



Urban Justice Center

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PODCAST SERIES: MISTY

INTERVIEWER: Would you mind stating your age and your nationality/ethnicity?

MISTY: 22 and I'm Hispanic.

INTERVIEWER: What age were you when you first started getting involved in sex work?

MISTY: Thirteen.

INTERVIEWER: Why did you get involved in sex work?

MISTY: A rite of passage, and as well the need for financial stability at the time. So it was kind of a dual thing. I think that's for everybody as well.

INTERVIEWER: Did you work with other people, or... How did you get involved?

MISTY: Everyone starts with someone, either inspiring them to get in drag and do it or inspiring them to do it, or leading them to a date that called them, or yeah, but yes, I did.

INTERVIEWER: Have you worked continuously all that time?

MISTY: You know, it's very funny, it's very unique I think, people have no idea... In the transgender community of color in New York it's something you can continue into your fifties and sixties. It's very unique to our community, but no one realizes that, unlike any other demographic, we always have the option of sex work, you know, in the times of financial hardship. Like, you know, just as other demographics have drug—you know, selling drugs and things, sex work is very, very, very prevalent and always there. And it's very unique in this community. People turn to it if they're doing well financially sometimes, just 'cause it's there. So let me make it clear. Do I do sex work here? No. I think that, you know, people confuse some things. Coming out here, you know, to a relative space that is for the purpose of, you know, convening and all that, that's what it is. Do I usually get a ride? Yeah. Is there probably gonna be a cute boy that drives by on a Friday night that I'm probably gonna flirt with? Yeah. Most girls in this day and age do not work the stroll unless they absolutely have to, because there's the Internet.

INTERVIEWER: What, if any, problems have you had with police? Whether on the street, or in other situations.

MISTY: Oh... Well... Okay. So first of all, I believe it's completely illegal for them to use the penal code of loitering for prostitution the way they do. I think the statute itself is way too broad, and that, just you—I mean again, that's exactly what I said. According to the statute, you get arrested for loitering for prostitution, for waving at two cars that winked at you! If a guy sits there and waves at me and admires me, I have every fucking right. Especially the fact that I'm a transsexual and it might even cause a spectacle to wave at the attention I'm getting. I mean, for god's sake, some transgender people might be narcissists and be trans for that reason! And so, the police always abuse their discretion and arrest people. I think that the fact that they do not

arrest the tricks is absolutely ridiculously disproportionate and horrible. They do not arrest the tricks. It is not fair. So there you have it, and then you question their reasoning for arresting anybody to begin with. Because if you say you're really arresting people to curb prostitution, to possibly act as a deterrent, you're only completing the equation partially. You have to arrest the other component, the trick, to cause any fear. If the tricks know they're not gonna get arrested, then you'll never stop the money from coming. And trust me, the money is a stronger influence than jail is a deterrent. So people will always come, because there are tricks. That's number one. So yes, I've had problems with the police, because they've done what I just said. They've abused the statute, they've arrested me times when I wasn't prostituting, and then when they process you, they don't follow the laws that are in place that say that transgender people identify their own gender. They say—they think, because it's jail, and this is supposed to be the official, you know, clean, black-and-white record of what's going on, that they have to put your born biological gender. And I don't believe that's legal. I believe that when Mayor Bloomberg and City Council passed Local Law 3, they intended for people to be able to identify their own genders. And for this, I think that the NYPD is blatantly breaking the law. There was an Amnesty International report—Stonewall—that was released a couple years ago. On the day of the release, the NYPD was actually questioned by a reporter- the 6th precinct specifically- that asked them specifically about whether or not they thought they were in compliance with Local Law 3. And not knowing about its existence, the local law enforcement replied to the reporter that there was no such thing as Local Law 3, and that we were lying! And that it didn't exist. And so that just goes to show you, either they are completely negligent, and they have no idea of the laws and regulations regarding the treatment of trans people, or they simply don't care. Either way, it's unacceptable. The mere fact that they continue to put on the pedigree form "male" when they know the person would rather be identified as "female" is ridiculous. And that's my largest problem with them.

INTERVIEWER: Now, do you feel that, because of your gender expression, that they stigmatize you, and jump to the conclusion that you're loitering with the intention of solicitation?

MISTY: Of course. Yeah. Well you just said it. I can say "ditto" to that. That's exactly what I feel. You know, they do not understand—they have no idea of the subculture around here. They cannot say that I do not have the right to be here because there's historical value here. So would you rather me be in Bed-Stuy, Brooklyn, and would you be willing to police the area so that queer youth could hang out? First of all, it wouldn't even be safe. It would be completely dangerous. So, what you're saying is, the one place that we can come, we can't come. It doesn't really make any sense. It's abusive. It's absolutely abusive. There is no doubt that anywhere, any time in the city during the nighttime, there are maybe hundreds, if not thousands of young people hanging out. This is the only instance where young people have to come to this particular venue because of their expression, and that leads them to be targets of discrimination. The 15 and 14 year old gay and queer, trans kids cannot go to their neighborhoods to hang out. Obviously, if they could, they'd be there. So anyway, the point is that I think if they could stay home in their neighborhood, they would. They obviously can't, and so they shouldn't be patronized for coming here. Open the damn pier! Do things! You know, New York City is one of the most—you know, obviously, it's like the center of the world. We could make it so that we are pioneering, the things we do with our queer youth. You could have activities all night that attract people to the pier. You could use the pier to take the people away from the prostitution on the residential streets. You don't want them on the residential streets? Make it so there's some kind of central activity. Have organizations volunteer to do something at night. There has to be something that can be done. Let them have a party, let there be fun there, we know they're here! They're here! So let's do something. Offer—you know, offer fucking healthcare at night. Do something revolutionary. Don't just say, "You know what, let's just kick 'em out." You need to explain to the mothers and the fathers and the uncles and the sisters, these are young people,

these are children. I mean, if they had the choice, they wouldn't be sitting here. So, you know, you should treat them as children. Do you think they wanna be, you know, on the corner of your block, prostituting? No! You guys are some of the most influential people in this city. Very, very wealthy, well-off people. So if you, if the people in this community really understood, you think that 14 year old should be prostituting? You think that 13 year old would rather take that three-hour train ride, you know, from somewhere and have to go home dressed as a girl and possibly get beat up? You think they wanna do that? No! The organizations that are out there don't relay that. They just say, you know, "Gay rights! Queer youth! Whoohoo! This is why we should be here!" They really need to explain the cultural significance of this place and why it's here. And with this, I think I'll lose my voice if I keep talking.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you very much.

MISTY: You're very very welcome.

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