


# Missing the real sex story

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I suppose I am just a typical male tabloid hack after all. On my way to a talk about “Prostitution and the Media” at the [Women’s Library](#) in Whitechapel in London’s East End all I could think of was how ironic it was to have the debate in the very streets where Jack The Ripper stalked and murdered prostitutes in the 19th century. How much has changed since then? The new [Guardian](#) Women’s editor, Kira Cochrane listed various gory clichés trotted out by all sections of the press about prostitutes in the last year. She also related some awful stories of abuse that hadn’t made it past a media still more interested in the happy hooker narratives peddled by *Bel De Jour*. And then [Channel 4](#)’s Head of news and Current Affairs Dorothy Byrne showed some of C4’s gory but realistic coverage of the real lives of prostitutes. Of course, both C4 and the *Guardian* are basically feminist outlets so we would expect them to take that approach. But Dorothy Byrne, who is a very experienced current affairs producer in her own right, made the really good point that news editors and hacks seem to lose all their normal news judgements when prostitution comes up. They either ignore it as ‘yucky’ or treat it as a ‘sex’ story. It is actually a really important social affairs story. It effects thousands of women and men and causes untold misery. It goes to the heart of any understanding of illegal people and drug trafficking – both growing issues. And yet it’s always treated as a cliché. Is it because we don’t like talking about something so sordid? Or is it because it’s seen as ‘the oldest profession’ and so it is always with us, like the poor?

Well that’s just poor journalism. You could have said the same about paedophilia, smoking or school dinners. The media treated those stories as real policy issues worth tracking in a serious way with proper reporting and analysis. And, lo and behold, the stories were moved on and reality changed.

Prostitution deserves the same treatment and then, who knows?, there may even be an impact on the ghastly reality. 



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