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*"The Stigma of the Whore"*

*by*

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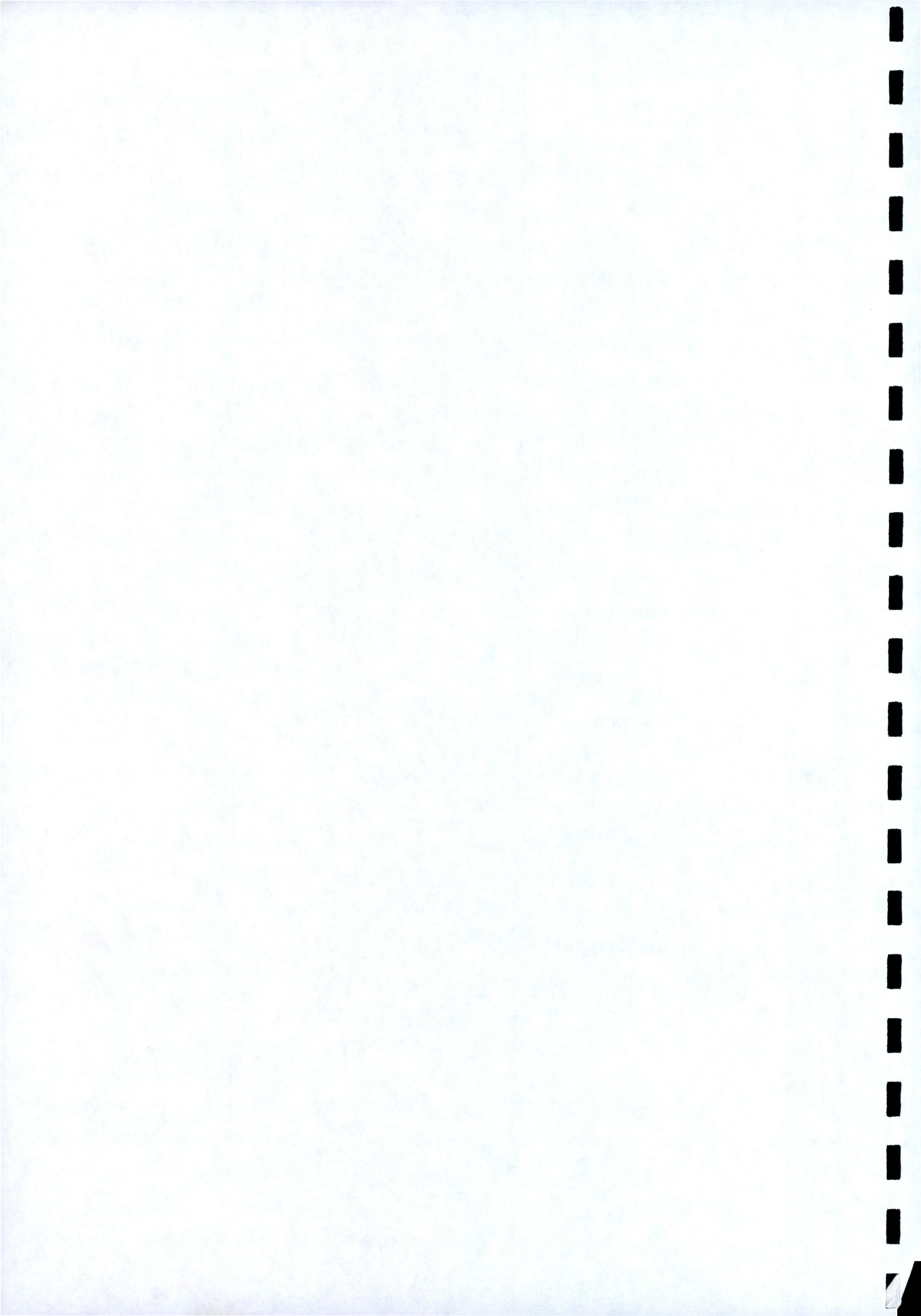
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## *INTRODUCTION*

*"In our job, some of the girls say;  
'Lay back and think of Britain', who wants to think of Britain  
and the state it's in anyway? Then you really would be a  
masochist".*

*- Chloe (Interview from "The Front Line" - Nickie Roberts)*

Q: What is a prostitute?

- A:
1. A whore, tart or woman of the night.
  2. Someone who degrades themselves by exposing lewdly himself or herself for sale.
  3. An immoral woman unfit for society
  4. A used sex object and a danger for all women.

These seem to be typical attitudes of many of us when we think of what a prostitute actually is. Few of us are willing to accept prostitutes for what they really are - People surviving, victims of society who use whatever means they have to make money. In my thesis I hope to explore the idea of prostitution, some of its origins and connecting features, and also put forward an argument for its legalisation. I do not want this thesis to stand as an unswaying argument for prostitution but hope it will be a realistic approach to a difficult topic.

In my first chapter I shall discuss prostitution, the stigma behind such employment and how the stigma of prostitution was formulated. To do this I shall look into prostitution in the past, but only from the last century as it is the most relevant to our own time and to the attitudes we adopt. Prostitution dates back to probably before the Jewish flight from Egypt 6,000 years ago - this is probably the first record of



prostitution.

As there are no reliable sources or records of the lives of the prostitutes themselves I shall endeavour to study their lifestyles through the records of society's attempts to clean up the streets through the use of asylums and refuges, in the 19th century and early 20th century. Included in this will be police statistics which will cover arrests, convictions, fines and imprisonment, comparing them with examples of today.

I feel it is necessary to have some idea of attitudes towards sex before discussing prostitution. While in chapter one I took a historical approach to the topic without really discussing attitudes, I have decided in chapter two to discuss modern day Irish attitudes towards sex and prostitution, to give us an understanding of the thought pattern of the public on the topic of prostitution. To enable us to understand where these attitudes come from I have decided to discuss the Victorian attitude towards sexuality - the wife in the home, the whore in the bed. This is relevant if we are to understand our own puritan attitudes. I feel the thesis would not be of any relevance if I did not also give some examples of the prostitutes attitudes themselves, so I have included some references of their attitudes towards their employment, their lives, their clients and society in general.

In chapters one and two I discussed prostitution as seen by society and by the prostitutes themselves. In chapter three I have decided to take a more personal approach to the topic and to discuss the image of a prostitute as I see it - a manmade image - a projection of our own sexual needs rather than being a projection of the prostitutes sexual desires. This image is projected through dress and into other aspects of the sex industry such as pornography, where, rather than being a method of expressing oneself, it becomes a degrading method of objectifying the body. Through discussing pornography I aim to show how it becomes the culmination of the degradation of all humans.

In chapter four I intend to discuss the possibility of the legalisation of prostitution and the positive results it could achieve. I also intend to discuss two forms of sex



"Clubs" which are legal because of loopholes in the law, but which are used to achieve different aims. In England, the "Swinging Scene" is used to put couples who are interested in group sex in contact with each other, while "Massage Parlours" have been set up here in Ireland to service the sexual needs of males. I shall discuss both of these organisations separately and then, compare and contrast them to find any point which could be beneficial for the legalisation of prostitution, and therefore be beneficial to society and prostitutes alike.

As I have previously stated this thesis is not an argument for or against the case of prostitution. It is not intended to be conclusive as there are many areas and approaches to prostitution. This is my interpretation of the subject - a discourse. One I hope to be of fair judgement, which will help open people's minds on the topic and one which will help to humanise prostitutes in the eye of the public. It is written with the intention of bringing knowledge to those who read it, of the fact that prostitutes are out there working for a life, and that they, like any other person, deserve respect and decent treatment from all society, both for themselves and for the service they provide. Without them there would be great increases on the number of sexual assaults that occur each year. Something which I think we can all safely say we can do without.



## *Chapter 1*

Since the beginning of history references have been made, through documents, drawings and even through ceramics of the sexual services provided by one person for another. In today's world this stimulation seems more evident and more of a taboo than in years gone by, and prostitution and pornography are at the forefront of this taboo.

In many of our minds the word "prostitute" or "whore" causes us to envisage a person, usually of the female gender, dressed in stockings, suspenders and basque, with promises of erotic and perhaps exotic sexual services. Used in common terminology it is a vulgar insult e.g. "She's a right whore" - an image of a "loose" woman is implied, but in a different context from the prostitute, this woman/whore is providing her services free of charge.

While prostitution may mean, technically; to expose for sale lewdly, we have a tendency to forget the prostitute is providing a viable service to society, using the means given to him/her to provide themselves with a good income while trying to be like any other employed person. They separate themselves from their work and distinguish themselves from others who end up on their backs after a night out at a club - those same people who see prostitution as a degrading lifestyle.

Prostitution as with porn is seen as a social problem but as we all know, anything to do with sex here in Ireland is a social problem. There are those who feel sex should be confined within marriage bounds let alone be something between two people in a relationship. Objections are made on moral grounds believing that sex is only good in the proper context i.e. in a Christian Marriage and if not so contained, is harmful and morally polluting. Therefore it is easy to understand how the stigma became attached to prostitution, yet many customers have told prostitutes that they were the sexual, no strings attached, bit on the side, relationship they need to keep their marriages together - the wives providing the tender, loving care and the prostitutes providing the lust. In the 19th Century in France "man was told by society, on one



hand, to expend his sexual reserves only within marriage, but on the other, he learned to expect sexual pleasure in the bed of a deviant woman" ("Painted Love" - Prostitutes of the French Impressionist Era Hollis Clayson, 1991). Things have changed little.

Much of the stigma has been formulated in the past and has been passed from generation to generation. The prostitutes we find on Benburb Street are a far cry from the images presented to us in books, paintings and films based on the past - the most predominant being the sixties' and seventies' "spaghetti westerns" - where buxom, painted ladies, laced into corsets to the point of stupidity are to be seen flirting and flaunting their "wares" trying to find a buyer to keep them off the streets. In "Dancers at the end of time" - Michael Moorcock Ch. 12. Jherok Carnelian having gone back in time to London 1896 is introduced to;

*"Powered, painted ladies in elaborate, tattered hats wore, gowns of green, red and blue silk trimmed with lace and embroidery and when they raised their skirts (which was quite often) they displayed layers of filthy petticoats. Some had the tops of their dresses undone .... and some of the children imitated their elders by painting their faces with rouge and charcoal .... Several other women, men and children expressed their willingness to make love to Jherok and he had to admit that on another occasion in different circumstances he would have been pleased to have enjoyed the pleasures offered".*

This is probably the culmination of peoples impressions of prostitutes, for, even though it was based on prostitution in London 1896 it is almost similar to the images we have of prostitutes today. Although we have many impressions of what prostitution was like in the 19th Century in Ireland, we have no reliable sources of what a prostitutes life was really like, there are no records of statements from them. The only references come from evidence gathered from police sources and records. According to Mary Luddy in "Women Surviving" - Studies in Irish Womens History



in the 19th Century and 20th Century - Prostitution and Rescue work in the 19th Century - Prostitution of the 19th Century was a "hazardous enterprise, disease, pregnancy, social ostracism and violence were common", yet Luddy believes the prostitutes were not victims of circumstance, they had other choices though they were limited by a lack of economically viable means of earning a living. I, however, find this difficult to credit because, due to the industrialisation of cities, many people were moving to Dublin to find work. Whole families at any one given time living in a single room, emptying human waste onto the streets below. Each house with six or seven families in residence rampant with typhoid, tuberculosis and any other diseases imaginable. Parents often unable to cope with large numbers of children sent them out to beg or to (hopefully) find some form of employment which at the time was minimal. Understandably, according to Mary Luddy's report, prostitution reached it's peak on the records of the Dublin Metropolitan Police during the years of the Famine (1845 - 1849) when food, money and employment was at an all time low. In many cases things got so bad economically, fathers went so far as to sell their daughters and other relatives to brothels. In Paris, around the same time the "Regime de la Tolerance Surveillance" was set up to accommodate the sexual needs of the poor, single, working class males who newly arrived from the country had yet to settle into the city. ("Painted Love" - Prostitutes of the French Impressionist Era- Hollis Clayson, 1991).

Under the Dublin Police Act of 1842, all that was necessary for the conviction of a prostitute was for one police officer to state he had seen the prostitute approach a male for the purpose of sexual deviation. Luddy is unsure of the criteria for release, but in some cases assurance of good behaviour of the defendant was sufficient for release. As previously stated, the greatest number of arrests were recorded during the famine when there was a large influx of women into the city with no form of income and no form of education or training. 99% of those arrested were illiterate and ranged in age from 20 to 30 years of age, although, in 1838 of those arrested 20 were between the ages of 10 and 15 years old. Luddy has also ascertained that many of the prostitutes had given up prostitution by their 40's although it is possible they may have died by this age or contracted illnesses. Prostitution while predominant in cities was not



confined thus.

Prostitutes were known to follow soldiers from Garrison to Garrison in towns around Ireland and while these women may have been seen as scourges to the pillars of society, military personnel were unwilling to back clergy on removing prostitutes from a vicinity as more often than not they were involved in long term relationships with the soldiers. Probably the most notable of these groups of prostitutes were the notorious "Wrens of the Curragh" - an infamous group of fifty to sixty prostitutes who lived outside the Curragh Camp, Kildare in Donnelly's Hollow - a small valley-like area surrounded by hills. Sheltered from the winds, the prostitutes lived in primitive, makeshift huts, where they became a family, pooling their earnings together, banding together and taking in any poor unfortunate wench who might come their way regardless of her financial situation. Unfortunately they were not treated so well by the locals. Shopkeepers refused them service and Charles Dickens on a visit from England in the 1840's wrote that it was, upon meeting with a prostitute, normal for a priest "to seize her and to cut her hair off close". The only way - then as with now - for a prostitute to be somewhat accepted was for her to repent and renounce her occupation.

In Dublin the Magdalene Asylum on Leeson Street was set up to enable the prostitute to do this. Lady Arbella Denny was the initiator who organised a place for woman to be sheltered:-

*"From shame, from reproach, from disease, from want, from the base society that [had] either drawn [her] into vice, or prevailed upon [her] to continue in it, to the utmost hazard of [her] eternal happiness". - ("Women Surviving" pg 76, Mary Luddy)*

There were basically two types of rescue homes - Lay and Religious - the only main difference being the religion - the Lay refuges were mainly Protestant while the religious were Catholic and run by nuns. To gain entry all one had to do was to



present oneself at the door and ask for refuge. Once in, the girls received education, training and preparation for the outside world, along with religious instruction to "cleanse" the body and soul of the "victim". Therefore, having been properly prepared, upon release, the woman would be able to take up, with pride, her proper place in society.

These days there are no such things as refuges for prostitutes - the nearest thing being the Mother and Child refuge homes. Judging by the amount of beatings, rapes and murders that occur each year around the world and indeed here in Ireland, refuges should be set up not to make a prostitute renounce her employment but to be there in case of need. Because of the type of employment the prostitute chooses it is very difficult for her if raped or beaten to bring charges to a court. Prostitution is probably the most dangerous employment a woman can undertake due to the status of prostitution in this country. According to the guidelines of the law, prostitution, technically speaking is not illegal but the only place a prostitute can work is in a one woman flat, which are expensive to run and not to mention dangerous. As two or more women working together constitutes a brothel, the prostitute is better off on the streets as organised brothels, saunas and massage parlours have been tried, to make things safer and more organised for the prostitute but have often proved unsuccessful, as in England, they have been raided time and time again, whereupon the prostitute is arrested and the client released.

The law for prostitutes has basically remained the same over the last two hundred years. On conviction the penalty is either a fine or imprisonment if unable to provide the money for the fine. In 1851 according to Luddy the average number of convictions for being a "common night walker" was one person per month being sentenced to one months detention in Grangegorman Female Prison or a fine of between one and two shillings. Within 28 years the number of women increased to 41 women per month and fined 21 shillings or 14 days imprisonment. Four of these women had not been fined before which proves the ineffectiveness of the judicial system. Things have not improved either, for many prostitutes having received a heavy fine all they can do to repay it is to work harder on the streets - for the fine and



to survive. It seems to be a vicious circle. Many people adopt the attitude that the prostitutes should serve the sentence and change their way of life - become good people again or so to speak. They fail to realise that many prostitutes are loving mothers trying to provide a decent life for their children who would be taken into care if their mother was imprisoned.

Another problem for concern for all women are "kerb-crawlers". Those nondescript men who pull up beside you on your way home looking for business. At present the British House of Commons is trying to put through a Bill which will illegalise "kerb-crawling". Although the prostitute generally dislikes this form of working, due to the dangers (the Ripper picked up his victims in his car up to 1979) and the degradation of having sex in a car, it is a major form of employment for them, and the English Collective of Prostitutes are against the passing of the Bill. However, it is not purely because of employment they are against it, Pros feel it will prohibit any form of exchange between any man and woman, as the police won't have to prove the woman is a prostitute or, that anything was said to indicate the woman is a prostitute. If passed it would be a problem for all women who happen to thread on British soil. Wouldn't it be easier to legalise prostitution and make the world a safer place. Can we not change our moralistic attitudes?



## *Chapter 2*

Over the past 40 years or so Irish attitudes towards sex have altered dramatically with the urbanisation and socialisation of the Irish Rural Community through the media we have developed from a sexually unknowledgable society in the 50's, and have come through a sexual revolution and free for all, to surface here in the 90's as a somewhat sexually knowledgable, acceptive, aware and careful society. This I feel applies mostly to my own generation - the 20-35 age group - those of us who have had the benefit of spanning three decades who can reap the benefits of the knowledge obtained through the mistakes made by our parents and those who have gone before us.

It is true though, that as a society we have not overcome our inhibitions of sex, but we are well on the way as homosexuality, pre-marital sex and single parents are more accepted into "normal" life. Much of this acceptance can be attributed to sexual education, now a formal part of second level school curriculum and on the verge of being introduced into all primary level schools, and, yet again, to the media which has made us more aware of movements an action to make sexuality open and discussable for all. As I have stated I feel this open-mindedness is to be found mainly in one generation. The reason for this being the stronghold of the church over the public in the past.

Up until now sex and sexuality were virtually unspoken of and many people knew very little about reproduction - finding out what caused new life when the female became pregnant. Even until the late seventies many young girls on becoming pregnant were placed into families for the duration of their pregnancy - working for their keep - because of the stigma behind being unmarried and pregnant. They were ostracised from their families and their own society, and expected to give their child up upon birth, for adoption.

If not willing to give up the child the girl lived a humiliating existence on a meagre unmarried mothers benefit of approx £18.03 per week, or to be prepared for a "shotgun wedding", no matter what the cost to each individual's personal



development. For example in Rosita Sweetman's book "On Our Backs - Irish Attitudes towards Sex" one of the interviewees stated a case where, upon a young girl getting pregnant, her partner committed suicide, the brother of the deceased then decided he had to marry the girl to give the child "a name". "Shotgun weddings" are a part of Irish history though it is not as evident today as it was ten years ago. Again this lack of marriage on the discovery of pregnancy may be disturbing to the older generation due to the feeling that a child needs two adults/parents in the home to survive even though the entire family may be miserable due to pressure and the life long sentence of marriage, due to two minutes of squelching noises, leaving the way open for poverty, abuse, and marital and mental breakdown.

In Bunreacht na hEireann (Constitution of Ireland) Article 41 - The Family, Section 2.2 a statement is made that,

*"The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by Economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home".*

These duties are primarily the care of their children and many women have difficulty in supplying this care due to lack of finances - hence a lot of unmarried or separated women have to find another means of obtaining this extra cash needed for survival and to perhaps bring their income up to an acceptable level for life, as the government cannot provide the money for any promises they have made. Prostitution seems, for many, to be the only way out, and no matter how liberal our society seems to have become we are not yet ready to fully accept prostitution into our stifled "normal" society.

This "stifled" attitude of society towards prostitution seems to have developed from the Victorian frame of mind when Puritanism was at its most severe. Wives and women were purely for the purpose of decoration, seemingly without intelligence or the ability to hold an abstract conversation. Upon marriage according to the legal system,



*"A man and wife [became] one person in law, the wife [lost] all her rights as a single woman, and her existence [was] entirely absorbed in that of her husband".*

*("Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre" Pauline Nestor Harvester  
Wheatshed - '92)*

Thereby losing all independence, forsaking all (if any) form of finances and literally declaring that she was, in the eyes of the law, no more responsible than a child or a lunatic, for she had lost all forms of a separate existence from her husband by signing a certificate of marriage.

Women were seen as the moral protectors of society, the pure side of humankind, and any form of work, even housework, was seen as undermining their purity. For those, for whom it was a necessity for survival, employment undertaken was to be in,

*"Work which protected the purity of others i.e. as domestic servants, washerwomen - or prostitutes .." "Sexual Divisions Revisited", Rationalisation of Housework, Leonore Davidoff, (Eds.) D. Leonard and S. Allen ('91).*

Prostitution therefore, according to Engels,

*"[Was] as much a social institution as all the others. It continues the old sexual freedom - for the benefit of the men. In reality it [was] not only practised by the ruling class, it [was] denounced only nominally. Still in practice, this denunciation strikes by no means the men who indulge in it, but only the women. These are ostracised and cast out of society, in order to proclaim once more the fundamental law of unconditional male supremacy over the female sex".*  
*- "Sexual Politics - The Sexual Revolution" -*



In other words of degradation of a prostitute and the attitude society has of prostitution and sexuality are reflections of a negative society which punishes promiscuity in women and chooses to ignore the same promiscuity in men, leaving them unpunished to continue the vicious circle of prostitution i.e. using the women, basically, as sexual aids, to provide the sexual stimulation which could not be provided by their wives as it was immoral. Victorian man could not risk the tainting of his wife's morality as she inevitably would be the mother and moral guide to his offspring. An occupation which could not be left to a woman of a sexually deviant nature. Hence, the emphasis to have a morally uncorrupt wife, was the norm of the day, but this norm proved to be a no win situation for the wife for she became hemmed in by the prostitute. If the wife wavered from the conjugal path of chastity and righteousness, she, through her deviation, did in effect become a prostitute, because of her willingness to please her husband. Yet, if the wife did as society asked and lived up to the ideal accorded her by the public she sent her husband to a prostitute's bed to receive the stimulation allowed him but not his wife.

In 19th Century France those women who had to work were paid minimal wages - 2 to 4 francs per day. So grossly underpaid in fact that there

*" .. were three principal means of overcoming a life threatening shortfall of money - prostitution, co-habitation with a man and suicide. Dr. Octave Commenge's record of the pleas of a typical clandestine prostitution following arrest affirms this state of affairs:*

*'Since my work was not sufficient to cover my expenses, I was forced to earn my living some other way!'*"

*- ("Painted Love" pg 116, Hollis Clayson, 1991)*

Prostitution has always been, it seems, to be about money. Regardless of the year, country or race the reasons always seem to be the same - money and survival. We cannot condemn those who want to survive and to get on in life. But each of us is entitled to our own opinion which is why I have decided to include some opinions of



people who count in this thesis - the Prostitutes themselves. I feel that some information on why they themselves entered "the trade" why they stayed and in some cases why they left at this stage would be beneficial.

The first case study I have chosen is that of Monique - a 48 year old retired French prostitute.

Monique was a prostitute for 13 years, has seven children and gave up prostitution four years ago. She believes every prostitute has a valid reason for becoming one. Monique was married by the age of seventeen and spent all her time in the house as a servant to her husband and children. She knew very little, about life and love, and looking back now sees herself as a silly little girl. Monique soon realised she did not love her husband and in return for her servitude became unfaithful. This was to be Monique's downfall, for she fell in love with a man who owned a cafe and who promised her a good life if she lived with him. Two weeks later her lover was heavily in debt and sent Monique into the trade, informing her of a cafe where she could find employment. She had no idea of what she was getting into and once informed she hid from the clients who all wanted her because she was fresh blood on the market.

The work, she recalled, was very difficult with one man coming in one door as the last client went out the other. Each client had 2.5 to 3 minutes with each girl, more time meant more money. At the end of each day she would have earned between 120 and 150 francs - a far cry from the 5 to 10 francs earned by prostitutes one hundred years earlier. Monique felt it impossible to work when sober, and, from the first time, she closed her eyes and made up the money she was earning in her head - one of the many ways a prostitute has of distancing themselves from the situation in hand.

Monique was a very religious person but kept soliciting because of the money - she had to feed her two boys. She retired after 13 years as she felt God had punished her enough. Prostitution was her punishment for rejecting her family and for being a bad mother and wife. Monique then entered a refuge for prostitutes but came out



again as her children were taken from her and placed into foster homes. In return for leaving the refuge she vowed to the Virgin Mary never to let a man touch her again and from that moment she (miraculously!) entered menopause, and never again worked as a prostitute. ("Witness" Documentary on Channel 4)

I feel this shows not all prostitutes wish to be employed thus but do it for a particular reason. In Monique's case, again, the reason was money and in her innocence, for love.

"Sequined Sid" is a male prostitute who advertises in London as a masseur and unlike many people, feels prostitution is an honest occupation and straightforward with no strings attached, but like any other job it has its downfalls - in Sid's case the punters:-

*"Sometimes when you see what turns up at the door, when they take their clothes off, it's awful ... Punters are selfish - they're absolutely intent on their own pleasure ... you're getting the money ... I'd say the punters will try to get as much out of you as they can, the good time and everything. They'd just bleed you of your personality if they could ... Okay, you may bet the one thats providing this good time for them, but you yourself don't enter into it, when all's said and done".*

*("The Frontline" - Nickie Roberts, Grafton Books)*

Another example of the prostitute's withdrawal from the situation, Sid as with Monique, calculated his earnings while working, while other prostitutes decided what they were having for Sunday lunch or what colour they were going to paint their room. (From "The Frontline" - pg 54). These are very domestic images and for many of us it is hard to envisage a prostitute, a stripper or a masseur as anything but an object of desire, yet, the private life and pride in themselves and their surroundings are there. Putting covers over his bed was Sid's method of keeping his place his home - he removed them when the customers had gone. It meant his world was not



tainted.

Mistress Scarlet - a corporal punishment "Hooker" from New York is involved with a man with whom she someday will marry. The day she marries she will stop her work and become a housewife. ("Hookers, Hustlers, Pimps and Johns" Documentary on Channel 4)

These are all ideals and habits of normal people. Why are we so unwilling to accept them as such? "Prejudice and Ignorance" according to Chloe, one of Nickie Roberts interviewees in "The Frontline", pg 218-226, they, (the 'straights');

*"Don't know fuck-all about it; they're just talking from the tops of their stupid heads. All this crap about doing it because you must like it; well I never liked it. Never. To me, it was like doing a job, like being a typist in an office, or a cleaner, or whatever - collecting a wage I think I damn well deserved .... We're not women, human beings, who've got feelings, or children, or other lives, in their eyes ... I've never regretted one moment of what I've ever done or ever been ... To other people we might all be strippers, all prostitutes but this is where the real respect lies - feelings, loving. We carry a community in our hears, really".*

One of the few benefits which occur in prostitution. This solidarity, was previously mentioned, in the last chapter, when in the last century the infamous "Wrens of the Curragh" pooled their earnings to ensure each person in the commune was looked after including the old and the infirm. There have been many times upon reading the information I have gathered that I have noticed this solidarity. Indeed Nickie Roberts put her finger on it when she states that;



*"Society can no longer ... dismiss [them] as "immoral" creatures who do not deserve to be listened to. [They] have voices, [they] can speak up, and [they] will be heard".*  
*(The Frontline page 238 Nickie Roberts)*

We are a society, a portion of humankind, that derives from the same origin. It was in this naked state, that we were all equal and all vulnerable. Many of the prostitutes have made the astute observation, that regardless of our race, colour or creed, we are, without clothing, all the same. Clothed we develop an austere aura, pointing the finger, condemning everyone but ourselves, for that which we in fact, ourselves, do wrong. One of the most hypocritical reactions, and also, might say, typical reactions, according to the prostitutes come from women i.e "You don't look like a prostitute". The worst of these reactions came, it seems, from the "Reclaim the Night" feminists in the 1970's and mid - 80's. Their initial ideals to get women off the streets and to stop exploitation of women looks good at first glance, but on closer inspection, the theory demonstrates, the women did not look further than their noses. They did not comprehend it was not the women in the sex industry that were being exploited but all women everywhere, given an opportunity the women in the sex industry could have provided a useful insight into the sex industry to help prevent violence against women and all forms of exploitation. In doing so it maybe would have helped more people realise that violence against women occurs because of the state of our society, with it's moralistic attitudes towards sex and sexuality. And, while our opinions have changed dramatically over the last 40 years they cannot totally be reformed until we loose our Victorian, puritanical, condemnation of sex and come to a complete understanding of love sexual contentment which will mean the elimination of the objectification of woman as sex. Until that day we will have to press forth trying to change things as we go along.



### Chapter 3

To many of us the image we have of prostitutes is one which Nickie Roberts expresses as being a "Cross between Mae West and Beth Lynch from Coronation Street". One of the many reasons for this image is the way it is presented. As stated in chapter one prostitutes are depicted by the media as sexy creatures of the night through their sense of dress. For example in "Dark Rosaleen" pg. 227 by Genevieve Lyons, Lyons describes how a large prostitute woman,

*"... held a black peignoir together over precious little else. She shamelessly revealed vast quantities of pink flesh with a careless indifference that had Rosaleen's eyes wide with astonishment".*

For many years women have strived to gain men's attentions through dress and this dress has been influenced by what is deemed sexy. For example in the 19th Century, fashion and society, in it's puritanistic state, decreed that it was immoral for a woman to wear her skirts above her ankles. This meant that any glimpse of a woman's ankle caused certain arousal for a man should he happen to see it. As stated in chapter two, women were the moral protectors of society and any form of deviance from the proper standards set by society would be morally polluting and so any form of exposing certain parts of the body, projected an image of the woman being sexually deviant, which in turn suggested the woman was sexually attractive, or, sexy.

It is my view that women project an image which men feel to be sexually attractive because of the moral standards set by fashion and society. It is by deviating from these standards that they become sexy, as the women, in my view, feel excited and through this deviation develop an inner image with varying extremes of what they feel men think of as sexy. Men, in turn therefore, being presented with an image which has deviated from standards set by society, become aroused by this projected image of a morally corrupt, sexually deviant and desirable woman. As previously stated it is my view that these images are projected through the female dress sense. We



assume that women, like a beautiful parcel, can appear to be something she may not be because of the way she is presented and while something may not directly, seem deviant or morally corrupt, we may subconsciously register it as being so because of the moral standards and teachings engendered into our subconscious mind by our society.

If we were to analyze the word sexy, we would find it developed from the basic element of desire, because we want what we cannot have, or rather, what we shouldn't have for certain reasons be they dangerous, immoral, or just plain naughty. It is for these reasons we desire things and for these reasons we look at something which appears sexy and wish to consume it. Prostitution is the same. Prostitutes dress up as projections of our fantasies, images of what we feel to be sexy, images ranging from nondescript to the bizarre, depending on each individual impression of what we see as sexy. It is upon this ability to present a desirable, sexual image that prostitutes depend. They cannot rely on their model-like looks or their "Chanel No. 5" to draw the clients in but have to rely on their ability of attracting men through their sense of dress.

This is where the connection lies with dress sense being related to sexual freedom i.e. when a woman dresses like a "tart" or prostitute, as previously stated in chapter one, we are given the impression of a loose woman. However, in the sixties and this freedom of dress was encouraged to benefit the sexual revolution when people were proud of their sexuality. These days many of those items of clothing would be viewed with a distasteful eye and the wearer would be given a severe ear bashing on morality. It seems that the clothes make the man, or in this case, the woman, and image, even if over-exaggerated by media hype or through the public itself, is the deciding factor on a person's character. The be all and end all of human nature. It is not without cynicism that I state that first impressions last. For many prostitutes, their personalities are decided for them, because of the image they portray through their dress sense. It is a natural human reaction to assume a person's character on a first glance basis, according to their dress code, for stereotyping in a worldwide bad habit. No-one, in reality can stereotype any group of people especially if it is based



on image. I agree there are similarities within groups and races of people, but individuality is something which will not be overcome as long as we have the ability to think.

There have been many reasons for prostitution in our society, many of which I have mentioned in the previous chapters. Massage parlours, sex shops, pornography, strip and peep shows have also been seen by most people to be largely responsible for the staying power of prostitution in our society, when in actual fact it is the pimps and proprietors of the sex industry establishments, who are supplying the goods for the demand in the first place. It is also due to these establishments, that many people see prostitutes as being as lewd as the environments they are presented in. Sex shops rate high in projecting a reputation for being dingy and dirty, and indeed, many are, but some are as inconspicuous as any other shop with only the content being explicit. While many of the contents are aimed at both sexes - for example, sex-aids and kinky clothing - it is evident that most of the pornographic material is aimed at and made by men. Through pornography, though more than clothing, women again become desirable objects for consumption. They become pieces of genitalia separated from the body, through the power of voyeurism at its most supreme. It is this voyeurism that separates prostitution from pornography as, even with prostitution, the prostitute can be accepted as a human being because she is physically there, while pornography does not give concrete evidence the person exists. It is now possible with the aid of modern technology to produce pornography through computer graphics, thus making the features of people and the people themselves figments of the imagination and an even more controlled part of sexual fantasy.

Sex therefore becomes power through fantasy women can be controlled, paper doesn't fight back and therefore through pornography women become more objectified than through prostitution. It is argued that pornography is a good sex aid, some feel if we were in tune with our bodies and our sexuality we would not need sex aids. There is a consistent fear held by much of the public that pornography contributes to sexual violence towards women, the same is said of prostitution, yet we cannot prove conclusively either way whether they do or not. The human mind is a vast thing not



yet wholly explored, who is to say what contributing factors cause violence against women. I myself however, cannot condone hardcore pornography, of either sex, not because of possible violent implications, but because I feel pornography is the culmination of the objectification of the human body. Through hardcore pornography, the body is no longer sensual and beautiful, but becomes a harsh sexual thing - thing being the operative word - projecting an image, somewhat the same as dress, that these images portrayed of women, and men, do not necessarily show the true character of the person involved.



## *Chapter 4*

For many reasons, most of which I have stated in the previous chapters, the majority of the public want prostitution to remain illegal. The main purpose however, of this thesis was not to state all the pros and cons of prostitution but to discuss it with a fair view. In many peoples eyes, if prostitution were to be legalised, it would spread like wildfire, failing to realise that under proper supervision, prostitutes could be registered and monitored, and prostitution like all forms of employment could be properly controlled. The government would benefit through taxation etc. while the prostitutes themselves would benefit through medical services, health programmes, pension schemes, organisation of the sex industry and, the elimination of pimps. Legalisation would also help eliminate those prostitutes who are addicted to drugs which would be beneficial to the other prostitutes as well as the clients, as drug using prostitutes pose as a higher risk of having drug and sexual related diseases such as A.I.D.S. which is passed on to the punter and in turn passed back to infect the other prostitutes.

At present there are no special services for prostitutes in any shape, manner or form. Prostitutes attend Drug clinics where they can be medically screened for disease and illnesses. They are also the only places where they can get advice - usually from social services workers present in the clinics, who, unless they have been in the same boat themselves cannot really understand the situation and like the rest of us can only give limited information because of their lack of knowledge. The "English Collective of Prostitutes" or "Pros" for short, is in reality the only place where prostitutes can get counselling, help and a knowledgable ear to listen to them - not much help to prostitutes here in Ireland who only have organisations like the "Well Woman Centre" to give them advice. If prostitution were to be legalised more organisations could be set up in the form of societies, unions or clubs to help voice the prostitutes ideals and problems and to let them be heard.

An example of this would be cases of rape and battery brought to court by the prostitutes themselves. As previously stated prostitutes find it very difficult to win these cases because of their employment. It is even more difficult for male



prostitutes as male rape does not exist as a criminal offence in the eyes of the law, and the fact that they are employed as prostitutes, makes it even more difficult to get sympathy from any moralist establishment - perhaps even more so than for female prostitutes. If it were to be legalised perhaps the attitudes that cause these cases of violence against men and women alike, to be lost or to be so difficult in winning, could be improved. And violence like the above, which is used as a form of social control by bigots and racists, could be prevented. An example of this bigotry against prostitutes occurred during the case of the Ripper in 1980 when the

*"Attorney General saw fit to declare that in his view, the fact that some of Sutcliffe's victims were not prostitutes was 'perhaps the saddest part of [the] case' a remark which in turn prompted some of [the sex industry workers] to observe that even 'sadder' was the fact that some were not attorney generals".*

*("The Frontline" pg. 235 - Nickie Roberts)*

It is these attitudes that cause many of the problems for prostitutes. Courts fine the prostitutes large sums of money forcing the workers back on to the streets and back into danger.

*"... Because [they] refuse poverty for [themselves] and [their] children, [they] are treated as criminals. In the eyes of the police [they] deserve what [they] get, even death".*

*(Statement issued by "Pros" to the Metropolitan Police Commissioner - "The Frontline" pg 235, Nickie Roberts)*

This is no way for anyone to have to live their life, perhaps through legalisation these matters can change. If legalisation were to be introduced "streetwalking" would also be eradicated. "Streetwalking" is the procuring of customers on the sidewalk, when prostitutes are at their most vulnerable, however, it is not only the prostitutes who are in danger but also other females. Through legalisation all women could walk the



streets without cars slowing down and the men inside assessing them like a piece of meat at the market, or as prospective victims, for the likes of Peter Sutcliffe. Legalisation would mean working from brothels or safe houses.

Prostitution became organised in France in the 19th century in France to accommodate the influx of poor, single, country men into the city and it proved to be a success. Can we not come to some similar arrangement which complies with both factions i.e. those who are opposed to prostitution and those who are not, including the prostitutes themselves. If we struck a common ground, moralists and liberalists alike could be satisfied, and it would be one step closer to the elimination of the objectification of the body.

The "Swinging Scene" is a low key series of clubs set up in England with the intention of providing a service for people who want to stay in a relationship, but who want to have the openness of being with other people once in a while. It is not known when or where it was originally set up because of it's almost underground nature in England but abroad it is flourishing where legal and seems to be a continuation, though more sexually liberated, of the swinging sixties, and on first observation, seems to be a step in the right direction towards the elimination of the objectification of the body. A way for "Sexual adventures to be a shared experience - a way to learn more about each other in the process" - (Excerpt from interview in "Bite" Magazine pg 61, Dec. '93).

It is also a way however, for one to develop potentially dangerous diseases and indeed, fatal ones. While being a step in the right direction for sexual liberation it could also be a lethal one. People involved in the scene pick and choose partners at will to enable them to explore their sexuality. A seemingly good idea for those who want to become in touch with their sexuality and sexual needs, but, as there is no form of screening for diseases for entry into these clubs, as far as I can ascertain, contraction of A.I.D.S. and other sexually transmitted/related diseases would be quite possible. The whole image is one of sexual freedom, which is a good thing in itself, but, promiscuity in this day and age is something which should be carefully studied



before participation.

The main aim of the "Swinging Scene" is to provide a sexually exciting area where people freely discuss their sexual predilections and flaunt their sexuality. In some of these clubs, customers are encouraged to take a step further and act out their sexual fantasies with their partners on the premises. This is particular to clubs on the continent, which are often furnished with mattresses, eros chair, hardcore porn videos and playrooms etc. etc. One of the most bizarre of these furnishings is in a club in Paris. The "Touch Box" contains:

*"Naked, writhing men and women inside and holes all around the outside. Guys stick their penises through the holes to be fondled or licked. And hands come out to grope breasts or vaginas. It gives you a great buzz to see people being so sexually liberated together like that".*

*- (Excerpt from "Bite" Magazine pg 63 Dec '93)*

It also gives one another image, one of the objectification of the human body. A 3-D type of pornography which allows both sexes to ignore human qualities and characteristics and to see the body as a collection of sex aids. We can all afford to become more sexually liberated to enable us to feel good in ourselves and to be able to flaunt ourselves without feeling inhibited, for our own benefit, as well as our partners, without going to the extent of group sex and organised partner swapping. It has to be said however, that the "Swing Scene" does have one very positive attribute - if we were to adopt some of the attitudes of the people participating in it - for example, open discussion on sexual predilections - it would be possible to eradicate some of the sexual services provided by the sex industry within marriage. For example, if we could eradicate prostitution within marriage, that is to say, eradicate the need for men to find extramarital sexual services, we would be able to keep moralists and liberalists satisfied to a certain extent. This could be achieved through more sexually liberated relationships. Wives would know their husbands to be safe from the "clutches" of the prostitutes and, prostitutes themselves and the men



who need their services e.g. single men, old men and widowers etc. would benefit from prostitution being legalised, making it not such an immoral thing to do.

Massage parlours are an integral part of the sex industry. They are relatively new to Ireland, the first public exposition of them occurring in the 70's. To many of us the idea of a massage parlour, is one of a sexually charged atmosphere created by a woman massaging a man or vice versa, in a sensual but firm manner, to relieve aches or pains, or just for relaxation. For some of us the image projected has sexual connotations, and indeed "Relief Massage" is the pseudonym used for masturbation performed by the masseurs for the client. It seems we have many of these masseurs advertising publicly in newspapers and magazines such as "In Dublin", under headings of massage parlours or health centres, and often for males only. According to Rosita Sweetman, in "On Our Backs" pub. 1979, it's very easy to set up a massage parlour with a minimum amount of capital. All that is needed is: two cubicles, a shower, a bottle of oil and a packet of tissues. At that time ('78 to '79) it would have been possible for the owner of the premises to make £2,000 tax free per week. The masseurs on the other hand did not come out of it so well, of the £8 cover charge the proprietor received, the masseur only received 50p, therefore if they wished to make money they had to try entice the client to pay for "extras".

Prices seem to have changed dramatically since the 70's, on top of the £8 cover charge - if anyone complained the owner could say the client payed in and he didn't know anything was going on - the girls charged £10 for relief while topless, £15 for mutual naked masturbation, £20 for oral sex, and £30 for full intercourse. These days things are not so cheap, £70-£100 is the present going rate for a "Visiting Masseur" in England offering the full works. It is important to note however, that not all massage parlours are offering and providing sexual services, but those that are providing these services technically constitute a brothel, which is, any establishment that may be used for the purpose of prostitution and indeed many of these establishments do offer services of prostitution. Massage parlours seem to be the ideal situation for prostitutes in Ireland at the moment. They offer a safe place to work anyway from the streets, a backup system where they can have the client



removed if they give any hassle - something which can't be done in a one woman flat, and a legal method of working which can prevent them being arrested, unless of course in the high uneventuality of a raid. According to Sweetman this is certain unlikelihood, as massage parlours work as legitimate businesses here in Ireland, and so far we have no law against the running of such a business, therefore the police cannot enter the premises without a formal complaint and a warrant which to all extensive purposes would obviously be a futile exercise. Nor can they enter in plainclothes as it would be acting as "agents provocateurs" - provoking advances from the masseurs would not be a legal police procedure - so it seems Massage Parlours are the safest place for prostitutes in Ireland at the moment until prostitution becomes legalised and women can work without the fear of rape extortion and battery. Perhaps the ideal situation would be a Co-op parlour where the prostitutes work together to create a service which would be beneficial to all, preventing kerb-crawling, streetwalking, attacks on prostitutes and thereby eliminating pimps and ponces, and again working towards making the world and the sex industry a safer place for women.

The "Swinging Scene" and Massage Parlours operate by providing sexual services under legal guises and both are a form of exploitation in their own way - the "Swinging Scene" exploits freedom of sex, while massage parlours exploit the workers in terms of pay. Both however, could be beneficial to society if the services provided were to be legalised. As stated previously, if people in general adopted some of the attitudes of the "Swinging Scene", and became more sexually liberated there would be less of a need for certain areas of the sex industry, while if prostitution was to be legalised and organised, massage parlours could supply an area for prostitutes to work from, safe from the dangers of the street. It is important to note however, that it is up to us, the public, to legalise prostitution so we may all benefit from it. It is time to change our moralistic, Victorian attitudes and to accept prostitutes as workers providing a service for the community.



## *Conclusion*

*"Trying to stamp out prostitution by criminalising the prostitute is rather like trying to stamp out slavery by making it criminal to be a slave".*

*- Josephine Butler, 19th Century Feminist ("On Our Backs")*

*- Rosita Sweetman).*

The main aim of my thesis was to humanise prostitutes in the eye of the public and to open peoples minds on the topic of prostitution. I have written it in the hope that it will bring the knowledge to those who read it that prostitutes are out there working for a life and that they, like any other person deserve respect and decent treatment for the services they provide. According to police records in Britain, rape has increased by 143% between 1977 to 1987. These figures would be, in my opinion, reduced if prostitution were legalised. Amsterdam for example, has the lowest occurrence of rape in Europe, if not the world. Here prostitution is commonplace and accepted into everyday life. It is possible to imagine a situation in Ireland and Britain somewhat similar to Amsterdam which if not taken to the extreme could be beneficial to society. Prostitution could help to eliminate many problems connected to violence towards women and it is for this reason I have taken an almost one sided approach to this topic, concentrating on the positive aspects of prostitution rather than on the negative, as I feel the media and the moralists have a tendency to pick out the bad points, and, expand and blow them out of all proportion to accentuate their beliefs on the topic.

Prostitutes are providing a service which wouldn't exist if sexual desire did not exist. It is a service which has been in existence as long as history and one which will undoubtedly exist until the end of time unless we develop a scientific method which will physically enable us to satisfy our own sexual desires. There are many pros and cons to prostitution some of which have been mentioned in kind in my thesis. Through writing this paper I have come to the conclusion that the stigma behind



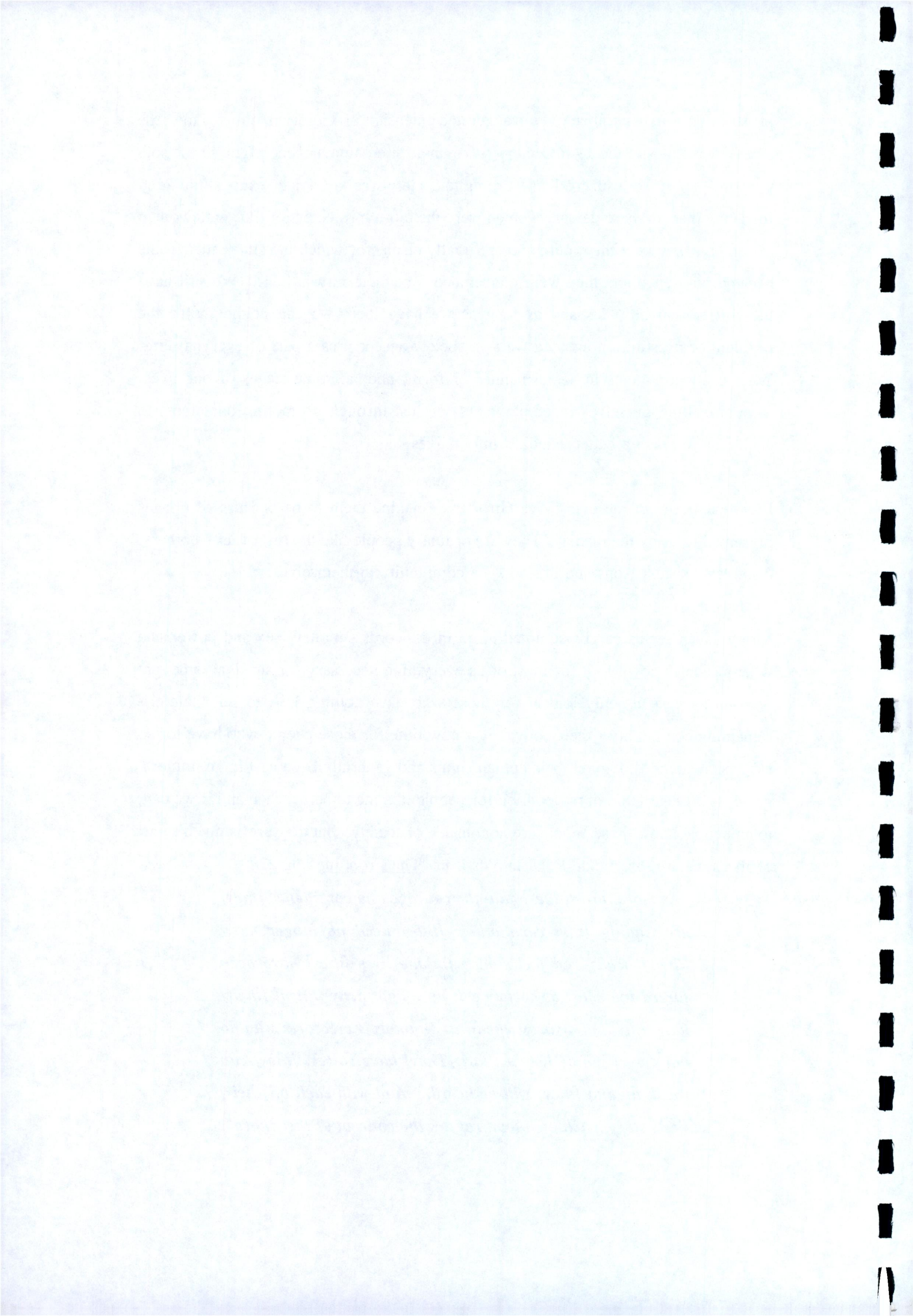
prostitution is in general an over exaggerated extension of Victorian attitudes towards sex. Prostitutes in the 19th Century were unclean creatures of the night whose sole purpose - apart from survival - according to society was to provide sexual stimulation for gentlemen. These deviant women were the moral protectors of the gentlewomen of society, they kept them pure and spiritually clean, for which in return, their souls became blackened and they were condemned for an eternity in hell. We still have these Victorian attitudes and as long as we have them we can neither solve the problem of prostitution nor can we as a society accept it as a part of everyday life. We are all prostitutes in some manner or form, and, at some stages of our lives, through selling ourselves in employment, or just through promoting ourselves, to enable us to reach a better standard in our lives.

Prostitutes are not the evil "Vice Girls" we imagine them to be because of images presented to us by the media. They are ordinary people like the rest of us - mothers, daughters, sisters, sons and brothers - a community in themselves.

Life today it seems can be summed up in three words - money, sex and power and when it comes down to it for most of us everything necessary for survival is bought or sold so it seems only logical for those who have nothing left, to sell their one remaining commodity - their body. It is now time for those people who have for so long been silenced, denied their human rights and generally been cast in an immoral guise, to be heard and in my opinion for people like me to help, when and if we can, to let people know those people are not outside of society, that they are as much a part of it, as we are, as Nickie Roberts puts it in "The Frontline" pg 238.

*"As more [prostitutes] gain the courage and confidence [they] are finding from each other, [they] need no longer hang [their] heads and feel shame for the lives [they] have been forced into, just as society can no longer deny [them] [their] humanity and dismiss [them] as 'Immoral' creatures who do not deserve to be listened to. [They] have voices, [they] can speak up and [they] will be heard. And with each of [their] life's story, each of [them] refutes the concept of the whore".*







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