemies were: patriarchy, heterosexism, racism, and capitalism.



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WHY 'SISTER OUTSIDERS'

Daisy Kler
Collective Member of
Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter

Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter collective members were sick with rage and grief that the Missing Women's Inquiry shut out the voices of feminist anti-violence workers, Aboriginal women's groups, and other women's equality seeking groups. In doing so, the Inquiry shut out the voices of those women who knew the blatant and utter failure of men in power and who could see the relationship between the everyday misogyny of ordinary men and women's daily degradation and subordination through prostitution. One of us was already writing and posting on facebook just to be able to stomach the Inquiry; she felt she had to do something in response. Another member suggested putting our responses into a broadsheet for distribution at the Inquiry. And so the process began.

The name of the broadsheet, Sister Outsider, came from Audre Lorde. Lorde described herself as a black, feminist, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet and activist. I was moved by her righteous rage, her

Sister Outsider is a fitting title to continuously challenge ourselves to develop an integrated critique of the Missing Women's Inquiry, to recognize our common enemy, and to hone our most righteous anger and action toward those people and powers. The enemy is so clear in Missing Women Inquiry: a consolidation of race, male, and class supremacy as reflected by state representatives, especially the police.

The title Sister Outsider exposes too that, with this sham of an Inquiry, we are outside any process of seeking justice and outside any process of holding accountable the many men and state institutions that should have to answer to us, the community of women.

Our solidarity and Sister Outsider status lies with the missing women, with women who work the front line, with women who understand this is a race, class, and gender issue, with women who are shut out of the process, with women who stand on the outside but refuse to be shut up, and with those of us who recognize ourselves in those women - in both our differences and similarities.

shut out ... but not shut up