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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Re: Article 'Skin in the Game' published in the March 21-27 Naples Florida Weekly

At a time when the #MeToo movement is gaining worldwide momentum to end sexual harassment, I find it disturbing that Florida Weekly would choose to glorify the strip club industry, which feeds off the objectification of women.

The lead business story by Eric Raddatz gives readers a glowing account of the financial growth of this industry, while shirking the horrific details of the underbelly of this beast. According to the National Human Trafficking Hotline, victims are frequently recruited by sex traffickers to work in strip clubs, which

are designed to provide the space and environment in which buyers may purchase commercial sex. Victims of sex trafficking in strip clubs are frequently moved between multiple clubs. Commercial sex sometimes takes place in the bathroom, VIP, or lap dance rooms, or offsite in hotels or buyers' homes.

Mr. Raddatz states that most club owners treat the dancers as independent contractors who get paid directly by the club's customers. Some owners also receive a cut of the performer's pay. This arrangement removes any legal or moral responsibility

from the owners, who make considerable income off a dancer who may or may not be there of her own will.

In the article, Rick Arenas would have readers believe he is a noble businessman who would never call an entertainer a "stripper" because "it's degrading." Regardless of the title, objectifying women for sexual gratification is degrading.

The article states that RCI has been previously named by Forbes as one of America's 200 Best Small Companies. Shame on Forbes for contributing to the problem of exploiting

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women and girls in our county by naming a strip club one of America's 200 Best Small Companies. Forbes is clearly part of the problem.

In the article, Joe Redner, operator of Mons Venus strip club in Tampa, points to his First Amendment right that protects his business. Perhaps we could head off the First Amendment with the Fifth Amendment, where it discusses the fact that citizens of the United States not be deprived of life, liberty or property without due process of law.

Redner says his industry has been adversely impacted by the internet, due to easy access to free content online. While the internet has created a hit to his industry, women and girls are now being sold by traffickers online as much, or more than they are out of strip clubs.

In the article, Dave Johnson, who runs Teasers in Key West, is quoted as saying, "in the end it's all about selling drinks." But it's

not about selling drinks, is it, Mr. Johnson? It's about selling sex. It's about the objectification of women, and by doing so, these clubs perpetuate violence against women and girls.

Johnson's final quote, "I have millionaires come in on a regular basis," provides readers with a chilling truth, most recently supported by the arrest of Patriots owner Robert Kraft. Traffickers go where the wealthy white men are.

In December 2017, Florida Weekly raised considerable public awareness with a cover story on the shocking reality of human trafficking. This week's story glorifying strip clubs takes the public three steps back. While they may be sound financial investments, strip clubs are a breeding ground for human trafficking. Please choose your stories with more consideration. ■

— Linda Oberhaus, CEO, The Shelter for Abused Women & Children



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