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SELF-ADVOCACY OF WOMEN IN SEXUALIZED LABOR, 1880–1980s.

by

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SELF-ADVOCACY OF WOMEN IN SEXUALIZED LABOR, 1880 – 1980s.

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University of Nebraska, 2009

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The purpose of this study is to centralize, into women's history, the marginalized historical voices of women activists working in sexualized labor (and/or those using sexualized economic strategies). This thesis situates the work of Josie Washburn, a former madam who turned self advocate in 1907, squarely within the Progressive Era debate on prostitution. By centralizing women's voices of sexualized labor, it provides a means to track the long-term evolution of the intersections between women's sexualized labor choices, traditional labor choices, self-advocacy, popular media, and social/political movements on behalf of women. This study asserts that a majority Progressive Era working women utilized sexualized labor strategies to survive the substandard wages of paid employment. Working women bartered their time and bodies in numerous different ways that included dating for luxuries (such as shoes) to professional prostitute in brothels. Thus, the history of sexual labor (clandestine to professional) is central to the grand narrative of women's history. Furthermore, this study compares the challenges and issues faced by Progressive Era prostitutes to that of sex workers during the 1950s – 1990s. The comparison reveals that the women who formed the sex workers movement of the 1980s confronted problems remarkably similar to those faced by Josie Washburn in the late-nineteenth century.

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Introduction: Self-advocacy of Women in Sexualized Labor, 1880 – 1980s.

I have a particular instance in mind, which is one of many that came under my observation. A beautiful woman of only twenty-six years who was truly an angel wife as nearly as a woman could be, with five children to support, was deserted by her husband. Such cases are numbered by the thousands. But as to this particular case, after a long struggle with poverty the deserted wife and mother was driven into the underworld. It was the only means to the support of her children.

Josie Washburn, *The Underworld Sewer*.¹

I got married. I figured we'd be like a normal married couple, simply married. But I couldn't depend on my husband. He was running around with other women while I was pregnant. He lost his job and I went to work, and then he was totally dependent upon me. It didn't last. I was selling popcorn when my boss came over and said, "I got another job for you in the strip tent."

Shortie, *Carnival Strippers*²

These two stories echo each other, yet the circumstances took place more than seventy years apart. Josie Washburn began her trek into the sex trade as a prostitute in 1871, at the age of 17. Soon after a failed suicide attempt, she married and moved away from Omaha, Nebraska. The abandonment of her husband forced Washburn to return to the “underworld sewer.” She ran a successful brothel at 226 South 9th Street in Lincoln, Nebraska, from 1895 to 1907. Soon after retirement, Washburn wrote a harsh critique of the conditions that forced women into prostitution titled *The Underworld Sewer: A Prostitute Reflects on Life in the Trade, 1871–1909*.³

Shortie's story was captured in the hours of cassette recordings and photographic images taken by photographer Susan Meiselas in *Carnival Strippers* (1976).⁴ Meiselas spent three summers on the northeastern carnival circuit from 1972 to 1975. Her camera captured the performances on the stage, inside the tents, and life behind the scenes. Still-shots captured the powerful intimacy of the women who worked as strippers during a

time of rapid change in their industry: the country had gone topless in the late-1960s; pornography was becoming mainstream; and the expectations of customers were changing all forms of sexualized labor. Carnival stripping (or more specifically cooch shows), in response to the mass consumption of go-go dancers, topless waitresses, and periodical soft pornography, had collapsed into on-stage prostitution.⁵ Shortie stated that “if they wanted to get right up on the stage and screw me it wouldn’t bother me a bit as long as I was gettin’ paid for it.”⁶ “Girl show” historian A.W. Stencell believed that “by the 1970s, of the remaining cooch shows, about 80% were serving lunch—touching, feeling, and tasting was all part of the extra show.”⁷

Washburn and Shortie had found their way into their form of prostitution for the same reasons: failed financial support from a man through marriage and a lack of options of other forms of labor that paid uneducated women a living wage. They both turned to prostitution when other means of income were exhausted. In her book, Washburn blamed society for the condition of women. The women in *Carnival Strippers* echoed Washburn’s sentiments as they drew correlations between their professional choices, the resulting social stigma, and their personal struggles. A failed marriage was only one contributor to women choosing sexualized labor. Lena, a young carnival stripper, described her struggles:

The townspeople thought that I was a whore already – even when I was a virgin, they considered me a slut – but when I got back last winter after stripping for four months, it was terrible. I was supposed to be selling myself for ten bucks a whack. I walked down the street with my nose in the air, because I was above the small talk. I always used to feel that I wasn’t above as pretty or wasn’t as smart as the other girls, but not anymore. I felt like I was better than everyone else in town.⁸

As illustrated by Washburn, Shortie, and Lena, women in sexualized labor is very complicated portrait. Yet, the passage of a century did little to change the circumstances of these women's lives. Shortie and Lena still faced the same challenges and barriers as did Washburn.

Prostitution is only one form of sexualized labor. The word *sexualized* is used in this study using the standard dictionary definition, "to make sexual in nature."⁹ In this study, the word *sexual* goes beyond the implication of the physical desire to include occupations and/or social interactions that "symbolize erotic desires or activity."¹⁰ The term "sexualized" is used in accordance with "whore label" or "whore stigma" defined here by Gail Pheterson:

The whore label is attached to anyone who works or has worked the sex industry as a prostitute, pornography model, strip-tease dancer, masseuse, sexual surrogate or other provider of sexual service or entertainment. The whore as prostitute or sex worker is the prototype of the stigmatized woman or feminized man. But not only prostitutes are labeled whores. Any woman may be designated "whore" within a particular culture setting, especially if she is a migrant, target of racist discrimination, independent worker, or victim of abuse. Rather than disassociate with the whore label, contributors to the book identify with all those branded persons and demand rights as whores.¹¹

A core theme to this discussion is seeking out the historical tension between the feminists who attempted to "disassociate from the whore label" and the feminists who attempted to own it. As explained by Pheterson, the occupations included in this definition are not just professional prostitutes, strippers, burlesque dancers, and pornography actors. Timothy J. Gilfoyle points out in his study on prostitution, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution and the Commercializing of Sex, 1790 – 1920*, that "by the antebellum years, certain types of female employment had in public minds become linked to prostitution."¹²

Accordingly, this study will show that the collapsing of *all* sexualized economic

strategies (such as casual prostitution and dating for gifts) into one stigmatized category of immoral women produced a class of sexualized labor that included actresses, waitresses, beauty queens, models, servants, and factory workers. The portrayals of these classes of sexualized labor in the popular media outlets of the era reinforced stereotypes based on occupation. Also, I use the term “working women” instead of working-class women. Often times, although women were raised in one class background, they found themselves in circumstantial poverty while in adulthood. The term “working” also makes implies that they are self-supporting or heads of the household (breadwinners). Although this definition does create a sweeping category of women’s occupations, this study will show that many of the same overlapping concerns have faced women in sexualized labor for most of the twentieth century.

This study is focused on white women as subject and sex work (prostitutes, pornography actors, and exotic dancers) as labor. Although other forms of sexualized labor are discussed, they are a small part of the discussion due to the parameters of this study. The author is well aware that the contemporary conjuncture of feminist scholarship is located at the intersections of sex, race, sexuality, gender, and class. Nonetheless, due to the limitations of scope and depth of this study, I felt it necessary to focus on only white women, gender, and class. The primary reason is that the majority of the primary and secondary sources are also focused on white women. This study does not attempt to be all inclusive and hopes to produce questions that will incite further scholarship and thought.

The subject of sexualized women’s labor has attracted attention from a wide variety of writers and scholars during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries from the

social purity reformers of the late 1800s to the pro-sex feminists of the 1980s. Early works on women in sexualized labor emerged from the social critics and moral reformers who participated in the debates on white slavery, reform, public health, abolitionism, feminism, social welfare, and regulationist movements. This era contributed a wide variety of strategies to address the rapidly changing roles of working women in the public sphere. Some moral reformers of this era portrayed women who utilized strategies sexualized labor (casually or professionally) as lacking agency. The prostitute was a fallen woman (beyond rehabilitation) while advocates for the “new woman” described these same women as victims of predatory men (who could be rehabilitated back to the state of true womanhood through institutions of reform). For example, historian Ruth Rosen argued, in *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900 – 1918* (1982), that the class and ethnic prejudices – based on a fundamental belief in moral corruption of all Others – of some female reformers was evident in their choices of services offered to prostitutes. One group of moral reformers held prayer meetings in brothels (to save the souls of the lost) while also offering to provide job training, employment placement, and transition housing to the same prostitutes they prayed for.¹³ These strategies to address the circumstance of prostitutes revealed the reformers’ understanding of the economic causes of prostitution. Thus, Rosen argues that female reformers concurrently treated the social problem of prostitution as a spiritual crisis of women who had fallen from grace (beyond rehabilitation) while addressing the very practical issues of living wage employment and suitable housing (for victims of the predatory male-dominated market). In *Engendered Encounters: Feminism and Pueblo Cultures, 1879 – 1934*, Margaret Jacobs argues that dominant notions of late-nineteenth-century sexuality “that women’s

sexual passion lay dormant and thus women were better able to control it than men” embedded Progressive Era politics.¹⁴ Jacobs explains that “many white, middle-class women appear to have accepted this view of female sexuality and to have used it to justify further forays into the public sphere, often to enforce their vision of sexuality and morality among women who were neither middle-class nor white.”¹⁵

Progressive Era voices on prostitution were diverse. Thus, I tend to overgeneralize into the three main categories of “moral reformers,” “radical social critics,” and “self-advocating prostitutes.” The moral reformers were members of groups such as the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) and the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). Although the internal nuances of these organizations were diverse, they shared the overarching theme of social reform and municipal housecleaning as their common solution to social problems. The category of radical social critics includes voices such as Havelock Ellis and Emma Goldman. Ellis was a British sexologist whose opinions were well read in the United States while Goldman’s anarchists’ views of marriage and female sexuality caused a stir. Although different in approaches, the radical social critics saw prostitution as representative of the changes caused by the progression of civilization and industrialization. Washburn represents the self-advocating prostitute (or sex worker). She sought to break the contemporary stereotypes of prostitutes through writing and organizing on the behalf of women in her profession. These categories, although over-simplified, represent the dominant debates necessary to discuss Progressive Era prostitution in this context.

Sexualized labor also emerged as a site of activism among women’s rights advocates, feminist scholars, and politicized sex workers during early second wave

feminism. The sex workers movement was a rebuttal to the image of the prostitute as the scapegoat of radical feminism. These politicized prostitutes teamed with academic scholars to challenge the portrayal of women's work as only white and middle class or privileged. Valerie Jenness explains in *Making it Work: The Prostitutes' Rights Movement in Perspective* (1993):

During the 1970s and throughout the 1980s a new image of prostitution emerged to challenge traditional views of prostitutes as social misfits, sexual slaves, victims of pimps and drug addiction, and tools of organized crime. It has become fashionable to refer to prostitution as "sex work" (du Plexix Gray 1992). This new image has been championed by the contemporary prostitutes' rights movement in the United States and abroad, which in turn has been led by the self-proclaimed prostitutes rights organization COYOTE (an acronym for Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics). Since its emergence in the early 1970s, the prostitutes' rights movement has put forth vocal and persuasive leaders, while also gaining visibility in the mass media and the world of government grants, foundation support, the academy, social science disciplines, and non-profit organizations.¹⁶

Many historians in the 1980s sought to locate women in history who were in sexualized labor and/or used sexualized economic survival strategies. Judith Walkowitz and Ruth Rosen produced significant historical studies on prostitution.¹⁷ Walkowitz's ground-breaking work, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State* (1980), argues that prostitution in turn-of-the-century Britain acted as a social microcosm for larger cultural dynamics. The red light district exaggerated the power arrangements between genders, within genders, between classes, between races, and between government and subject.¹⁸ She persuasively argues that early women's rights activists sought to claim their authority by perpetuating an ideology based on the assumption of a "separate sphere," and thus justified their public roles as morally superior caregivers of humanity whose job was to protect lesser women from the animalistic, "carnal" tendencies of men.¹⁹ In *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900 – 1918* (1982),

Rosen carefully constructs the moral and physical landscape of Progressive Era prostitution in the United States. By utilizing both a feminist and class critique, she argues that “a complicated web of particular economic, social, and family difficulties led working-class women to choose prostitution as a survival strategy.”²⁰ In the late 1990s, Rosen further contributed to the discussion by co-editing *The Maimie Papers: Letters from and Ex-Prostitute* (1996). This book provides a brief snapshot of the life of Maimie Pinzer, a clandestine prostitute, entrepreneur, and prostitute advocate. Pinzer’s wrote letters to Fanny Quincy Howe from 1910 – 1922. The letters revealed Pinzer’s life journey. The journal-like narrative follows Pinzer as she navigates the economic and emotional terrain of being a young woman in the Progressive Era.²¹ Like Walkowitz, Rosen centralizes prostitutes in their own history, providing them agency. Rosen describes the abolishment of red light districts in nearly all major cities at the turn of the twentieth century. A trend destroying women’s neighborhoods and businesses. Walkowitz and Rosen connect prostitution with the economic conditions of women and unequal social structures. These two scholars also analyze the internal gender hierarchies evident in the working women’s counter-cultures that often mirrored the class mores of larger society and complicated the prostitute stereotype produced in the nineteenth century.

Other scholars also have contributed important works during the 1980s. Kathy Peiss and Joanne J. Meyerowitz reconstruct working women’s counter-cultures that highly valued entertainment, leisure, and style. Prostitution was firmly embedded in the counter-cultures described by Peiss and Meyerowitz. “They [moral reformers] noticed that chaste working women sometimes adopted the clothing, makeup, and speech that had

earlier distinguished prostitutes and related them to a visible pariah caste,” argued Meyerowitz.²² In *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (1986), Peiss locates working class women in history as active members of a larger culture of women who pioneered new manners and mores by forging radical patterns of leisure activities and fashion. Peiss argues that these young women were a working class variant of the “New Woman.”²³ In accordance, Meyerowitz’ examination, in *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880 – 1930* (1988), of “wayward women” argues that these young working women challenged contemporary conventions and influenced generations to come. By examining women wage earners, Meyerowitz’ demonstrates that “bereft of family support and confronted with poverty, [working women] created new subcultures, challenged Victorian prescriptions, set patterns for contemporary sex roles, inspired social reformers, and influenced popular cultures.”²⁴ These scholars illustrate the cross-pollination of style, fashion and life style choices between the independent, privileged “New Woman” and the “woman adrift” and the subculture of prostitution. These works situate working class women as one source of the early 20th-century middle-class sexual revolution that mainstreamed the idea of women in the public sphere and loosened the mores of women’s public behavior.

Some scholars argue that working class counter-cultures are most evident in the casework files and court documents of social welfare workers, local courtrooms, and reform institutions. Ruth M. Alexander examines female sexual delinquency in New York City (1900 – 1930) while Regina G. Kunzel charts the professionalization of social work by examining the plight of unmarried mothers from 1890 to 1945. Alexander argues

that by examining women incarcerated in two New York reformatories the tension playing out between the shifting lives of young women and the institutions built and designed to control their deviance is exposed.²⁵ Kunzel's work reveals the same tension as that of Alexander's while also shining light upon the turbulent transition of public social work from the service of rich matrons into an institutionalized state agency.²⁶ In 1988, Mimi Abramovitz added to the intellectual conversation by producing an unapologetic historical analysis of the American social welfare policy from colonial to contemporary times. She concludes that deviant women were denied the "rights of womanhood" and "could not expect protection or respectability and instead faced social stigma, economic insecurity, and such penalties as mandatory work requirements, child removal, and strict government supervision of their parenting, sexual, and social life." With implementation of the New Deal legislation, Abramovitz argued that as the welfare state became more institutionalized the behavior of public women came under more and more scrutiny over the course of the twentieth century.²⁷

Other more recent works of significance include Brenda Foley's *Undressed for Success: Beauty Contestants and Exotic Dancers as Merchants of Morality* (2005). Foley's work established "that the nude woman of today represents nothing but herself" by comparing strippers and beauty queens to illustrate how stage performance had collapsed into a stigmatized gender performance.²⁸ By the end of the twentieth century audience members assumed that any woman on stage was revealing portions of her private self. Foley establishes this argument with an in-depth study of the signifiers used in the stage performance of the beauty queen and stripper. These signifiers are the well articulated and practiced social markers of costume, hip movement, walk, off-stage

behavior and on-stage etiquette that were developed over the century to distinguish one type of performance from the other. Foley also establishes how a woman's performance on stage was read by the audience as a revelation of the exotic dancer/beauty contestants' authentic self.²⁹ Therefore, the performance artist constructs her performance using the appropriate signifiers to distinguish herself one from the other. In 1991, Robert G. Allen first considered female burlesque actresses and cooch dancers as part of American theatre while Tracy Davis's meticulous study of Victorian English actresses established them as more than performers: they were working women.³⁰ Katie N. Johnson, in *Sisters in Sin: Brothel Drama in America, 1900 – 1920* (2006), recognized a new genre of theatre that had evolved from the Fallen Woman genre: the frequently staged Brothel Drama. The Brothel Drama, Johnson argues, mainstreamed prostitutes on stage. To establish the mark of stardom of every major actresses of the era had to play one these renowned roles.³¹

The feminist "Sex Wars" of the 1980s – 1990s produced a litany of scholarship and writing on women in sexualized labor with a special focus on prostitution and pornography. This discussion depends heavily on work done by Gail Pheterson, Valerie Jenness, Kari Lerum, Shannon Bell, and Wendy Chapkis. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Whores* (1989), Pheterson outlines the history and core theory of the sex worker's movement in her introduction. The rest of the text is dedicated to the participants in the First World Whores' Congress - held in Amsterdam, February 14th, 1985 - who articulated their own agenda. The Pheterson text is just one example of how books from this era served as both primary and secondary sources to this thesis. They provide archival material from participants of the movement speaking for themselves while also

serving as secondary resources of experts analyzing their movements with the authority of education and advocacy. Pheterson was a scholar, but she made the efforts to frame the testimony of the sex workers to serve as both a primary and secondary source to establish sex worker's authority in the feminist movement.³² Jenness, in *Making It Work: The Prostitutes' Rights Movement in Perspective* (1993), examines the early movement by providing an in depth look at the first American sex workers organization, COYOTE. In *Reading, Writing, & Rewriting the Prostitute Body* (1994), Shannon Bell situates the prostitute movement within a postmodern framework; she established the prostitute as the "Female Other" to women who were already an Other to the patriarchy.³³

During this era, another historical precedent was established: feminist women in sexualized labor began to speak for themselves through the publication of books, creation of arts, and self organizing. Carol Leigh, politicized prostitute, summarizes that "since the early 1900s there have been a number of authentic memoirs by the demimondaine, from Maimie Pinzer's letters (1910 – 1917) in *The Maimie Papers* to Xaviera Hollander's *Happy Hookers* in the '70s. Norma Jean Almodavor's *Cop to Call Girl* and Dolores French's *Working: My Life as a Prostitute* were published in the '80s, followed by a number of anthologies of first person accounts by sex industry workers, including *Sex Work*, published in 1987."³⁴ Other authors, advocates, and performance artists who are important to this body of research are Carol Leigh, Annie Sprinkle, Margo St. James, and Nickie Roberts. Carol Leigh coined the term "sex work" and provides an excellent exploration of her evolution from a young feminist activist to a veteran global politicized prostitute advocate in *The Unrepentant Whore: Collected Works of Scarlot Harlot* (2004). Nicki Roberts published a comprehensive chronicle of *Whores in History: Prostitution in*

Western Society (1992) that draws correlations between the current global condition of sex workers and their historical Progressive Era red light district sisters.³⁵ Although Annie Sprinkle is not cited in this thesis, it's important to recognize her influential use of performance art as advocacy. On "legitimate" stages all over the world (with limited appearances in the United States due to theatre's federal funding being threatened), she questioned and challenged the whore stigma. Her autobiography *Post-Porn Modernist: My 25 Years as a Multimedia Whore* (1998) serves as a grand narrative of the sex workers movement while utilizing her personal experiences as a public figure as a public education tool.³⁶ The common themes that run through all of these writings and scholarship are that the conditions of women's poverty are connected to larger social structures; that working women's choices of economic livelihood have been historically limited; that poverty is a mitigating factor in women participating in sexualized labor and/or sexualized economic survival strategies; and that sexualized labor produces a stigma that impacts women's long-term quality of life.

Despite the comprehensive nature of scholarship in this field, I know of no study that centralizes the self-advocacy of prostitutes in the Progressive Era debate on prostitution to establish their work as predecessors of the sex workers and feminist movements of the latter half of the twentieth century. This study situates the work of Josie Washburn, a former madam who turned self advocate in 1907, squarely within the contemporary debate on prostitution in the Progressive Era, instead of allowing her work to remain marginalized much as she was in her time. This thesis creates a framework for future studies to examine and compare sexualized labor with those of "legitimate" forms of women's labor. The purpose of this study is to centralize, into women's history, the

marginalized historical voices of white women activists working in sexualized labor (and/or those using sexualized economic strategies), women whose history has been marginalized. By centralizing sexualized labor women's voices, this thesis tracks the long-term evolution of the intersections between women's sexualized labor choices, traditional labor choices, self-advocacy, popular media, and social/political movements on behalf of women. This study does label young Progressive Era working women the bartering of sex and dating favors for money and material possessions as deviant. In fact, I argue that working women used sexual labor strategies as a normative option in their counter-cultures. The thesis concludes by comparing the Progressive Era prostitutes with the politicized sex workers of the 1950s – 1980s. The comparison of the two cohorts reveals that women's sexualized labor experienced similar trends that in state legislation, professionalization, specialization, institutionalization, self organizing, self-advocacy for control over their profession, the feminist movement, and unionizing. The comparison of the two cohorts also notes little change in areas such as low pay, poor work conditions, social stigma, reported sexism, narrow portrayals in popular culture, and negative stereotyping.

This thesis examines how the scrutiny of all women's public behavior impacted the lives of women laborers. Their public behaviors were considered a revelation of the private self (just as Foley argued that women on stage were thought to reveal their private selves). The juxtaposition of good public/private behavior was constantly measured by the bad public/private behavior of women in prostitution or those who were exhibiting whore-like qualities. The regulation of women's behaviors became institutionalized with the advent of state-run women's juvenile facilities, the social welfare system, and unwed

mother homes. The outlawing of such behavior (unwed pregnancy, prostitution, and unwed fornication) manifested a tension between the moral reformers of the bad women's behaviors and women labeled deviant. This thesis focuses on how Progressive Era prostitutes navigated their self agency against more powerful social reformers. The strained relationship eventually erupted into the sex workers' intense self-advocacy of the 1970s – 1990s. These tensions also became evident as second wave feminism split into different camps based upon being anti- or pro-sex.³⁷

“Self-advocacy of Women in Sexualized Labor, 1880–1980s” examines the challenges confronted by women working in sexualized labor as they advocated for improving their quality of life over the twentieth century. The first chapter examines the physical and moral landscape of prostitution on both national and local levels. The red light districts were more than areas of ill repute. They were neighborhoods full of women-owned businesses and residences, areas where fashion, culture, and behavior were exchanged between the classes as prostitutes strolled the theatre districts while living in the same apartment buildings where the upper-class “new women” slummed. The same neighborhood also housed middle-class women who were abandoned and widowed as they sought work to support their children while their sisters attempted to apply their education as nurses, doctors, and teachers. In the Progressive Era, geography alone was superseded by the development of a supposedly homogeneous American national culture. Mass media spearheaded the development of a national consciousness with the lucrative advancements of technology in photography, film, traveling theatre, and the publishing industry. Chapter Two examines the self-advocacy of Josie Washburn. At the cusp of these dynamics, a former madam named Josie Washburn wrote an anti-

prostitution treatise calling out society, business, and industrialization as the causes of a sex industry whose profit margins were the backbone of city budgets and business coffers. She proceeded to work for approximately a decade to help transition women out of prostitution in Nebraska. Although her efforts did not yet take root, she left the only known verifiable work of self-advocacy from the time period. Chapter Three explores the echoes of Washburn's sentiments as they were found in the Sex Workers Movement of the 1970s - 1980s, a social movement that began as sex workers organized to improve their quality of life and increase the safety of their occupation. They were inspired by and contributed to the rhetoric and grassroots organizing of the 1970s' second wave feminist movement. The sex workers' social movement exploded as sex workers found their voice within the fiery feminist debates regarding pornography in the 1980s; they protested being objectified by the very movement that inspired them to claim their civil rights.

Chapter 1: The Physical and Moral Landscape of Prostitution and the Performing Female Body, 1880–1920.

Identifying the intersections between Victorian sexual repressions and Progressive Era transformations situates the reconfigurations of female sexual knowledge in the early twentieth century. Michel Foucault described the rule of the “Victorian regime” as a historical moment when sexual knowledge “was carefully confined” as the “conjugal family took custody of it and absorbed it into the serious function of reproduction.” Foucault argued that Victorians left all sexual knowledge outside of the parent’s bedroom vague and sterilized. Their standards advocated that those with “proper demeanor avoided contact with other bodies” and “verbal decency.”¹ (Foucault omits that this is the experience of the middle class and upper classes, not the experience of the highly influential working classes.) Barbara Smith Corrales, in “Prurience, Prostitution, and Progressive Improvements: The Crowley Connection, 1909 – 1918” (2004), described the Progressive Era as “a period distinguished by a national spirit of almost frenzied social rectitude . . . a time of religious zeal, health and sanitation reform, political housecleaning, and moral purification.”² Joanne Meyerowitz described Progressive Era women as a population in upheaval as they joined the migration from country to city.³ During this era, women’s participation in the workforce quadrupled. Women from all socioeconomic backgrounds and races “not only entered the workforce but also lived apart from the homes of family, relatives, and employers.”⁴ The converging of these different dynamics reconfigured the moral frontiers of female sexual knowledge for many Progressive Era women. The story of Progressive Era women and sexual knowledge cannot be told in a linear narrative. Helen Horowitz, in *Rereading Sex: Battles over Sexual Knowledge and*

Suppression in Nineteenth Century America (2002), addressed the complexities of “telling the story of sexual knowledge and suppression in nineteenth-century America” by articulating two different narratives, a national story and a local tale⁵ The national narrative examined the contents of materials made available to Americans through the penny press and other literary outlets. To localize the dialogue on sex, Horowitz focused on New York City, the cultural hub of the United States, with its growing tensions of reform agitation and trendsetting court litigation. Horowitz retold the story of nineteenth century sexual knowledge from a localized experience that expanded out in concentric circles to a national phenomena. Therefore, to retell the story of Progressive Era prostitution requires the same national bird’s eye view nested into a localized discussion about how this knowledge played out in average Americans’ lives.

Prostitution is one facet in the raging Progressive Era debates on female sexual knowledge. Social reformers labeled prostitution as ground zero in their battle to control women’s changing relationship to their sexual knowledge. The red light districts were also the homes to low income female laborers as well as cottage industries. Thus, the red light district housed contention as the Victorian ideology of prostitution as a “necessary evil” gave away to the Progressive era social purification campaign. The campaign advocated that the “social evil” of prostitution be wiped from the map of human history and urban geography⁶

Unlike Horowitz’s choice of the unique dynamic of New York City, I believe the story of women in sexualized labor is best examined in a secondary city, such as Lincoln, Nebraska. Secondary cities were where most Americans would have experienced the mourning of this era’s “loss of the “traditional family,” upheld the values they associated

with American rural life, and sought to restore women to their proper place” (as described by Ruth Rosen).⁷ This chapter argues that secondary cities were an intensified microcosm of the changes occurring on a national level to the physical and moral landscapes of Progressive Era red light districts. Red light districts and commerce districts overlapped in small secondary cities. Commerce and prostitution co-existed side-by-side in the booster economy of late nineteenth century and early twentieth century.⁸ No buffer system separated average citizens from the work of the prostitute. The reality of prostitution was thinly veiled. Progressive Era red light districts were not just the home of brothels. This chapter examines the heart of a thriving downtown Lincoln where the feminized business districts lay embedded in the center of the male subculture.

Prostitution also existed in the popular public imagination as one turbulent facet of the public debate on the changing roles of women and their public valuation. This chapter explores how women reformers defined women’s worth through a hierarchical approach. The chaste political activist topped the hierarchy. She brought domestic values into the public realm as a domesticated matriarch engaged in municipal housecleaning. This character assessment was based on the concept that a woman revealed her private self (chaste or whore) through public behaviors. This belief system lay at the root of many of the public campaigns against prostitutes and their neighborhoods.

The Physical Landscape of Prostitution

Prostitution connects geographical location with ideology. Thus, it is important to examine the physical space inhabited by prostitutes in context with the contemporary ideologies about prostitutes. Progressive Era experts described the location of prostitutes

by where they ranked on the hierarchy of sexualized labor. In *History of Prostitution* (1876), William Sanger broke the elaborate New York brothel system down into four grades (or classes). The highest ranking prostitutes assimilated all the virtues attributed to the women reared in the cult of domesticity. "Being almost invariably young and handsome, and always very well dressed, they pass through the streets without their real character being suspected by the uninitiated," explained Sanger.⁹ After an in-depth study of these elite prostitutes, Sanger spares two or three pages to discuss the second and third grade prostitutes. The second-grade prostitutes are the middle classes of prostitution. According to Sanger, the second-grade houses are staffed by many women who were originally inmates of the in first-class houses, but left them when their charms faded. These women had become jaded and lost their desire to "assume virtue."¹⁰ "Degradation has had its effect upon them, and now that they are reduced to a humbler sphere they feel more of the world's pressures, and become more daring and reckless in their conduct."¹¹ Sanger argued that many of these second-tier women were located in the third-tier of theatre houses or found as streetwalkers. It was in the second grade of prostitution that women revealed "the assigning of their true position."¹² Sanger asserted that the women of the first grade had the potential to marry out of their condition, but by the time the woman had reached the lower ranks all hope was lost. With the exception of prevalent drunkenness and profanity, the second-grade houses ran similarly to that of the elite. The third grade houses could be found amongst the districts of immigrants and sailors. These prostitutes were mostly foreign born Irish and Germans. "Most of the women are young, and many of them are very good-looking, while the houses, particularly those kept by Germans, are in general conducted very quietly."¹³ According to Sanger, Germans ran the

most virtuous of the third-grade brothels, especially when compared to the more rowdy Irish houses whose clientele were predominantly sailors.¹⁴ These houses received their guests in barrooms instead of the refined parlors of the native born brothels. Finally, the lowest grade of prostitution was the catch-all described as “diseased and dirty, the houses redolent of bad rum.”¹⁵ Sanger’s framework of prostitution is very evident in modern scholarship on prostitution.

Although historian Ruth Rosen does discuss the middle classes of prostitution in *The Lost Sisterhood*, most scholars have portrayed the Progressive Era red light districts as if there were only two grades of prostitutes: the elite or the disparaged. A Kansas vice report stated that there were houses decorated lavishly with “the finest upholstered chairs, well chosen paintings and costly rugs” while the majority of brothels in the rest of the district were “hovels of repulsive squalor.”¹⁶ Other scholars cited that few cities could claim the variety of New York while “almost every city of any size had at least one exclusive house such as the one of the Everleigh sisters ran in Chicago.”¹⁷ The Everleigh sisters’ legendary brothel was known for its selective client list, deep political clout, and long waiting list of women seeking employment.¹⁸ Their exclusivity was infamous, because although many madams may have aspired over the centuries for this kind of success, only a handful actually obtained such grandeur. Timothy Gilfoyle summarizes mid-nineteenth century prostitution into the categories of broad, generic brothels, territorial streetwalkers, and courtesans who “worked in the foremost theaters, concert halls, and hotels.”¹⁹ Accordingly, the western frontier city of Butte, Montana, seemed to offer only these two extremes. “By 1900, Mercury Street had a smattering of everything the district offered, boasting half a dozen parlor houses, several saloons, and numerous

low-rent cribs where women of all ages and ethnic backgrounds plied their trade.”²⁰ In the article “Capitalists with Rooms: Prostitution in Helena, Montana, 1865 – 1900” (1981), Paula Petrick calls scholars to task for their fascination with extremities:

Historians like their counterparts in the arts, have often glorified the harlot's progress and concentrated their efforts on the flamboyant lifestyles of high-class, successful madams: the Comstock's Julia Bulette, Denver's Mattie Silks, and the great madams of San Francisco. More recently, both have taken the opposite tack. Several historians have argued that the majority of fancy ladies died in poverty and degradation, trapped in a profession not of their choosing.²¹

The representation of two extremes of prostitution eliminates the middle classes of the red light district in the imagination of the scholar. Did every city house the upper elite of prostitution and how prevalent was the most degraded form of prostitution?

During the Victorian period, Studies of secondary cities such as Lincoln, Nebraska, Helena, Montana, Davenport, Iowa, and St. Paul, Minnesota, provides evidence that red light districts were composed of a female entrepreneurial class.²² One scholar concludes that “in contrast to the famous vice districts in major seaports and on the frontier, prostitution existed on a modest scale in St. Paul. In this respect, it was typical of many other cities.”²³ Another scholar argues that “for the historian, a smaller city is a more intimate canvas, opening up all possibilities for research that would be impractical in a great city.”²⁴ During the Progressive Era, small cities, like Jacksonville, Florida and St. Paul, experienced three-hundred percent population growth with the resulting industrial growth, traffic congestion, demand for public schools, need for extended public transportation lines, and other urban expansion.²⁵ In *The Freedom of the Streets: Work, Citizenship, and Sexuality in a Gilded Age City* (2005), Sharon Wood argued that “in 1880, more Americans lived in urban places of twelve thousand to seventy-five thousand than in cities with populations of half a million or more.”²⁶

Secondary cities scholars contend that the rapid expansion of the mid-nineteenth gave women entrepreneurial opportunities in the red light districts not available to them in other occupations or geographical locations. In "Careers in Brothel Prostitution: St. Paul, 1865 – 1883"(1982), Joel Best argues that women were able to transition in and out of prostitution with relative ease. They did not experience the recourse and stigma of being permanently labeled a former prostitute. "Although the majority of prostitutes remained poor, they were not doomed to special misery and a few even were upwardly mobile."²⁷ In "Capitalists with Rooms: Prostitution in Helena, Montana, 1865-1900" (1981), Paula Petrik found the same dynamics in the frontier city of Helena.²⁸ "From 1865 until 1883, Helena's tenderloin was dominated by proprietor prostitutes, women who operated alone primarily, owned their own dwelling on the "line," or had sufficient capital to do so."²⁹ Petrik argued that some women were able to achieve upward and outward mobility during this era. They had, in fact, built an empire where the transactions of business (such as real estate) were conducted between women, whether of ill-repute or married legitimately. Yet, Petrik argued that these entrepreneurial opportunities were lost to them at the turn of the twentieth-century when the U.S. Census Bureau stopped drawing a frontier line. The ownership of Helena's red light district was transferring from women to the hands of men.³⁰ Wood discovers this same transition from female to male ownership. "The pattern of Davenport's urban development encouraged the movement of the most visible prostitution from large, isolated brothels on the outskirts of town into small establishments like cigar stores in the heart of the city."³¹

Unlike these other secondary cities, the Progressive Era red light district of Lincoln, Nebraska, was still a predominantly female-owned district until the reformer's

movement shut it down in 1907. Former madam Josie Washburn described the houses of ill fame in Lincoln as being “not the extremely fashionable kind with costly furniture, nor of the lowest grade such as you will find in larger cities.”³² There were 18 “sporting houses” listed within the segregated red light district in the 1900 Lincoln manuscript census. Sixteen of the houses included three to ten native-born and immigrant white women (and often a servant and possibly a piano player); the other two African-American brothels housed thirteen women collectively.³³ Washburn’s claim of a middle-of-the-road red light district by 1900 is supported by evidence such as the 1903 Sanborn Map, which illustrates that the brothels were located in modest-sized buildings and houses or were co-located within larger buildings that housed other businesses. C. E. Kinsey, a local resident interviewed for The Federal Writers Project in 1939, described the co-habitation arrangement: “The old [First?] National Bank Building had a gambling joint on the second floor and a sportin’ house on the third.”³⁴ County records described Washburn’s brothel as resembling that of an average two-story building that was much smaller than the other brothel located in a former hotel on the north corner of 9th and N streets.³⁵ The all African-American houses of Maggie Heney (626 J Street) were co-located next to two white brothels at the far southern edge of the red light district. Emma Johnson’s house (405 S. 9th Street), with an all African-American occupancy, was just two blocks south of Washburn’s.³⁶ There was a segregation of inmates by race, but not necessarily by location. The black brothels appeared comparable in location and size to the white madams’ houses. The co-location of the black brothels was similar to that of the African-American middle class in Lincoln. Black middle class community members could be found in a small cluster of houses within a white middle class neighborhood.³⁷

According to Rosen, “the extent of racial segregation of prostitution varied widely from one city to the next.”³⁸ New Orleans, for example, had houses segregated by race standing side by side, but only the white customer could frequent the varied business establishments at his will. Rosen described the crib system (an assembly-line of small cell-like rooms) in San Francisco to be segregated by floors: white women occupied the top floor while women of different ethnicities inhabited the lower floors. The price was determined by the floor of the prostitute’s crib.³⁹

Prostitution was not the only female business located in Lincoln’s demimonde. Lincoln’s red light district mapped out to be approximately a ten block square ward that was overwhelmingly populated by female proprietors of cottage industries according to the 1891 Sanborn Map and the *Lincoln Directory, 1889*. Right next to Lydia Thompsons’ landmark brothel, women business owners pursued a wide variety of occupations, including charwomen, dressmakers, and cafe owners. Most of the proprietors were listed as “Mrs.” with no corresponding male affiliates; estranged wives were the known majority of the 1890 female labor pool, reflecting a potentially unique factor of Lincoln’s female labor market. Washburn’s neighborhood was like that of the Davenport “demi-monde” that Sharon Wood recorded as “a neighborhood where prostitutes plied their trade alongside other struggling women and where legitimate businesses rubbed shoulder with illicit ones.”⁴⁰

Working and living districts where female entrepreneurs and wage earners mingled and cross-pollinated with the women of the sex industry existed not only in Lincoln, Nebraska, but were reported nationwide. According to Joanna J. Meyerowitz, the most prominent vice districts in Chicago were located in the heart of the furnished

room districts (high-turnover dwellings for young wage earners).⁴¹ The furnished room district in the South Side of Chicago was the most notorious with brothels also tolerated in the West and North side quarters as well. The popular theatres that attracted many young working class women were located in New York's Bowery district. The Bowery was renowned for its innovation in entertainment venues. By demand of the male subculture, many forms of entertainment involving the nude female originated in the Bowery district.⁴² Kathy Peiss described the "two hundred concert-saloons" that sprang up by the mid-1860s in New York City as catering to "a heterogeneous male clientele of laborers, soldiers, sailor, and 'slumming' society gentlemen." Their main attraction included the singing "waiter girls" who "worked the tables, flirted with men, and often made assignations with favored customers."⁴³ Labor advocate and author of *Charities and Commons* (1907), Mary Van Kleeck described the large numbers of the female workforce in the Bowery:

Watch the Bowery at the close of any working day if you would gain some conception of the number of individuals involved in this question of regulating women's hours of work. Thousands of women hasten through the street entrances of the factories and are carried by the crowd south along the Bowery, dividing at the cross streets to pass west and east into the tenement districts wherein human lives are almost past counting.⁴⁴

Like Kleeck's observations of the large metropolis of New York City, Wood identified this same geographical overlap of women's labor, residence, and entertainment with that of the lives and business of prostitutes and the male subculture. Sharon Wood noted that in Davenport, Iowa, the development of suburbs overran the large, isolated brothels on the outskirts of town, encouraging prostitutes to relocate to smaller establishments located downtown. "As sites of prostitution became especially concentrated along the same few streets where most woman-run businesses lay and in the same neighborhood

where many woman-headed households clustered, those women identified as prostitutes shared their neighborhood streets every day with women who claimed sexual respectability.”⁴⁵

Both Joanna J. Meyerowitz and Kathy Peiss argued that the emergence of the “new woman” was the result of complex interactions between classes as geographic barriers between them began collapsing in urban environments. Meanwhile, mass communication (film, magazine, novels, books, traveling theatre productions, etc.) began to provide access to a national homogenous culture of fashion, entertainment, and education. Intermingling among the classes of women was most evident in the incorporation of style of behavior and fashion. The cosmetic accoutrements (clothes, wigs, make-up) of prostitutes were, according to Ruth Rosen, incorporated into the “respectable” twentieth-century woman’s appearance.⁴⁶ “Tantalized by the fine dress, easy life, sexual expressiveness, and apparent independence, while carefully marking the boundary between the fallen and respectable, a working woman might appropriate parts of the prostitute’s style as her own,” explained Peiss of the young working-class women on the streets of New York.⁴⁷

It is challenging to conclude how much of the style of women in sexualized labor was incorporated by Lincoln’s (Nebraska) female population. Awareness of the style of the prostitute, however, was evident as Willa Cather, then a local reporter and student at University of Nebraska-Lincoln, lamented in this November 5, 1893, *Nebraska State Journal* article:

SHE sat clear up in the highest gallery where very few women go, and only one class of women go entirely alone. She had been very handsome once, she was so still, that was the worst of it. Had she been a plain woman one could have looked at her with less pain. Tall, well formed women always make more pitiable wrecks than the little ones, there is more of them to ruin. Her head was fully

shaped and was set proudly on a white firm throat. The pose of her head alone was enough to make her beautiful. Her face was so disfigured by paint one could tell very little about it.

Three years later Cather, as the editor for *The Home Journal*, had changed her tune. In a January 1897 editorial she chastised reformers for attempting to distinguish respectability in fashion: “The somewhat trivial discussion of what is right and what is wrong in dress has certainly reached its climax when one of the most noted female speakers on reform and morality has declared that ‘no woman who wears an egret in her bonnet is a moral woman.’”⁴⁸ Cather was most certainly aware of the debate and tension playing out as fashion confused the internal gender hierarchy based on sexual restraint. Middle class women were incorporating the signifiers of dress of the women from the underworld and causing a frenzy of public debate about women working and appearing in public. The next section provides a brief survey of the relevant debates on prostitution from the Progressive Era. This era arguably produced more literature on prostitution than any other.⁴⁹

The Moral Landscape of Prostitution

At the turn of the twentieth century, prostitution, as a public examination, was entrenched in all forms of media, from the courts and legislatures to the theatrical stage. Corrales argues, “By 1900, the debate over prostitution had become virtually a national pastime.”⁵⁰ It was the zealous campaign of the social purity movement that had the most lasting impact on the lives of prostitutes during this era. Other women’s movements left their mark on the public perception of prostitution as labor. Rosen argued that the social purity movement consisted of both men and women who propagated goals that “encompassed not only the abolition of prostitution but also the censorship of

pornography, reformation of prostitutes, sex education, prosecution of prostitutes' customers, and establishment of women's rights to refuse to have marital sex."⁵¹

Although the social purity movement was not feminist by its nature, the women's movements and social purity were "very much intertwined, with members of each movement supporting causes of the other."⁵² Rosen expands:

By the end of the century, American abolitionists could regard themselves as part of a national and international movement. Aggressive and outspoken, they had gained strong support from feminists, clergy, the National W.C.T.U. (Woman's Christian Temperance Union), and other urban reformers, and had developed close ties with abolitionist groups in Great Britain and Europe. Gradually, a movement to abolish prostitution through a reformation of morals was transformed into the Progressive Era's drive to abolish prostitution through the intervention of the state.⁵³

The result was a heated, highly contested debate and eventual shut down of most red light districts across the nation. Ultimately, the debate juxtaposed the social value of women's labor against that of the value of the Sexualized female other. Thus, the Sexualized female other would represent the female whose lack of moral self caused her to commit immoral public acts. Thereby, the presence of the Sexualized female other justified the moral women's presence in public affairs. Moral women wielded the yardstick that measured all women's behaviors. In *How Women Saved the City* (2001), Daphne Spain described the tenets of this phenomenon within the framework of "municipal housekeeping."⁵⁴ Spain argues that municipal housekeeping was a political agenda designed to create avenues of public influence in an era where little existed for women. "Advocates of municipal housekeeping promoted similarities between the home and the city, particularly the need for cleanliness and order, as a way to establish their credentials for civic involvement."⁵⁵ The Sexualized female other was one of the many diseased and dirty creatures that needed to be cleaned up in the campaign for municipal housekeeping.

The rhetoric of municipal housekeeping was located deep within women activists' rhetoric during the Progressive Era. For example, Mary Kingsbury Simkhovitch, in the 1910 article "A Social Adjustment," saw prostitution as both a moral and ethical weakness that could be rectified by applying domestic strategies to women's public duties such as labor and entertainment.⁵⁶ According to Simkhovitch and other similar social critics, women were only following the natural evolution of progress as their unpaid domestic duties were turned into underpaid, unskilled labor in factories and shops. "She [the factory worker] is, of course, the same sort of person as the society girl or the so-called middle-class girl, but her position at just this juncture is a more difficult one than that of any other young woman, for she is stepping from the most old-fashioned type family into the newest type of industry."⁵⁷ Until a woman could make a living wage, without the exploitation of her body and family, civilization was in a state of crisis, according to Simkhovitch. Despite the desperate circumstances of substandard pay and limited options, Simkhovitch called for women to rise above their plight to uphold the moral progression of the new civilization. Admittedly, Simkhovitch confessed the ideal nearly impossible to maintain under the contemporary circumstances.

Yet, this was a circumstance that required the intervention and advocacy of the municipal housecleaner on behalf of her weaker, exploited sister. The American girl, Simkhovitch informed us, was a homeless migrant lost in the urban jungle whose only real comfort was the recreation of home and the dedication to an altar. The Jewish girls upheld their family as religion but when independent of their loved ones lost site of a higher power, whereas the Italian girls had an uncontrollable taste for pleasure and pampering.⁵⁸ A Catholic Irish girl fared well under the pressure as her religion was above

family, friend, or foe. In his research, Gilfoyle found that Simkhovitch was incorrect: “In demographic terms, native-born and Irish women accounted for the most significant numbers of prostitutes” in New York City from 1840 to 1870.⁵⁹ Rosen noted that “fears of unrestricted immigration, the prevalence of stereotypes about the ‘low moral’ of other racial and ethnic groups, and the popularity of eugenics all made female reformers waver in their sympathies for prostitutes.”⁶⁰ Reformers’ biases, Rosen argued, were evident when they portrayed prostitutes as foreign-born when their own research cited that “native-born daughters of immigrant parents” comprised the majority in the profession.⁶¹ Further, Simkhovitch’s claims are not supported by contemporary studies on prostitution, such as those by Kneeland or Sanger, which showed that native-born whites made up the majority of prostitutes.⁶² Nonetheless, Simkhovitch informed her audience of social scientists that the girls most susceptible to the lure of the underworld were those of foreign descent whose domestic situations equaled that of her own.

Social critics, such as Simkhovitch, created a devalued Sexualized female other (a pleasure-seeking laborer collapsed into a potential and proven prostitute) in an attempt to negotiate and bargain for a higher public/private social value for the moral new woman (and other similar archetypes). For example, Simkhovitch extends the domestic sphere of women to include the laborers of industrialization:

The entrance of women into industry is an act of necessity. Women have in the beginning gone to work in factories and in shops in all occupations outside the home, not from choice but because the industrial revolution has so altered the conditions of life that such as departure from the home was rendered inevitable. Women has entered industry half-heartedly. She is not work-conscious as she is home-conscious.⁶³

Yet, Simkhovitch concedes that living up to the high moral ideals put forth were, in fact, nearly impossible within the contemporary circumstances of substandard wages and living conditions of working women:

These positive safeguards are, as we have seen, of various kinds; they are religion, or socialism, or trade unionism, or any compelling form of social or political development. They all involve an individual direct relationship between the girl and her desire. She is a person with her own hopes. She is freed from entanglements. She attains a purity very different from that feeble inhibited negative thing which comes from outward protection alone. But there is another side of the question. It is nonsense to suppose that any spiritual enthusiasm, no matter how powerful, will be adequate to protect the girl whose wage it is impossible to live on.... It is silly, not to say criminal, for us to suppose that girls are going to starve or go without decent clothes or deprive themselves of all pleasures because they cannot pay their own way. There will be cases of heroism always.⁶⁴

These acts of heroism are what set the moral woman laborer apart from and above the prostitute. Smikhovitch observed: “among the prostitutes of this city, I doubt if you can find one who is either a revolutionist, a socialist, a Zionist, a good trade unionist, or an ardent suffragist.”⁶⁵ Hence, Simkhovitch created a moral new woman that possessing an evolved superiority (the utopian convergence of public labor with ideal moral self). Women designed to lead the progress of American civilization.⁶⁶ She attempted to align the unskilled virtuous female laborers of the new industrial family with the reconstructed radical middle class whose reformed utopia would promote “vigorous expansion of populist democracy, abolish most class distinctions, eliminate capitalist exploitation, bring women to full political power, allow ordinary families to make decisions about their lives in an age of expert control, overturn American imperialism, and even [although this was the most provisional] subvert racial privilege” as described by Robert Johnson.⁶⁷ Smikhovitch did so by manifesting a sexualized female other in the form of a socially unaware prostitute. This image of a sexualized female other was then juxtaposed to illustrate the superior value of the socially and religiously engaged female laborer. A

low-income woman worker who engaged in the municipal housecleaning aside her morally revered middle-class sisters. Other “new women” advocates in 1910 also argued that women as laborers were seen to be “industrially weak” due to their relationship “as industrial producers and as homemakers and mothers” in an unregulated competitive economic system.⁶⁸ Thus, the rhetoric constructed the municipal housekeeper as a committed woman to furthering her race and the concept of a perfect civilization.⁶⁹ Therefore, women’s public/private performances were measured by the existence, attempted eradication, and/or management of the sexualized female other as an attempt to redefine womanhood as a necessary component for advancing civilization. The “new woman” was the result of civilization reaching a higher plane, a new frontier as described in the March 21, 1895, *Chicago Tribune* article titled “Woman’s Progress in Medicine”:

When the development of the world passed from physical to mental, and intelligence became the leading force of progress, we moved ahead with wonderfully accelerated speed. Every advance movement prepares for another and greater, and we go on in a constantly increasing geometrical progression. So it is no wonder we seem to be living at great speed and surprise ourselves with our own growth.... There are still individuals who retain old prejudices and cannot comprehend that scientific knowledge does not depend on sex, but a triumphant majority is rapidly and surely proving the contrary. Those who look forward with judgment based on the past can see a future full of opportunities for great work and devoid of that prejudice against sex, which has for so many years retarded progress.

Katie N. Johnson identified the phenomena of the sexualized female other as the “prostitute-construct.” She explained, “Imagined as an Other [sic] in juxtaposition to respectable bourgeois identity, the ‘prostitute-construct’ fulfilled the function of segregating normative from deviant sexuality in the modern [early twentieth-century] imagination.”⁷⁰ Shannon Bell found the prostitute-construct specific to gender: “modernity through a process of othering has produced ‘the prostitute’ as the other of the other: the other within the categorical other, ‘woman.’”⁷¹ The very existence of the

prostitute and her potential degeneration into the gutter was considered evidence in the public debate that the new woman who combined labor, good deeds, and activism was a true revelation of an authentic, highly evolved female public/private self. Perhaps, the rhetoric of the municipal housekeeper was in response to the political clout that prostitutes had gained as entrepreneurs (as aforementioned). Female reformers argued that affluence gained by capitalism (that of the successful prostitute and madam) *did not* trump that provided them by their moral superiority (retaining no or legitimate labor). Nonetheless, Johnson concluded that prostitution “became a framework to analyze mass production, modern technology, and the entry of women into the urban workforce – the prostitute becoming the personification of these changes.”⁷²

Despite the attempts of social critics to create a rhetorical and geographical juxtaposition between prostitutes and other forms of women’s labor, Progressive Era studies suggest that the trends of “legitimate” women’s labor were similar to those found among women working in prostitution. Harry B. Woolston – a Progressive Era researched and radical social critic - claimed, in *Prostitution in the United States: Prior to the Entrance of the United States into the World War* (1921), that young women transitioned into prostitution at the same age and for about the same number of years as they did other forms of skilled and unskilled employment.⁷³ Further complicating matters, Woolston’s study also showed that most of the semi-skilled, trained (teachers and nurses), and unskilled workers who entered prostitution maintained their original employment, working as casual or “clandestine” prostitutes for supplementary income.⁷⁴ Moreover, the percentage of women who worked in the different occupations were representative of those found in *Statistics of Women at Work: Based on Unpublished Information Derived*

from the Schedules of the Twelfth Census: 1900 (1900). For example, Woolston's study of 1108 streetwalkers from across the United States represented four trained nurses, eight nurse girls, and nine teachers (approximately 4.3% of the 488 surveyed with occupations) with the overwhelming remainder (95.7%) of those employed in unskilled and semiskilled jobs such as store clerks, domestic service, theatrical work, and factory.⁷⁵ The 1900 census document listed nurses and teachers (including professors) as representing 8.0% of the working women population with 88.9% in agricultural, service, domestic, and factory occupations.⁷⁶ Gilfoyle found:

The occupational background of Gotham's prostitutes after 1900 reflected the low-paying jobs most women were forced to accept. Of nearly five hundred prostitutes who related personal histories in a 1912 Night Court survey, department- and small-store clerks made up 30 percent. Servants, houseworkers, and chambermaids together totaled another 24 percent. Interestingly, new occupations also appeared in significant numbers. As a single skilled occupational group, office workers, stenographers, telephone operators, and teachers accounted for 15 percent of New York's prostitutes, as did actresses and factory operatives.⁷⁷

Thus, if the trends of Progressive Era female labor show that the demand of women for work increased more than supply of work then what did women do to supplement income? Does the evidence not lean towards the brutal reality that more and more women, from all sectors, were increasingly vulnerable to exchanging their bodies in acts of prostitution (from casual to professional) for the income to survive? If this was the case, then why have scholars persisted in upholding a dichotomy between moral and immoral women by presenting women who prostituted as marginalized in society and in historiography? And why has the historical resurrection of Progressive Era women's voices focused so exclusively on suffragists and reformers, thus drowning out Washburn and other self-advocates?

For example, modern scholars such as Tracey Davis and Katie N. Johnson have worked to deconstruct the Progressive conflation of actresses with prostitutes. In *Actresses as Working Women: Their Social Identity in Victorian Culture* (1991), Davis addresses the collapse of actresses into prostitutes in the public imagination throughout her text. “Actresses were symbols of women’s self sufficiency and independence, but as such they were doubly threatening: like the middle classes generally, they advocated and embodied hard work, education, culture, and family ties, yet unlike prostitutes they were regarded as ‘proper’ vessels of physical and sexual beauty and legitimately moved in society as attractive and desirable beings.”⁷⁸ Davis argued that managers would dismiss actresses as the theatre district was a public space where the legitimate woman and the woman of ill-repute openly mingled.⁷⁹ According to Davis, “the actress’s contravention of men’s rules for feminine behavior likened her to prostitutes not only in terms of her public profile, but also in her perceived anti-domestic choice.”⁸⁰ Johnson upholds Davis’s attempt to rehabilitate actresses’ reputations by stating that actresses represented such a small portion of the prostitute population that their reputation thus had to be a figment of the public imagination. The close association of the theatre building and establishments for prostitution tainted actresses’ reputations; it was a short leap from the activity in the third tier or mingling of streetwalkers on Broadway to that of the backstage. Johnson argued that the “actress-as-whore” existed in the public imagination because actresses’ higher incomes collapsed the familiar idea that public women were only to be consumed. The actress’s ability to be independent consumer (without the male financial support), Johnson argued, made her a dangerously unfamiliar female who did not fit the prescribed feminine roles of whore or Madonna. “The figure of the actress navigated the uncharted

territory between sexual freedom and respectability as few women could,” concluded Johnson.⁸¹ Davis and Johnson attempted to create a third space where late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century actresses stood outside the prescribed gender roles of their contemporaries. What resulted was a confused public imagination that labeled the actresses as whores thereby placing them in the wrong category and reducing their legitimacy. Yet, at the same time, these scholars successfully argued that the famous actresses were able to gain unprecedented wealth and exercise social power that allowed them to navigate outside of the proscribed contemporary gender roles.

Despite Davis’s and Johnson’s convincing arguments, other scholars have successfully argued that many other actresses of lesser notoriety had indeed moved in and out of clandestine prostitution. In the chapter “Economics and Advancement: Or, Flesh-for-Cash Transactions and Cinderella Myth,” Foley debunked the myth that Progressive Era theatrical work was a reliable source of upward mobility for young women. Few women reached the fame and fortune that Davis and Johnson cite. At the onset of the unionization of Burlesque chorus lines in 1933, workers were only earning \$10 to \$12 per week despite working 82 hours in a week.⁸² A decade earlier, “theatrical choruses constituted the largest single category of regular employment for women in the entertainment industry.”⁸³ Therefore, the majority of those women working in the entertainment industry were making the equivalent of typists’ and stenographers’ subsistence wages.⁸⁴ Yet, according to the 1900 national census, women in theatrical work represented less than 1.0% of all female laborers, while Johnson, citing Kneeland, reported that, of prostitutes, “only 2.8 percent had previously done theatrical work and only 2.2 percent said they had combined prostitution with a theatrical trade.”⁸⁵ This

statistic acknowledges that actresses were overrepresented in prostitution in comparison to their national statistics as laborers, which correlates with the argument put forth by Foley. The statistics provided by scholars and contemporary researchers complicates prostitution. Johnson reported that 6.5% had prior theatrical experience and another 7.9% claimed they combined theatre work with prostitution.⁸⁶ Woolston found that approximately equal numbers of women reported theatre work as reported factory work.⁸⁷ Theatre work was tied for second under those women who claimed working in department stores. Therefore, the representation of actresses as prostitutes, like that of teachers and nurses, was equally or over-represented in studies on prostitutes as compared to their statistical presence as female laborers in the census. That is, of course, if those surveyed answered truthfully.

What were Progressive Era new women advocates and, more recently, feminist theatre historians seeking to do by debunking what was a reality of working women's strategic decision-making in harsh economic circumstances? Were they attempting to undue the whore-stigma? Were they seeking for their subjects to be taken more seriously and, if so, by whom, and by which placement within whose hierarchy?

The physical and moral landscape of the Progressive Era red light districts was in dynamic flux at the turn of the century. As established in this chapter, some scholars have argued that successful Victorian madams and prostitutes in secondary cities were able to experience entrepreneurial upward and outward mobility through the microstructures of prostitution until the onset of the Progressive Era. In turn, an onslaught of Progressive Era rhetoric placed the prostitute as a symbol of disease of female autonomy. Despite representing the diseased female body, mainstream culture exalted prostitutes as

representatives of sexual freedom. Thus, mainstream fashion incorporated their sexual signifiers of dress while the bearers of the clothing incorporated their behaviors.

Meanwhile, female reformers juxtaposed their self worth against the moral decay of the prostitute. Female reformers constructed their public political agency as an extension of their domestic sphere. In doing so, they advocated “cleaning of the streets” as their duty. The chores of municipal housecleaning were no different than those done in their homes. Thus, these advocates who argued that municipal housekeeping promoted civilization also established the existence of the Sexualized female other. The Sexualized female other can be found in modern scholarship as well. Modern scholars have constructed an environment where the prostitute was either a successful entrepreneur that lost to Progressive Era policies or a silent pawn of potential resistance to female reformers’ interventions. Yet, this thesis argues that the self-advocacy and agency of prostitutes did not cease at the onset of the twentieth century but was, in fact, just beginning.

Chapter 2: The Self-advocacy of Josie Washburn

Introduction

This chapter will answer these two basic questions:

- (1) How did Progressive Era radical social critics construct women working as sexualized laborers in relationship to the industry of sexualized labor?
- (2) How did women in sexualized labor address their labor and civil rights while navigating the gender-biased hierarchy ranked by a constructed morality?

To answer these questions, I turn to Josie Washburn, the landlady of a brothel located at 226 South 9th Street in Lincoln, Nebraska from 1895 to 1907. After retirement, she dedicated herself to exposing the political dynamics of the underworld. Her first endeavor was writing and self-publishing the political treatise titled *The Underworld Sewer: A Prostitute Reflects on Life in the Trade, 1871–1909*.

¹ Her text reveals an astute understanding of contemporary politics. Thus, the answer to the first question argues that Josie Washburn's participation in the contemporary debate on prostitute politics centralized her as an activist who exercised agency through self-advocacy. She complicated the debate on prostitution by attempting to reframe the stereotype of the prostitute as heartless fallen women whose redemption impossible. This stereotype, she argued, was based on the ignorance of a society who used morality to shroud the cold reality of women being siphoned into a business with profits at all-time historical highs. She railed at a society that thought prostitution was a moral failing of women instead of a calculated business driven by men. By doing so, she was resisting and debunking the stereotype of prostitutes and exercising an agency that was thought not to exist. This chapter reveals how Washburn conceptualized the sex industry's relationship with the real estate markets, local retail district, city government, and the police force, establishing a long history in which prostitution supported local

governmental budgets and the coffers of businessmen. The difference of the modern age, she argued in unison with some contemporary social critics, was the introduction of the “man-landlady” who produced the inhumane crib system, a factory farm of small rooms lined up with quick clientele turnover and high taxation of the boarder.

This chapter attempts to centralize Washburn’s activism in the debate of the contemporary social critics and the history of women. Washburn’s five main arguments on the construction of prostitution are explored: (1) the women of the underworld were human; (2) women in sexualized labor were the victims of male predators; (3) men held all the power as industrialists, owners and law makers; (4) prostitution was a business and the backbone of city budgets, and, as such, the women in it acted accordingly; and (5) the “good” women of society shouldered as much of the blame for the plight of the fallen women as their husbands (the customers and owners). Washburn attempted to combat the idea that prostitution was a necessary evil or that the prostitute embodied all social evil by establishing that gendered hierarchies lay at the roots of such distinctions. Washburn sought to prove that the plight of the fallen woman was an unnecessary social mechanism constructed by church, state, society, and family. Washburn argued that the idea of fallen women in society was an inevitable sacrifice. Therefore, society needed to change its perception and create alternatives for women. Until then, all fallen women should be able to retain their social value and maintain their welfare. The plight of the fallen women lay on the shoulders of all citizens, not just the fate of the individual woman in a free market system.

This chapter also discusses Washburn’s strategy of reconstructing the hierarchy within the industry to illustrate its similarities to the larger gender hierarchy. Society

women were no different than the elite of prostitution, except the inevitable fall into the depths of the underworld of the prostitute. Progressive Era Americans were obsessed with the fall of the women into prostitution. The obsession turned into a popular theme of popular entertainment. The dire ending of fallen women played out on theatrical stages nationwide during this era. This chapter draws correlations between Washburn's rhetorical prostitute and the theatrical characters such as *Camille's* Marguerite: a woman of good heart and intention who was redeemable by society's love and would meet a heartbreaking conclusion without social redemption.

I address the second question—how women in sexualized labor addressed their labor and civil rights while navigating the gender-biased hierarchy ranked by a constructed morality—by examining the symbolic manifestation of the prostitute in modern industrialized society. The prostitute represented the martyr and the sacrifice and the bottom of the gender hierarchy, a measure by which all other women were ranked. New Woman, the Progressive Era icon of an evolved civilization, juxtaposed their net public worth against the prostitute by citing her as the example of the failings of an inhumane economic system. By contrast, other more radical social critics, such as the sexologist Havelock Ellis, cited the wretched condition of the prostitute as the fallout of an over-intellectualized civilization; a civilization that tried to out-think base impulses and by doing so created sexual neuroses.²

An examination of the dialogues surrounding the debate on women as prostitutes and prostitution as labor reveals how Progressive Era female reformers used morality to construct a gender hierarchy. Morality, as constructed by female reformers and advocates of municipal housecleaning, attempted to displace and discredit women who worked as

prostitutes and advocated for women's rights. Creditability was a tool of legitimacy often withheld from women who entered the public arenas, from professional women to prostitutes. Progressive Era prostitutes were especially vulnerable due to their ever increasing outlaw status. An examination of the grafting trial that involved the testimony of Washburn and her fellow madams against a former police administration illustrates the powerlessness of women against the exploitation of corrupt public administrations. Yet, the coalition building between madams provides insight to their attempts of collective self-advocacy. Thus, the moral housecleaners attempted to create their worth upon the cleanup of the corrupt prostitute body while prostitutes – such as Washburn – attempted to debunk negative stereotypes through acts of self-advocacy. A women's worth should not be devalued due to economic circumstances that caused her to make compromises in ways that she would not otherwise.

Progressive Era Free Market Prostitutes

During the Progressive Era, radical social critics sought to humanize the prostitute by constructing her as a woman who faced difficult decisions due to an unstable, exploitative free market that left few reliable labor options outside of prostitution. Social critics asserted that overcoming the conditions of impoverishment trumped morality in the everyday reality of survival decision-making. The only verifiable Progressive Era artifact written by a sex worker for the purpose of self-advocacy and organizing was Washburn's text. The exact nature of the circumstances surrounding Washburn's life is perhaps shrouded somewhere between fiction (public performance) and fact (verifiable details of identity) as Sharon Wood argues in the introduction of Washburn's book.³ Nonetheless, Washburn undoubtedly sought to deconstruct the reductive stereotypes of

fallen women that produced a permanent social stigma and thus entrapped women in the industry of prostitution. To Washburn and many of the radical social critics of her era, prostitution resulted from the historical institutionalization of the exploitation of women's bodies for power and profit by the church, state, and private business.

Wood presented Washburn as a woman who was "careful to veil her past in mysteries" and who acted with "courage" to "write a book about it."⁴ The use of the word "courage" to describe the work of Washburn fails to capture her depth and tenacity as well as the insight and foresight of her book. Her bold social analysis revealed that of contemporaries and revealed a social critic who was well versed in the contemporary debate. Washburn's decisions as an author and advocate were more conscious and brilliant than mere "courage"; her advocacy stood witness to a deep knowledge and authority on her topic. She possessed a command of argument; hers was a voice to be taken seriously within the public debate. "You vote for an administration to perpetuate the evil because the good sister needs protection, the men need the evil association, and the merchant, the saloon, and the police department need the money which the social evil supporter puts in circulation," lamented Washburn. Her authenticity of experience in the actual sex industry as prostitute and madam should not marginalize her, but instead centralize her critique amongst her contemporaries.

Washburn states that she used autobiographical details in order to reinforce the message of her advocacy. She thus implemented the same strategies noted by Kwakiutl L. Dreher when "writers take advantage of everyday life occurrences and her feelings that form around them to unearth the stealth elements of racism and sexism and to critique race relations, class issues, and women's rights and domestic matters."⁵ Washburn does

not confront the issue of race. Yet, she utilized the same strategies as defined by Dreher to define personal experience as a source of expertise on larger societal dynamics that affected her means of daily survival. In the text, Washburn identified sexism and classism and demanded women's rights and an overhaul of failed domestic and economic arrangements. She did so in a larger societal debate that sought to silence the voices of the prostitute (as aforementioned). Washburn used the nuances of personal experience to establish her authority of the underworld with the purpose of effectively exposing the hypocrisy of "political factions [who] seek to have the influence and money of the owner of the cribs [of prostitution] and the king gambler, and the prestige of the chief of the police."⁶

She railed against the institution of prostitution and against profiteering from a woman's body. Like other moral reformers of her era, Washburn favored the prohibition of alcohol, women's suffrage, and the eradication of prostitution. Yet Washburn did not bother to feign naiveté by framing the difficult economic decisions facing impoverished women as purely a moral dilemma. Her book ridicules the reform movement and Christian society while articulating arguments that were in complete alignment with politics of the national rhetoric Woman's Christians Temperance Union (WCTU) and calling out the lack of advocacy on behalf of prostitutes by the local chapter. By 1914, Washburn had begun identifying herself as a "White Slavery Advocate" in her self-published pamphlets on the dangers and damage of syphilis (1913) and alcohol (1914). Despite her reservation to name names for fear of prosecution under the Comstock Laws⁷ (thus making the book's distribution difficult, if not impossible), I suggest that Washburn was, in fact, a fearless advocate whose arguments predate and predict those of writers

from the Sex Workers Movement that emerged in the late 1970s. Washburn's work directly influenced Emma Goldman, thus indirectly influencing second wave feminists including Andrea Dworkin. Washburn retired from the business in 1907 with the intention of "throwing the searchlight on the underworld"; the artifacts left provide evidence that she did so with bold articulation that reached beyond the pages of her text.⁸

Prostitution, according to Washburn, was only one cog in the wheel of an institutionalized exploitation of women, whether as wives or poverty-level wage laborers. The condition and neglect of the women found in prostitution was the real ill of society *not the women who were driven to prostitution*; "the more starved these girls are, the cheaper can they be bought into slavery."⁹ For if prostitution was the necessary evil—an altar on which someone's daughter would have to be sacrificed for the sanctity and safety of another man's wife—then so it should be that the women sacrificed are revered instead of abandoned.¹⁰ Washburn argued that the condition of all women could not be raised without raising that of the prostitute herself because, in fact, she was like all other women. The only real difference between the prostitute and her moral sister was getting snared in the double sexual standard that caused communities to turn their backs on fallen women who had become prey to the will of a vile man. This hypocrisy was based on many women's fears that they could find themselves a victim of fate (i.e., the death of the breadwinner) and many men's worries that their wives were secretly prostitutes reformed.¹¹

Josie Washburn's authority on the industry of prostitution was based upon her 12-year tenure as a madam that was preceded by an 8-year apprenticeship with the renowned Anna Wilson (1835–1911), a prosperous madam and philanthropist from Omaha,

Nebraska. Upon the publication of *The Underworld Sewer*, prostitution was Washburn's only known occupational field and constituted the bulk of her adult life except for a 15-year hiatus from Nebraska (between apprenticeship and entrepreneurship). Historian Sharon Wood has suggested that during this lengthy absence Washburn was married to an alcoholic man (who was a son of a professor) who Washburn accused of deserting her.¹² Washburn suggested, however, that the entire sabbatical was not spent in holy matrimony by stating that she "lived in different houses [of ill fame] coast to coast."¹³ She claimed in a 1925 letter written to A.E. Sheldon, Director of the Nebraska State Historical Society, that she remained with madam Anna Wilson from "stumbling into" Omaha at age 17 in August 1871 until the summer of 1879.¹⁴ Cross-country travels to work in various cities as a prostitute would help to explain how a destitute wife generated the resources to open a brothel in the heart of Lincoln's red light district in 1895. More than a decade later, Washburn retired in 1909 on her savings from the sex industry and moved to Omaha where she became an activist with the feminist inclination that "if some good shall come to womankind as the result of my effort, [then] I will be thankful that I have undertaken the work."¹⁵

The Underworld Sewer constructed the industry of prostitution as a complex economic microstructure¹⁶ that was based upon the historical exploitation of women for the coffers of men. Whether for pleasure or profit for church, state, and/or private business, the economic microstructure was shrouded in morality to divert the public sentiment from the true nature of its existence: political power through profit.¹⁷ As Washburn wrote, "As a BUSINESS PROPOSITION FOR THE CITY THE UNDERWORLD MEANS LARGE PROFIT AND QUICK RETURNS; only

POLITICIANS and BUSINESS ESTABLISHMENTS can REALIZE THE EFFECT WHICH THIS INSTITUTION [prostitution] has upon the VARIOUS BRANCHES OF COMMERCE, but they are NOT FREE TO ADMIT IT... It is asserted that you DARE NOT PUT THE INSTITUTION OUT OF BUSINESS; that the social evil is so NECESSARY FROM A COMMERICAL STANDPOINT; that TO ABOLISH IT IN YOUR CITY WOULD DESTROY THE BUSINESS INTERESTS and start the GRASS TO GROW UPON THE STREETS.”¹⁸

According to Washburn, the economic microstructure of prostitution “was overwhelmingly greater in its proportion than it has even been” before in Western history,¹⁹ a sentiment echoed by Emma Goldman in her 1917 article titled “The Traffic in Women.”²⁰ Dr. Alfred Blashcko, a contemporary of social critics Havelock Ellis and Dr. William Sanger, agreed, asserting, “Although prostitution has existed in all ages, it was left to the nineteenth century to develop it into a gigantic social institution. The development of industry with vast masses of people in the competitive market, the growth and congestion of the large cities, the insecurity and uncertainty of unemployment, has given prostitution an impetus never dreamed of at any period in human history.”²¹ Prostitution was being developed with capitalist efficiency into a manufacturing industry no different than any other in principle, and it created a tax base that cities could not afford to lose.

Washburn argued, in unison with the recognized “experts,” that earnings from prostitution had evolved from a coveted income for medieval churches into the backbone of many city budgets (supporting schools, political campaigns and police forces), as well as a considerable percentage of the profit margin for industries such as retail and real

estate.²² A drastic change had occurred from the “ancient times” when the prostitute was given home and care in exchange for her contribution of earnings to support the church and state. Havelock Ellis explained that when the early Christian church rose to become a state power it continued to reinforce the pagan tradition of women providing paid sexual service as part of their ritual worship and monetary contribution to their deities.

Thirteenth-century brothels were founded under municipal protection of the Church State and “constituted a sort of public service, the directors of them being considered almost as public servants.”²³ Emma Goldman quipped in 1917 of the changes in the modern Church’s policy, “At least she [the Church] does not openly demand tribute from prostitutes. She finds it much more profitable to go in for real estate, like Trinity Church, for instance, to rent out death traps at an exorbitant price to those who live off and by prostitution.”²⁴

The “modern system,” Washburn argued, was “less humane” and is merely “a pretense of lawful control of the evil.”²⁵ As industrial capitalism took root in a changing America, fallen women were the lambs laid on the altar as sacrifices to the political power struggles. A corrupt system was made more corrupt as “the political factions seek to have the influence and money of the owner of the cribs and the king gambler, and the prestige of the chief of the police,” fumed Washburn.²⁶ The same mechanisms streamlining other industries had found their way into the industry of prostitution; crib systems laid out in factory farm arrangements (of prostitutes in small primitive cells) raised the political stakes as profits soared. “At night these cribs are brilliantly lighted, the shades are never drawn, and through the glass front or large windows therein, that

which transpires on the inside may be observed from the street,” reported the Omaha Grand Jury.²⁷

Washburn argued that the fat profit of the crib system was found in the monopoly of service industries connected to the district and the inflated daily rent charged the occupants. The landlord or middle man garnered indirectly all of the income of the crib system and affiliated businesses while taxation was collected through illegal grafting schemes (the fines or taxes paid by the prostitutes and female madams). Illegal grafting schemes consisted of raids and secret extortion that shrouded the true origins of municipal funds from the public. C.E. Kinsey, an occasional musician who played at Washburn’s brothel, explained:

Josie Washburn used to run a house on south ninth and we played there some, and it was orderly enough but every so often the police would pull them all and take them up and fine them. That was the way they collected their license fees.²⁸

The fees generated by the raids supported schools, political campaigns, and police judges.²⁹ A Nebraska State Journal reporter described, in a 1954 pamphlet titled “Seeing Lincoln,” the long history of the City Mission Building as a once successful brothel:

There was a law on the books against the sort of district, but instead of enforcing it the police extracted tribute.... As the rate was, we are told, about \$15 for inmates and \$25 for managers per month, they left a considerable stack on the municipal desk. Most of it went into the public school coffers.³⁰

An article in the *Omaha Daily Bee* quoted the Southwest Iowa Teacher’s Association as stating in their 1896 opening address that “in order to support a school in its work of enlightenment and intellectual healing,” some Nebraskan communities establish “a saloon and a brothel to light manhood and curse womanhood.”³¹ Prostitution, Washburn and her contemporaries argued, had originated from and grown into an intricate part of local governments and lay at the core of capitalists’ profit margins. Therefore, like other

regions dependent upon the different natural resource industries for survival, so the city was dependent upon the microstructure of prostitution as a service industry.

Washburn articulated the internal hierarchy in the microstructure of prostitution by utilizing the rhetorical structure of economic class and the sensationalism of the polar extremes of rank. Her approach was perhaps built upon Sanger's elaborate classification system found in his study of the pre-civil war New York's industry of prostitution (as discussed in Chapter One). "Our best society is made up of the beautiful, well-educated, witty, fascinating and refined women" who occupied every legitimate occupation from stenographers to teachers to "young wives who have been abandoned by their husbands, leaving them without money or ability to support themselves and their children," explained Washburn.³² The upper crust of the red light district included "entertainers" who were attuned to the type of customer who found the seedy side of the underworld distasteful. "This class of women who constitute OUR HIGHEST society in the underworld, are as far removed from those occupying cheap dives and cribs as are the millionaire's daughters from the girls born and raised in rag-cat alley."³³ Yet, Washburn warned that these high-ranking residents of the underworld were not redeemed. Life was not a choreographed drama. Women of the underworld were not saved as playwright Eugene O'Neill saved his infamous character Anna Christie with marriage to a good man. Washburn lambasted, "While the millionaire's daughter will never reach the condition existing in rag-cat alley the women [sic.] of our highest society in the underworld come to the lowest dive and crib as certain as time goes on unless she dies or quits the business."³⁴

Sanger placed these former first-class prostitutes, whose charms were fading into a jaded tawdriness, into the second-class houses that he felt bordered on tacky. Washburn paid little attention to the middle classes of her society. Instead, she rivaled Dante in her description of “the depth” where “male and female lie around everywhere stupefied with dope and liquor; the house is blue with smoke and profanity, and reeking in filth, disease and degradation.”³⁵ The “living death” that populated the “cribs, dives, dens, holes, and nests” were colonized “from drunken parents in large cities, who compel their children to furnish money by begging and stealing, and by debauchery of their daughters of tender age, whose parents and ancestors have lived in poverty and filth for centuries without education, training or nourishing food; dwarfed in body and mind, they are disqualified to earn a living except by vice.”³⁶ It was in these extremes of the underworld that Washburn found the greatest tragedy as she illustrated stories of the elite being lured into the opium dens of rich men while the poorly bred and reared inhabitants of “the depth” suffered the daily horrors of performing as an “instinct of self-preservation.”³⁷ The prostitutes regarded their audiences as “merely a herd of cattle, which is wrong of course, as the comparison is a slander on the animals.”³⁸

Yet, Washburn refuted the stereotype of the prostitute as “a drunken, foul-mouthed, debased creature, whose face is so thick with paint that it would be impossible to see her blush if she ever had such inclination”³⁹ (as constructed by Willa Cather’s description of the prostitute in the theatre discussed in Chapter One). Washburn argued that the underworld women became “what men and conditions have made her.” The “paint” served as a double-edged sword: first, it attracted the men who sought their company, and it also served as a mask that shielded “our tortured feelings from the

savages who defile the air with their hideous language.”⁴⁰ Washburn even went so far as to suggest that the incorporation of more prostitute style by moral women would potentially solve the wandering of their husbands:

To keep your men at home you might try dressing, painting, and wearing décolleté dresses all the time, or red kimonos. RED IS A FAVORITE SHADE WITH MEN AND HAS SOME SUCH AN EFFECT UPON THEM AS IT HAS UPON SOME KIND OF ANIMALS. Men will pursue a glimpse of anything red fluttering around the corner in spite of all. You might try using plenty of red paint for your faces, AND MAKE LOVE TO YOUR MEN TO BEAT THE BAND.⁴¹

The current billion-dollar industry of women incorporating the trade tricks and style of sex workers into their home lives suggests that Washburn’s advice may have been well-heeded. The current industry is evidence that a very successful cross-pollination of style, fashion, and behavior has occurred—due to geographic encounters as well as public interest through entertainment—over the course of the twentieth century.

Another key Progressive Era source of cross-pollination of style and image of the prostitute was the presentation of the “fallen woman” on the theatrical stage. Arguably, the stage was the most mainstream consumption of the prostitute stereotype by American audiences as the popularity of theatre was reaching its height during this era.⁴² Theatre was, Havelock Ellis contended, the nineteenth-century mental orgy that replaced the physical release of dance and other behaviors once found in pagan-like festivals in less civilized cultures.⁴³ Katie N. Johnson argues that the Progressive Era depiction of women on stage “relied on a distinctly gendered sexual paradigm: women’s sexuality was defined as either virtuous or deviant.”⁴⁴ There were only two options for women caught in this “binary”: “they could either fall or be elevated upon a moral pedestal; there were no in-betweens.”⁴⁵

Washburn's prostitute neither set fashion trends nor used prostitution to escape from hard labor for poverty wages. Washburn's prostitute was an economic and political victim to the men who owned and perpetuated the economic microstructure of prostitution that kept women hungry enough to be siphoned into the underworld. Despite her victimization, she was human—no different than respectable women—doing the best she could in a corrupt business that was going to render her incapacitated, dead, or trapped in a life of stigma and potential social betrayal. “A fallen woman has the same feelings as others, there is no difference,” insisted Washburn.⁴⁶

Washburn was seeking to deconstruct the stereotype of the prostitute presented everywhere in the popular public imagination of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. “In fact, the underworld woman must be an actress, and those who act their part well are the most successful financially,” she explained.⁴⁷ Washburn attempted to deconstruct this “binary” by establishing another: the stigma of the fallen woman identified against the cultural hypocrisy of the lack of a “fallen” man. The clearest articulation of this female/male binary is found in Chapter XXVI: “Reform and Reformer,” which Washburn opens by asking, “Will a woman for the underworld be allowed to reform?” Her answer was that “the Christian world is delighted to have a MAN who has been a drunkard, and burdened with all the sins which go with that condition, reform.”⁴⁸ He was welcomed back into the fold of business associates, his family, the members of the congregation, and other aspects of public respectability. He was exalted as an example of God's work. The Christian world, Washburn contended, believed that it was the same for a woman; she must only have the desire of redemption and nothing more was needed. Yet, as Washburn pointed out, reform of the fallen woman

was not so simple. A woman had to fabricate a new existence that obscured her past from her new neighbors and potential friends or else she risked being labeled the “reformed fallen woman,” thus prompting the townspeople to gossip amongst themselves cautioning “their children not to go near her BECAUSE ‘SHE HAS BEEN A BAD WOMAN.’”⁴⁹ The social ostracizing accorded a life worse than death, thus forcing the former prostitute to go back to the underworld for compassion and understanding amongst her own.

Washburn’s social death of the fallen women who attempted reform and failed—thus condemning her to a spiritual or physical death in the grips of the underworld—echoed that which occurred on all the popular stages with high frequency during the late-nineteenth century and throughout the Progressive Era. Yet, her story was the only true version as “professional writers will often attempt to explain the inward workings of a public house, but they make a dismal failure of it, to say the least.”⁵⁰ According to Johnson, the fallen woman genre of the late-nineteenth century typically featured a woman of prominence whose secret past of sexual discretions was revealed, causing her to repent while being so harshly punished that it often caused her demise. A ruined woman could never redeem herself even through marriage. The audience understood the moral of the story “in the world of art on this side of the grave, and so an audience looks with complacent tears on the death of the erring woman.”⁵¹ Johnson noted that the plays of this genre required “that all fallen women—from promiscuous women to courtesans, mistresses, and streetwalkers—be understood and punished as prostitutes.”⁵² Washburn also identified the conflation of deviance from strict sexual mores with prostitution: “my good Christian sisters” who “say the fallen woman has forfeited all claim to the consideration to which she thinks she’s entitled... YOU will say that a fallen woman is

degenerate, and unless she reforms according to your particular plan of salvation, she SHOULD BE PUNISHED AND DRIVEN AWAY.”⁵³ Johnson argues that it was the tragic role of Marguerite in *Camille* that epitomized the “iconic” prostitute-with-a-golden-heart. In this classic story, love redeemed the fallen women only for her to die from complications of advanced syphilis. *Camille* was one of the most frequently performed plays between 1900 and 1918. Johnson explained that the strongest female parts were found in the fallen women plays, therefore requiring actresses to play the part of prostitutes if they wished to advance their careers.⁵⁴ For example, from as early as 1855 well into the Progressive Era, every major actress played the title role in *Camille*.

The conflation of the prostitute with the actress and the actress with her part was the symptom of an audience who viewed women’s behaviors categorically rather than individualistically; if one woman had fallen then all women had the potential to fall. The November 23, 1893, *State Journal Article* reported that “the most intelligent and cultured audience that has assembled in the Lansing Theatre [Lincoln, NE] this year last night gathered to do homage to the great genius of Clara Morris. Conspicuous and decidedly pleasing to the eye were the boxes, in which Dr. Giffin and wife entertained the governor and staff and their wives.” Willa Cather, the reporter, went on to say that ladies were dressed in their finest evening wear while the gentlemen were all in “full uniform.” The paramount audience of the year had come to pay homage to a “truly awful play” performed with perfection by an amazing actress:

Clara Morris plays only awful plays. Her realism is terrible and relentless. It is her art and mission to see all that is terrible and painful and unexplained in life. It is a dark and gloomy work that has been laid upon more geniuses than one. But after all is said there is so little said where so much is felt, so much revered. There is the terrible scene with Monsieur Duval, the last kiss upon Armand's forehead which was pure as a wife's, holy as a mother's, and the last embrace which was restrained, which are beyond all words, which we can only remember

and shudder and suffer at the memory. Men cannot say where art gets its beauty, where power gets its strength. The greatest perfection a work of art can ever attain is when it ceases to be a work of art and becomes a living fact.

Cather collapsed the events of the stage into the execution of life captured by an actress who sought only to see that which was dark. The actress off stage was collapsed into her work on stage. Despite the prestige of the audience and Cather's accolades, Morris was still reduced to the part she played on stage: a fallen woman fascinated with the seedy side of life. The actress was conflated into her part as the prostitute just as Johnson argued the fallen woman genre conflated prostitution and aberrant women's sexuality into a dominant discourse.⁵⁵ Brenda Foley concluded that female performers of this era were "caught up in a kind of syllogistic synecdoche" where audiences viewed actresses behavior not as individualistic, but categorically, therefore if one actress had disobeyed then all actresses had the potential.⁵⁶ Foley explains that "moral implications had inhabited the shadow of every female performer since her first step on the stage, but by the century's end they had become contextually inseparable from the performance themselves, resulting in cultural attempts to segment forms of display into socially controllable, enforced, and decidedly reductive categories."⁵⁷ Cather collapsed Morris' brilliant performance into an act of authenticity on stage. Authenticity, to the late-nineteenth-century audience, was a sign of revelation of self by the actress (i.e., the actress had provided a glimpse of her inner awfulness just as a prostitute displayed her inner moral depravity).⁵⁸

Tracy Davis argued that the stigma of actresses was understood as "socially produced meaning that served the interests of particular social groups to the disadvantage of female performers themselves,"⁵⁹ whereas Washburn argued that the unredeemable stigma of the fallen woman left her vulnerable to the special interests of those who

profited from her destitution without regard for her fate. She attempted to deconstruct this perception of the prostitute by focusing on her public performance as a business transaction that was only a forced economic reality and not a true revelation of self as thought by the greater ignorance of society (and especially Progressive Era theatre audience members). One example of this strategy is Washburn's comparison of the madam to the department store:

Neither the department store nor the madam cheats the girls, but in each case the HOUSE GETS MOST OF THE PROFIT. ONE IS JUST AS BAD AS THE OTHER, IF NOT A LITTLE WORSE. In fact, the department store drives the girl to the madam by paying her as little as possible, and the madam tries to keep the girl by the same means. The financial difference of the two HOUSES is THE MERCHANT BECOMES A MILLIONAIRE by the efforts of THE GIRLS EMPLOYED, while BUT FEW of the underworld establishments even become wealthy.... The majority of madams do not stop to consider the immorality of their business. If she stops to think about it at all, she decides that the world would soon give her the "cold shoulder" if she did not have the money to pay her way.⁶⁰

For the madam, the brothel is "merely a BUSINESS" that is "disagreeable" and "disreputable" and one "which she hates."⁶¹ Income becomes the deciding factor as both the madam and the girl put off getting out of the business: "It is a difficult task for her to QUIT A BUSINESS THAT PAYS SO WELL." The reader is reminded though that "neither the madam nor the girls are responsible for the conditions they are in."⁶² Just as the department store owner increases his profits by paying his clerks as little as possible, the madam shrewdly maintains the prostitute at the minimum of a living wage. Washburn argued that the madam was participating in the same public performance of business as men of the same stature.

Yet, it was obvious that the madam viewed the living wage much differently than that of the merchant. According to Washburn, the madam understood that the prostitute only remained engaged in the performance of her occupation due to the high income. No

matter the correlations, Washburn argued, both the madam and the girl were simply conducting business as victims of an economic microstructure not of their making and one they would escape if they had the economic opportunity and societal support.

Women were indeed exploiting other women to make a profit, according to Washburn, but they did so much more humanely than men despite the myth of the cruel landlady.

“There is a HUMANE LAW prohibiting the abuse of DOGS, but there is NO SUCH PROTECTION for our girls.”⁶³

Self-advocacy of Prostitutes

Washburn also provides us a glimpse into how women in sexualized labor navigated the gender-biased hierarchy to advocate for their labor and civil rights. The concept of prostitution as labor and prostitutes as women who deserved civil and labor rights must be examined within the dynamics of the Progressive Era debate (as discussed in Chapter One) on the condition of women in labor and, specifically, prostitution as labor. Social critics cited low wages and harsh economic conditions coupled with the desire for the luxuries of civilization as the driving force behind women entering prostitution. Washburn and Polly Alder, an infamous Progressive Era madam, contended that economic decisions within the confines of impoverishment were made outside of the moral dilemma and within the necessity of a society that allows women to starve to death without a means of income. Havelock Ellis, a British sexologist, physician, and social reformer, maintained that prostitution was the direct result of a civilizing process that no longer allowed for the physical release of human impulses through the socially sanctioned rituals of carnival and orgy.⁶⁴ In concert, Goldman stated that prostitution could not be addressed until the double standards of the gender-biased economic and

social systems were rectified—systems that regulated women’s behaviors to the point that they were prostituting their bodies in marriage as a means of survival.⁶⁵ No matter the angle of their argument, each point of view sought to justify, sustain, or eradicate the contemporary view of the prostitute as the bottom of the gender hierarchy as well as the lowest rung of labor.

Sexualized labor, according to Washburn and many of her radical contemporaries, was the result of an unregulated gender-biased economic and social system that consciously kept women laborers in a state of desperate poverty, leaving them susceptible to the lure of the underworld. This economic reality overshadowed morality. A madam, explained Washburn, did not consider the immorality of her business because “if she stops to think about it at all, she decides that the world would soon give her the ‘cold shoulder’ if she did not have the money to pay her way.”⁶⁶ Some years later, Polly Alder, in her autobiography (1953), described her “informal, almost casual” 1920 entrance into the profession beginning with the hosting of an apartment (assassin house) for a bootlegger and his prominent mistress.⁶⁷ Eventually, the bootlegger’s relationship deteriorated and he asked Alder to find other women who would have affairs for a price. That’s when Alder and the bootlegger made a deal that eventually grew into a brothel. “But then it never even occurred to me to think of Tony’s [the bootlegger] plan and my part in it as being moral or immoral.”⁶⁸ She was simply maintaining a lifestyle she had grown accustomed to when a working actress took Alder under her wing. She struck the deal after her long struggle with maintaining sporadic and unpredictable factory employment that often left her hungry and a victim of sexual harassment by her male supervisors.

Alder, like Washburn, named poverty—the “emotional poverty and intellectual poverty and poverty of the spirit”—as the overwhelming common denominator driving women into the sex trade.⁶⁹ “As well as material lacks, there can be a lack of love, a lack of education, a lack of hope,” explained Alder. “And out of such impoverishment the prostitute is bred.”⁷⁰ Howard B. Woolston, in his sociological study of pre-World War I prostitutes, verified the claim of economic depravity as the most prominent reason cited by women for entering prostitution. Of those Progressive Era streetwalkers surveyed by Woolston, almost half (518 of 1106) declared that “lack of work” was their primary reason for going into the profession.⁷¹ He added, “This, apparently, together with the attraction of gay company, bright lights, pretty clothes, may account for the willingness of some of the women to enter a life which would ordinarily appear most repulsive.”⁷² Alder, unlike Washburn, would have agreed with Woolston that a taste for the finer things was a common motivating factor to remain in the industry. Woolston concluded that the “weaker sisters” who chose the “easier way of making money” in general earned an income that varied “with the type of girl and the character of the resort, but so much is sufficient to show that in prostitution an ordinary woman can realize almost as much in one night as her meager abilities would enable her to earn in a week.”⁷³

Many social critics of the era agreed that economic “poverty engendered prostitution,”⁷⁴ while Ellis made the compound assertion that the civilizing process had the deepest impact on the contemporary conditions of the profession. Prostitutes admitted in studies that their desire for pleasure and luxury was a driving force behind their labor choice. The response was often found as the second or third most popular response. Ellis argued the prostitutes desire for please and luxury was a symptom of the progression of a

conservative civilization. Accordingly, Ellis argued that the existence of prostitution was an indicator of the civilizing of a society that suppressed human physical impulses that used to be released through traditional Christian carnivals that incorporated the pagan practices of social indulging (such as drinking, dancing, drumming, and relaxed sexual mores). Now physical releases, Ellis asserted, could only be found in regulated entertainment districts (red light districts) of contemporary cities. The entertainment in the red light districts satisfied “a mad and irresistible craving for excitement, a serious and willful revolt against the monotony of commonplace ideals, and the uninspired drudgery of everyday life.”⁷⁵ Although pro-prohibition, Washburn nonetheless was in accordance with Ellis’s assessment when she traced the fall of women beginning with innocently seeking recreation at local dance halls (as discussed in her chapter “The First Drink”). Ellis also found that in international surveys and studies, prostitutes claimed economics as their primary reason for entering the profession.⁷⁶

Yet, Ellis complicated the moral landscape of prostitution when he introduced his evolutionary theory of its existence. To Ellis, prostitution was not a loss or lack of morals or even a necessary evil. Instead, it was the consequence of the development of an economic system that has caused marriage to become more and more expensive:

The history of the rise and development of prostitution enables us to see that prostitution is not an accident of our marriage system, but an essential constituent which appears concurrently with its other essential constituents. The gradual development of family on a patriarchal and largely monogamic basis rendered it more and more difficult for a woman to dispose of her own person. She belongs in the first place to her father, whose interest it was to guard her carefully until a husband appeared who could afford to purchase her. In the enhancement of her value the new idea of the market value of virginity gradually developed, and where a “virgin” had previously meant a woman who was free to do as she would with her own body. Its meaning was now reversed and it came to mean a woman who was precluded from having intercourse with men.⁷⁷

A daughter's ownership was transferred from father to husband to retain her highest market value. Thus, Ellis argued, the price of marriage increased substantially. The result was a surplus of young men not yet rich enough to marry. Ellis explained:

At such a point in social evolution prostitution is clearly inevitable; it is not much the indispensable concomitant of marriage as an essential part of the whole system. Some of the superfluous or neglected women, utilizing their money value and perhaps at the same time reviving traditions of an earlier freedom, find their social function in selling their favors to gratify the temporary desires of the men who have not yet been able to acquire wives. Thus every link in the change of the marriage system is firmly welded and the complete circle formed.⁷⁸

Ellis justified the subordination of women by seeing it as inevitable in the civilizing process. Yet, he also argued that prostitution was a purely economic function of evolution. "It is this factor of prostitution, we may reasonably conclude, which is mainly responsible for the fact, pointed out by F. Schiller, that with the development of civilization the supply of prostitutes tends to outgrow the demand."⁷⁹ Ellis might have agreed with modern scholar Ruth Rosen's when she argued prostitutes were motivated by a "disturbance of a fragile family economy" that outweighed the risk of "the personal and social costs of joining a deviant subculture."⁸⁰ Throughout her book and particularly in the chapter "A Cause," Washburn cited the broken family economic system as the central reason why women entered the profession. Yet, Ellis went beyond the broken family economy to say "there cannot be the slightest doubt that it is this motive—the effort to supplement the imperfect opportunities for self development offered by our restrained, mechanical, and laborious civilization—which plays one of the chief parts in inducing women to adopt, temporarily or permanently, a prostitute's life."⁸¹

Emma Goldman, in her article "The Traffic of Women" (1917), complicated the discussion on prostitution by maintaining its existence was the crescendo of the gender-biased double standards of misogyny.⁸² She claimed that prostitution was a widespread

evil of an economic and social system completely “indifferent to the sufferings and distress of the victims”⁸³—as indifferent to the evil as society had “remained to our industrial system, or to economic prostitution.”⁸⁴ Goldman argued that marriage was economic prostitution; it was simply a matter of degrees between a woman selling her body to many men or signing the socially sanctioned contract that sold her body to one man in the holy matrimony of marriage. Economic prostitution was the dehumanizing exploitation by “the merciless Moloch of capitalism that fattens on underpaid labor, thus driving thousands of women and girls into prostitution.”⁸⁵ Women were judged by their sex, not the merit of their work. “It is therefore almost inevitable that she pay for her right to exist, to keep a positive in whatever [bread] line, with sex favors,” argued Goldman.⁸⁶ “Whether our reformers admit it or not, the economic and social inferiority of woman is responsible for prostitution.”⁸⁷ A decade earlier, Washburn articulated the same sentiment.

The nuances of arguments based on a flawed economic system as the primary motivator, such as those made by Washburn and Goldman, were constructed against social critics, such as Mary Kingsbury Simkhovitch of the Greenwich House in New York City (as introduced in Chapter One). Simkhovitch saw the plight of the working women—although in crisis and in need of attention—as simply part of the “new social adjustment,” that was “as inevitable as the economic adjustments that followed the industrial revolution.”⁸⁸ That is, Simkhovitch advocated for the advancement of Ellis’s short-sighted civilization. Washburn called for “the present economic regulations, training and education” to be “eradicated otherwise women’s sacrifices will continue to be purchased in the market, cheaply, by men, RESULTING IN SORROW AND POVERTY FOR THEIR OWN WIVES AND CHILDREN, AND MOST DREADFUL

DISEASE FOR THEMSELVES AND THEIR POSTERITY.”⁸⁹ In her 1910 article “A Social Adjustment” (discussed in Chapter One), Simkhovitch agreed with Washburn insofar that the “purity of the working girls is under terrific strain” due to the “social—or as some prefer to call it, moral—instability at the present time that is very serious.”⁹⁰ She warned that to “close our eyes to the fact” is “criminal” as “those who know this to be the case seems almost committed to a policy of silence.”⁹¹ There was an admitted discrepancy between the reality of women’s lives and the daily task of maintaining the difficult ideal put forth by Simkhovitch. Interestingly, Simkhovitch conceded that “it is silly, not to say criminal, for us to suppose that girls are going to starve or go without decent clothes or deprive themselves of all pleasures because they cannot pay their own way.”⁹² There were thousands of girls who did deprive themselves of pleasures to stay straight. But, according to Simkhovitch, “others—and these too are doubtless in the thousands—are *too normal* to deprive themselves of *their rights* in the world [emphasis added].”⁹³ Washburn might have argued that a woman who made the “normal” choice to follow Simkhovitch’s “perfectly innocent love of pleasure” that “becomes transmuted through gradual corrupt relationships into a life of degradation”⁹⁴ had not only given up her “rights,” but potentially all normalcy of life. “If a girl could know in advance that, in a very short time after she would enter the underworld, she will be miserable beyond measure, as compared with anything she has ever know or heard of; she WILL BE SNUBBED AND INSULTED BY RESPECTABLE PEOPLE, she will be MOST TERRIBLY ILL TREATED BY DRUNKEN MEN, she will be THROWN INTO THE PATROL WAGON, PARADED THROUGH THE STREETS AND LOCKED UP in a DIRTY JAIL; that whenever the politician NEEDS HER MONEY, she WILL BE

KICKED AND CUFFED ABOUT BY THE POLICE, and come to the WORST POVERTY AND DEGRADATION KNOWN TO HUMANITY,” protested Washburn.⁹⁵ Washburn and Simkhovitch both agreed that prostitution potentially condemned women to a loss of status and potential, that is, the loss of civil rights, loss of credibility, and loss of degrees of social value; they also agreed that the alternative to prostitution—women’s labor choices—were dismal.

More striking is that Simkhovitch attempted to create a higher social value of women in labor and public life by juxtaposing the depraved moral politically active female laborer against the depleted value of the Sexualized female other laborer. As discussed in Chapter One, the Sexualized female other is identifiable in the juxtaposing of the moral female laborer against feeble-minded, pleasure-seeking prostitute. This was a common strategy used by female reformers (and other women’s advocates) to increase the social value of women’s municipal housecleaning. The image of the new woman fighting for her social value by eliminating the degenerated Sexualized female other was very evident in literature written by and about Progressive Era nurses. One example of the rhetoric was found in the foreword of *Early Leaders in American Nursing* (1922):

It was due largely to the efforts of this remarkable group of women whom we here celebrate, that the new Nightingale system of training was firmly planted in American soil, and having successfully weathered the opposition and hostility of those early days, spread over the whole country. It took a Spartan type to accomplish what these women did. In the words of one of them, “They were a strong, determined and intrepid set of workers, full of energy, and the uncompromising spirit of the reformer. Their work was largely housecleaning on an extended scale. They warred against physical dirt and disorder, against immorality, irresponsibility and political corruption. They regenerated the moral atmosphere of the early hospitals and banished coarseness and vulgarity, neglect and indifference. They were stern, often severe, sometimes hard, but no one can realize what they did who knows nothing of the conditions grappled with.”⁹⁶

In practice, Washburn revealed that nurses in Lincoln, Nebraska, “warred” against immorality by shutting prostitutes out of hospitals. “Church hospitals are so prejudiced against us that we can not obtain proper care therein, even though we pay liberally for service.”⁹⁷ If the prostitute was admitted, “this girl will call again and again for assistance WITHOUT RECEIVING A REPLY; FOOD OR ANYTHING IS PUSHED OR FLUNG AT THE PATIENT.”⁹⁸ Washburn continued, “It is with a SCOWL that NEVER LEAVES the FACE OF THE ATTENDANT, that she waits upon the underworld girl.”⁹⁹ The nurses “warred against physical dirt and disorder, against immorality, irresponsibility and political corruption” with the same means to the end as the reformers addressed prostitution and the red light district—they intended to eradicate it at all costs for the good of civilization’s progress.¹⁰⁰ Washburn seethed, “One would think that THE TENDEREST CARE WOULD BE GIVEN THIS HOMELESS, MOTHERLESS CREATURE OF THE SEWER, but you are wasting your good thoughts.”¹⁰¹

Washburn also argued that the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) and the local Woman’s Christian Temperance Union excluded prostitutes. “The very name of ‘Young Women’s Christian Association’ would suggest all members are taught and required that they must do Christian acts,” quipped Washburn. “If such is not the intention, the name should be changed to home for pious young women.”¹⁰² Washburn continued:

IF A YOUNG GIRL FROM THE UNDERWORLD WERE TO APPLY TO THEM FOR SHELTER, with the intention of DISCONTINUING HER SINFUL LIFE, WOULD THESE YOUNG LADIES of the Christian Association BEFRIEND THIS WRETCHED HUMAN BEING? NOT AT ALL; but on the contrary, SHE WOULD BE REGARDED AS “having her nerve” AND QUICKLY SENT AWAY. SHE WOULD NOT BE TOLERATED A MINUTE.¹⁰³

She knew of no special efforts made by the local Woman's Christian Temperance Union on behalf of women of her kind as well. "Why should the girl who is endeavoring to reform be LEFT ENTIRELY TO PROFESSIONAL REFORMERS?"¹⁰⁴ The act of helping women transition out of prostitution, Washburn argued, "SHOULD BE the BUSINESS of EVERY CHRISTIAN woman to lend a helping hand."¹⁰⁵ But as Sharon Wood pointed out in her book *The Freedom of the Streets: Work, Citizenship, and Sexuality in a Gilded Age City* (2005), "respectability was a kind of capital: the greater the investment, the richer the social and employment opportunities."¹⁰⁶ The intermingling of women laborers with prostitutes (sometimes one in the same) in public spaces was dangerous. As Wood argued, "Those who endorsed paid employment for women and those who believed women should confine their labors to the domestic sphere sealed their arguments by appealing to the same fear: paid employment put women in danger of becoming prostitutes."¹⁰⁷ The rhetorical and geographical exclusion of the prostitute's body in certain feminized public spaces exercised potentially more power and control over the Sexualized female other than her presence in other regulated spaces controlled by men (such as the designated red light districts). Johnson argued that "the body of the prostitute was a corporeal site upon which these desires and culture imperatives [American anxieties about sexuality, contagion, eugenics, women's rights, and urbanizations] could be mapped."¹⁰⁸ Moreover, the hospital was potentially one of the hidden battlefields where women attempted to produce a space where, as described by Richard Phillips, "the apparent asexuality of many different homes, workplaces, cities, landscapes and other material and metaphorical geographies conceals and naturalises

[sic]" the hidden power of "the hegemonic heterosexualities that structure and dominate them, and are reproduced by them."¹⁰⁹

Therefore, all women's labor collapsed into an act of public performance of a moral or immoral private self produced a culture of surveillance that categorized women's public behaviors. Thus, the label of moral and immoral public acts measured her authenticity of character. This was particularly advantageous to the social critics who sought to juxtapose themselves against the prostitute to increase their monetary (higher wages) and social value of the public spaces they occupied. As established in Chapter One, an actress's performance of prostitution on stage was considered an authentic revelation of self. The supposed actress's revelation of self was interrupted and rated by the audience member (and theatre critic). The audience's conclusion tallied the amount of degrees by which the actress revealed her true self. If deemed a failure, she was of poor moral fiber. If a success, she was deemed a genius and the self revelation authentic even if she played a destitute prostitute.¹¹⁰ Genius was the saving grace of the actress. Her staged (or controlled) representation of immorality set her apart from the prostitute. The prostitute's performance represented a public act of a private moral failing. Thus, the actress's genius performance trumped the immorality of her stage character. Yet, the audience's assumption was that the actress had to possess immorality to perform immorality. Thus, the actress's public act of performing immortality was excused if the public performance was genius. On the other hand, the prostitute was not capable of genius. Thus, it allowed the audience to increase the actress's public value while still aligning her privately to the fallen woman (thus making her performance more exciting, more voyeuristic). On the other hand, the prostitute performed the public economic

commoditization of her private failure. The prostitute's public failure was the possession of an immoral private self (a creature devoted to pleasure versus higher spiritual acts such as art). Thus, a woman without a moral self does not possess a soul with honest emotions. "For the warped mind who believes that a fallen woman is incapable of human emotion it would be impossible to realize the grief, the disgrace, the tears, the wounded pride that was ours every time we pulled in [to the jailhouse]" said Washburn, as cited in Goldman's essay.¹¹¹ Yet, a prostitute's private failure was a matter of public degrees. Her rank was ultimately measured by the placement within the internal "whorearchy"¹¹² of prostitution, contributes to a ranking system that was similar to that of the actresses who were evaluated by their possession of genius. The possession of genius earned her a ranking amongst the legitimate female hierarchy. Her lack of genius ranked her with the failed illegitimate female hierarchy. Accordingly, the genius of an elite prostitute might win her marriage to a legitimate man. Furthermore, the unskilled female laborer won her value in the hierarchy of the municipal housecleaners with the fearless confrontation of poverty. The female laborer maintained her low ranking on the legitimate female hierarchy by maintaining a faultless morality through the acts of chastity and political activism. Advocates, such as Simkhovitch, argued that such acts would help domesticity to transcend the limitations of the home. Richard Phillips argued that these acts helped female laborers to "quietly conform to the unwritten, commonly heteronormative rules of the time and place in which"¹¹³ they found themselves.

In an attempt to increase their social value (self-advocacy) against the onslaught of devaluations, Washburn and a group of her fellow madams fought for their own credibility and respectability through the local court system during a sensationalized

grafting trial. The newly elected city administration put on trial the former police chief and deputy as described in a November 10, 1905, article in the *Lincoln Journal*:

Sworn statements have been secured from no less than six of the women who operated disorderly resorts during that time showing that they were forced to pay Chief Routzahn and Detective Bentley \$50 a month for about nine months, in return for which they were promised, and actually enjoyed, immunity from arrest and the privilege of selling beer in their places.

As established in the previous section, taxation of prostitution through grafting and raids was an indispensable part of city coffers. This particular grafting method was very costly to the madams in comparison to the random raids and fines they had paid in the past. The madams were also under particularly harsh extortion by the police judge who threatened them with \$500 fines, if they were arrested again. The arrests would only come if they failed to pay the monthly extortion payments. Washburn claimed that she and her fellow madams fully participated in the scheme as “the women in the underworld realize that they are in the power of the police.”¹¹⁴

Yet, Washburn revealed an act of agency when that harsh administration came back up for reelection. “Sometimes an influential woman among us may obtain favors by doing political work.”¹¹⁵ The tainted administration came to Washburn “with this singular and almost comical request” to help them “in a political way.” Washburn scoffed that “it does not require much stretch of the imagination to guess whether I did or not.” Political campaigning conspired within brothel parlors while the grafting trial was splashed across newspapers delivered onto the porches of Lincoln.

The outcome of the trial did not surprise Washburn. She explained, “After the usual proceedings (to make a long story short), the two ex-officers were found by the jury to be, ‘not guilty.’”¹¹⁶ Washburn called the trial a public farce that was designed to humiliate the old administration not establish precedent. “The new chief and the new

detective did not want them convicted by testimony of fallen women for boodling [the grafting scheme], it would make these girls too prominent, and also put a permanent stop to graft."¹¹⁷ The judge did, in fact, warn the jury that the madams were indeed accomplices to the crime on trial and that their testimony should be taken with "great care and caution" while subjecting it to "careful examination."¹¹⁸ The judge's action incited state prosecutors to appeal the verdict all the way to the Nebraska Supreme Court; the action outraged Washburn.

Washburn was suspect of the double standards that held men to different moral standards than women. Washburn's decried the institutionalized misogyny that accepted the word of men who owned the dens and the customers who frequented them.¹¹⁹ She demanded to know why men were not asked about their habitation of the red light districts while women were asked about their associations "for the purpose of DISCREDITING HER TESTIMONY."¹²⁰ Washburn questioned the hypocrisy:

There are no good reasons why our oath should not stand good until our INDIVIDUAL VERACITY SHOULD BE IMPEACHED in the same manner and form as men are treated. The fact that our oath is not accepted subjects us to the grossest insult and injustice and compels us to feel that you are making a mockery of your court of JUSTICE AND THAT IT IS MERELY A RELIC OF BARBARISM. We are constantly reminded by the police, as well as all men who abuse us, THAT OUR OATH WILL NOT BE TAKEN IN COURT.¹²¹

Perhaps unbeknownst to (or dismissed by) Washburn, the 1908 Supreme Court opinion did, in fact, take the testimony of the madams seriously.

The Supreme Court's opinion articulated the ambiguity that Washburn questioned. Although it upheld the lower court judge's warning to the jury to question the credibility and intention of an accomplice to the crime, the opinion stated that "it is doubtful if the evidence of the State was sufficient to establish the charge of blackmail or extortion, a point which is not decided; but it would seem clear that this evidence, if true, was

sufficient to convict the defendants of the crime of bribery.”¹²² Next, the Supreme Court readmitted the evidence of the madam’s testimony that was thrown out in the original trial. The recognition of their testimony was nullified in the ruling as the trial was for the wrong crime. Thus, in effect, the ruling maintained the devaluation of the economic exploitation of the madams by calling them accomplices to the crime. The trial was one of the many incidents that led Washburn to commit her later life to activism by writing a book “to take up the work that I am now doing—throwing the searchlight on the underworld.”¹²³

Another act of self-advocacy was Washburn’s attempt at creating social services for prostitutes to support their transition out of the profession. She argued, “Our reform of industrial schools for girls are failures in many respects.”¹²⁴ She believed that the contemporary reform school system ruined the reputations of girls who were only being rebellious and, instead, drove them into the underworld.¹²⁵

The local Lincoln newspapers consistently reported of the salvageable young wayward women. According to a March 8, 1905, *State Journal* article, a young Mamie Howe, a 15-year-old from Ashland, Nebraska, was sentenced to the state industrial school. The man she wished to wed refused to marry her. The pernicious circumstance ended with her appearance before the police judge. Infamous Chief Routzahn was “impressed by the appearance and actions of the girl with the conviction that she was not hardened in waywardness” as reported by the *Lincoln Journal* on July 22, 1904. The love of Harry Kirk had brought the unidentified girl to the edge of the underworld. This young woman escaped being sent to the industrial school, or The Home of the Good Shepherd in Omaha,¹²⁶ when her uncle took her home to Omaha.

Washburn asserted that Nebraska took a very conservative approach towards the rehabilitation and supervision of women's supposed deviance. During the Progressive Era, Nebraska established two girls reformatories to provide "shelter and protection" and also "employment and means of self support to penitent women and girls, with a view to aid in the suppression of prostitution," as stated in the *Nebraska Blue Book* (1926).¹²⁷ The State established the Nebraska industrial schools during a wave of national development of similar institutions. The two Nebraska schools for girls were opened within a decade of each other. The co-ed State Industrial School for Juvenile Offenders (1879) admitted the first female, a 13-year-old from Kearney, in 1889.¹²⁸ The Nebraska Industrial Home near Milford, built in 1889, housed "homeless, penitent girls who have no specific disease," but who had broken the law by being pregnant out of wedlock (the law remained in effect until the 1950s).¹²⁹ According to a March 29, 2008, *Lincoln Journal Star* article, no other state fully funded their industrial homes for girls.

Women of prominence were major players in the founding of the girls' schools. Nebraska's home for unmarried, pregnant women in Milford was founded with the encouragement of Francis E. Willard, a national icon in the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. Ada Bittenbender wrote The Industrial Home bill enacted in 1887. Bittenbender, the first woman admitted to the Nebraska Bar Association, practiced in front the Supreme Court of Nebraska.¹³⁰

Although never mentioned by reference or name, Washburn had to be intimately aware of Bittenbender and her activism. Bittenbender was the secretary-elect of the Nebraska Woman Suffrage Association at its 1881 inception. She was elected president of the organization the next year after helping to write and successfully submit a

women's suffrage amendment to the Nebraska legislature. She also served as a national delegate for the WCTU in Washington, D.C. According to *A Woman of the Century: Fourteen Hundred-Seventy Biographical Sketches of American Women in all Walks of Life*, edited by Frances E. Willard and Mary A. Livermore (1893):

Bittenbender secured the passage of the scientific temperance instruction bill, the tobacco bill, secured a law giving the mother the guardianship of her children equally with the father, and several other laws. She is the author of the excellent industrial home bill which was enacted by the Nebraska legislature in 1887, which establishes an industrial school as well as home for penitent women and girls, with a view to lessen prostitution. At the International Council of Women held in Washington, D. C, in March, 1888, she spoke on "Woman in Law." During several sessions of Congress she remained in Washington, representing the National Woman's Christian Temperance Union as its superintendent of legislation and petitions.¹³¹

Soon after, Bittenbender was elected as the National Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) attorney. Willard and Livermore celebrated the probity of a distinguished career by stating that "Mrs. Bittenbender has for years borne a wonderful burden of work, showing the capacity of woman to endure the strain of deep thinking and of arduous professional labor."

Yet, despite Bittenbender's intimacy with their national agenda, the local WCTU did not establish a home that helped prostitutes transition out of the profession as found in many other state chapters. These homes provided job training, temporary housing, and job placement for wayward women. One such home was located in Des Moines, Iowa.

According to the Iowa Women's Archives at the University of Iowa:

In 1882, shortly after the organization became an incorporated body, the WCTU of Iowa founded the Benedict Home in Des Moines, Iowa, as a reformatory for "fallen women." Over 1,900 single pregnant women and former prostitutes lived at the Home between 1882 and 1943. Nearly 1,600 babies were born at the Benedict Home; many were placed for adoption. Young women had to be free of venereal disease and promise to receive at least one year of Christian training at the Home. Relatives were not permitted to visit young women during their "confinement," and residents were permitted to send two letters per week; letters were subject to review by supervisors at the Benedict Home. The Home was

supported by donations from local WCTU chapters and modest funding from the State of Iowa.¹³²

Perhaps, Bittendbender felt the needs were being addressed by the Nebraska Industrial Home in Milford. Washburn did not seem to agree as the disease-free clause excluded prostitutes from the services of the state home.

In 1911, Washburn was involved with a bill introduced to Nebraska Legislature that requested funds to establish services for women to transition out of prostitution.¹³³ E. B. Quackenbush¹³⁴ introduced House Roll No. 408. The bill called for an act to “establish, locate, erect, and maintain in, or near the city of Omaha, Nebraska, an institution to reclaim, educate, and train women, who are in, and desire to abandon the underworld, and to aid them to obtain employment for which they may become qualified and worthy, in useful and self-supporting vocations, to appropriate the necessary funds therefore and authorize such institution to accept and reject donations and endowments.”¹³⁵ Wood suggested that Washburn outlined the plan in her book’s closing chapter, but her knowledge of the contemporary WTCU rhetoric, and that of other leading orators of women’s rights, leads one to consider other possibilities.¹³⁶

The rhetoric of much of Washburn’s argument is almost identical to that articulated by that of Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt, president of the National Woman Suffrage Association. In a March 18, 1901, *New York Times* article, the reporter quoted verbatim one of Catt’s speeches titled “The Degradation of Women in New York.” For example, Mrs. Catt stated in this article that:

No woman in the world can accept her purity at the sacrifice of another’s, if she is worthy of the name woman. You tell us that the social evil is necessary, because if it did not exist many happy homes would be polluted. We tell you that it is no more necessary for one class of women to sacrifice their virtue to protect other homes than it is necessary for us to have a class of kleptomaniacs to protect certain kinds of property.

In her book, Washburn echoes Catt's sentiments by stating, "If you consider that it is necessary you ought in justice to be willing that one of your own daughters or sisters be sacrificed, and not always the daughters or sisters of your neighbors."¹³⁷ The *New York Times* article goes on to quote Catt as arguing that "we are responsible for" a city where thousands of women are forced to make compromising decisions leading them to barter "virtue for food." Catt noted that institutions were built for the lame, the blind, and the sick, but questioned, "Why turn loose upon society these women who are maimed morally?" "Our place" is to act as a physician to treat and protect them. "Our place is to extend the helping hand of good womanhood before it is too late," argued Catt. The sacrifice of women to prostitution due to low wages in unregulated industries was unacceptable. The degradation of these women lay not at the fault of the prostitute, but in the "duty to restrain them as we restrain other criminals, for society's sake."

Washburn may have taken issue with the enforced restraint of women.

Nonetheless, Washburn stated, "If this sentiment is correct and the keeping of public women for such purposes is necessary as a PROTECTION FOR OTHER GIRLS AND WOMEN, then the unfortunate sister SHOULD BE TREATED WITH KINDNESS AND CONSIDERATION; it would be right for the state or nation to do as they did in olden times, that is, support and care for them so that they might the better fill their mission."¹³⁸

Emma Goldman summarized the argument by advocating for a "sweeping away the attitude of hypocrisy" to "insure a greater understanding and more humane treatment" of prostitutes.¹³⁹

Although these similarities of rhetoric and activism warrant a deeper analysis, for the purpose of this discussion, it opens up questions of the breadth of influences upon

Washburn in the construction of her conscious acts of self-advocacy; it also centralizes her within the contemporary debate of prostitution. As an educated woman, Washburn exercised agency with the awareness of being a historical player, centralized within the contemporary politics that indicted her. In the letter that accompanied the donation of her book to the Nebraska State Historical Society, she wrote, “The substance of this book would make an interesting story for a good writer—if ever used—I trust my name will be used as one of the features.”¹⁴⁰ *The Underworld Sewer* “was scattered pretty much all over the United States and in Canada and England—there was considerable demand for it after I had discontinued the publishing.”¹⁴¹ Washburn admits that it could have been a “big success.” Yet, she was not up to the notoriety. “The book is alright as far as it goes but it didn’t go far enough.” Therefore, this leads one to ask: Was she aware of the WTCU Benedict Home in Des Moines, Iowa, and other such prostitution rescue houses across the United States? Is her dedication of one of her pamphlets to Mrs. Hester T. Griffith “who helped bring about Women’s Suffrage in the State of California” a revelation of deeper relationships that caused a profound impact on her book and advocacy?¹⁴² Why would her intellectual influences be any different in context than those of Emma Goldman, Carrie Chapman Catt, or Francis Willard?

Washburn’s attempts to improve the lives of prostitutes were similar to her contemporaries such as Maimie Pinzer. Rosen, in *The Maimie Papers: Letters from an Ex-Prostitute*, reported that Pinzer, with assistance from many benefactors, “informally transformed her apartment into a halfway house for young, would-be and actual prostitutes.”¹⁴³ This was not Pinzer’s first time assisting other women in the same plight in her low-income neighborhood. She was obviously an active member of a financially

stressed subculture that exhibited an interdependency to help each other subsist. This female labor subculture was developed in scholarly historical works such as Wendy Gamber's *The Female Economy: The Millinery and Dressmaking Trades, 1860–1930*, Joanne Meyerwitz's *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880–1930*, and Kathy Peiss's *Cheap Amusements: Working Women Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York*, as well as other works by Sharon Wood, Ruth Rosen, and Brenda Foley, cited in this chapter. Women created neighborhoods where they sought to support themselves through a fluid navigation of paid labor, entrepreneurship, self-advocacy, camaraderie, institutions, marriage, family, dating, entertainment, and different kinds of prostitution. Examples of self-advocacy by Washburn and Pinzer suggest that they were not lone actors in their own history. The rest of their history is buried or lost—a potential victim of a bias of who actually *makes* history.

Washburn was politically active from the lowest rung of the gender hierarchy during a time in which reformers were attempting to eradicate the red light districts—to destroy prostitution in the name of progress. Yet, Washburn and her contemporaries understood that utopian legislation was detrimental to the prostitutes who were only being shoved into the margins of an industry that was fast becoming more and more sophisticated, an industry that would evolve the whore-stigma into a billion dollar “Raunch Culture” that permeated all outlets of the popular global culture of the twenty-first century.¹⁴⁴ Rosen argued that the “abolition of prostitution translated into immediate unemployment and impoverishment of prostitutes and the long-term institutionalization of criminalized prostitution.”¹⁴⁵ The war against the social evil ignored the welfare of the prostitute and integrated her into the underworld of crime.¹⁴⁶ The problem was not the

prostitute, according to Washburn, but the economic and social system that left her bound by the double standards of the whore-stigma, a stigma that restricted the fluidity of a woman among occupation, class, legitimate marriage, and even her family. Washburn argued, "Such an administration would observe that there are SEVERAL MILLIONS of human souls held in captivity by a condition MADE FOR THEM by mildewed laws and customs which keep the UNDERWORLD SEWER GOING."¹⁴⁷

More importantly, Washburn and Pinzer's self-representation through literature and activism foreshadowed the surge of women in sexualized labor advocating on their own behalf in the latter half of the twentieth century. A Sex Workers Movement emerged in relationship and reaction to the Second Wave Feminist Movement. It inspired women from all tentacles of sexualized labor from across the globe to unite to build sophisticated networks that have impacted every aspect of society from fashion to legislature to the ivory tower.¹⁴⁸ In their early writings and advocacy, the modern sex workers were probably not yet aware of Washburn's book, as her work was not re-released until 1997. Yet, women in the Sex Workers Movement echoed Washburn's sentiments and perspectives - from a century earlier - as they articulated their conditions as self-advocates and agents in their own history. They established that "dissident movements provide a microcosmic view of the dominant culture's values, assumptions, and social structure."¹⁴⁹ The concluding chapter provides a glimpse into the movement.

Chapter 3: How Much Has Really Changed?

From Washburn's era to the end of the twentieth century, the sex industries changed dramatically while the challenges facing the women who worked as sex workers remained relatively stagnant. Modern twentieth-century American mainstream culture has absorbed the incestuous family tree of a complex billionaire-dollar sex industry. The sex industry has evolved from a heavily policed, localized prostitution-based economic microstructure into a major American macro-economy that encompasses everything from installed stripper poles for middle-class mothers' extracurricular exercise *to* primetime television runways draped in million-dollar Victoria's Secret lingerie-clad models *to* major book tours of legalized pornography actors promoting rags-to-riches autobiographies *to* exotic dancers unionizing clubs for their labor rights *to* outlawed politicized prostitutes globally organizing for their human rights. It is impossible to calculate the impact and diversity of the sex industry. Since the onset of the second wave women's movement in the late 1960s, social critics have written a small library on the topic. Yet, this historical evolution has remained relatively undetected on the radar of scholars outside the disciplines of sociology or geography.

Modern sex industry fashion signifiers saturated late-twentieth-century American popular culture. The Progressive Era "New Woman's" clothing references to iconic risqué prostitute fashion turned into mainstreamed fetishes. Judith Reagan, publisher of the world's highest grossing pornography star, Jenna Jameson, stated to CBS in 2005, "I believe that there is a porno-ization of the culture... what that means is that if you watch every single thing that's going on out there in the popular culture, you will see females

scantly clad, implanted, dressed up like hookers, porn stars and so on, and that is very acceptable.”

Ariel Levy, author of *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture*, noted how the sex industry permeated the spring 2004 New York fashion shows:

The designer Jeremy Scott decorated his show (which he called “Sexybition”) with pole dancers and the actress Lisa Marie who was dressed as a dungeon sex slave and appeared to be having either an extended orgasm or an epileptic seizure onstage. Likewise, the Pierrot knitwear show was set up like a mock porno shoot with the designer, Pierre Carrilero, playing the director and the models rolling around in various familiar porn tableaux (black man/white woman, three-way, etc.).¹

The concerns of early suffragists over egret feathers worn in hussy hats that appeared on respectable women’s heads (as referenced by Willa Cather in Chapter Two) had translated into a late-twentieth-century porn-inspired couture. The infamous nineteenth-century entertainment that once staged tableaux performances of famous paintings, such as *The Birth of Venus*, in Bowery saloons to male-only audiences morphed into performed snapshots mocking skin flicks for fashionistas described above. Late-twentieth-century cable television stations have transmitted everything from grape-leave sex scenes on prime time to a litany of crime shows solving the murder of young, sexualized, half-naked, barely legal girls to pay-per-view X-rated Play Boy Bunnies. These television shows have replaced the early-twentieth-century theatre that once staged plays written by infamous playwrights dedicated to the brothel genre as well as the early leg shows of the Burlesque. Low-brow entertainment trumped Victorian morality by simply outselling it in the tradition of twentieth-century patriarchal, free-market capitalism.²

The incorporation of sex-industry signifiers into American’s daily lives disguised a country still rooted deep in the Victorian morality of fear and repression. Some modern

social critics argue that mainstream American culture has mistaken the faked public orgasmic performances, executed by the exotic dancers and porn stars, as real acts of sexual expression and sex-based power. Levy argues that due to a lack of balanced sex education, American women have mistaken the exhibitionism of public sex transactions between hooker and client, or the exotic dancer and tipper, for a personally liberated sexual freedom:

As of 2005, federal funding was denied to all public school sex education programs except for those advocating abstinence until marriage. Consequently, a disturbing percentage of our people are equipped with nothing but G-strings and Jenna Jameson to guide them through the roiling sea of hormones they are entering, and all the attendant dangers of STDs and pregnancy that are its sharks. Our national love of porn and pole dancing is not the byproduct of a free and easy society with an earthy acceptance of sex. It is a desperate stab at freewheeling eroticism in a time and place characterized by intense anxiety. What are we afraid of? Everything...which includes sexual freedom and *real* female power.³

Foley concludes *Undressed for Success: Beauty Contestants and Exotic Dancers as Merchants of Morality* with similar observations:

In the United States, where Miss America beauty contestants thank God for putting them on the stage, and a bikini-clad Mrs. America Pageant contestant proudly announces her status as a minister's wife, female sexuality and ideological notions of value and morality are intentionally conjoined to market a particular image of socially acceptable femaleness.... Until ideologically based assumptions of morality cease to function as criteria by which performers in strip clubs and beauty pageants are socially recognized, these performers will continue to serve as cultural markers, and marketers, of a rigidly standardized definition of the American Female in popular entertainment.⁴

By merging Levy's observations with Foley's core thesis, some of the myth-making strategies of modern sexual knowledge are exposed. Over the course of the twentieth century, mainstream women have incorporated - with intensifying frequency - the sex industry signifiers of dress and behavior. Consequently, the non-public performing women mistake the sex industry professionals' *public* performance of orgasm and sex acts as a genuine *private* expression of sexual knowledge, expression, and freedom. By

simulating sex workers, mainstream women see themselves as knowledgeable and liberated. Yet, they are merely imitating a staged performance of a sex act, not an act of sexual intimacy. Exotic dancers are performing orgasm, not having orgasm. Thus, the incorporation of the signifiers of exotic dancers becomes a private performance of the Madonnas emulating the whores, thus “equating the selling of sex with sexual liberation.”⁵ Andrea Dworkin describes this phenomenon in *Pornography: Men*

Possessing Women:

Her sexual will can exist only as a will to be used. Whatever happens to her, it is all the same. If she loathes it, it is not wrong, she is. Within this system, the only thing for woman has been to embrace herself as a whore, as sexual wanton or sexual commodity within phallic boundaries, or to disavow her body. The most cynical use of women has been on the Left—cynical because the word *freedom* is used to capture the loyalties of women who want, more than anything, to be free and who are then valued and used as left-wing whores: collectivized cunts. The most cynical use of women has been on the Right—cynical because the word *good* is used to capture the loyalties of women who want, more than anything, to be good and who are then valued and used as right-wing whores: wives, the whores who breed.⁶

Horowitz argues that the coveting of sexual knowledge by modern doctors and science convinced women to reject midwifery and other female knowledge-based practices.

Horowitz called the knowledge that the modern male doctors had to purge from the people “vernacular culture.”⁷ Vernacular culture, according to Horowitz, is “passed down through the generations and sideways among peers, this framework sustained an earthy acceptance of sex and desire as vital parts of life for men and women.”⁸ Thus, modern women turning to sex workers (public performance) for sexual knowledge is the result of the loss of our culture’s vernacular culture and the reinforcement of patriarchal control over our bodies.

Levy argues that the late-twentieth-century sex industry macro-economy (or to use her term “raunch culture”) is a façade for a deeper cultural anxiety. She makes clear

that *Female Chauvinist Pigs* “is not a book about the sex industry; it is a book about what we have decided the sex industry means...how we have held it up, cleaned it off, and distorted it.”⁹ A country split over civil rights based on acts of sexuality while investing billions of dollars in pornography is a nation in crisis. Levy elaborates:

In 2004 our forty-second president, George W. Bush, the leader of the free world, proposed an amendment to the U.S. Constitution to forever ban gay marriage—which was *already* illegal. In opinion polls, about 50 percent of this country said they thought Bush had the right idea. If half this country feels so threatened by two people of the same gender being in love and having sex (and, incidentally, enjoying equal protection under the law), that they turn their attention—during *wartime*—to blocking rights already denied to homosexuals, then all the cardio striptease classes in the world aren’t going to rend us sexually liberated.¹⁰

What Levy does not mention is that homosexuals are not the only sexual deviants whose outlawed civil and human rights are potentially symptomatic of American’s confusion and anxiety over sex: politicized prostitutes argued that laws prohibited them from organizing on their own behalf, working safely and without legal repression, traveling without legal restrictions, having families and raising children, and enjoying the same rights, responsibilities, and privileges as other people.¹¹ Nicki Roberts, whose historian, argued that “the contemporary prostitute has much in common with her sisters from previous centuries: she is just as likely to be working class, unskilled and relatively uneducated, and to be in the life for the money.”¹²

Almost a century later, the gender hierarchy faced by Washburn remained relatively intact, especially within the feminist movement itself. “On the issue of prostitution, American feminists found it difficult if not impossible to agree whether they should protect the rights of sex workers or simply abolish the industries that employed them,” explained Ruth Rosen in *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women’s*

*Movement Changed America.*¹³ Rosen wrote of a well-cited (the topic of Kate Millet's *The Prostitution Papers*) 1971 radical feminist conference on prostitution where:

The gulf between prostitutes and movement women proved impassable. Both groups agreed that prostitution should be decriminalized, but for radically different reasons. Prostitutes demanded safer working conditions for an ongoing trade; feminists wanted to abolish prostitution altogether. Alix Kates Shulman recalled that after several prostitutes described the working conditions they wanted, "one feminist jumped onto the stage, and said, well, why are you prostitutes? Why aren't you making a living some other way? Like, as a file clerk."¹⁴

The feminists of this conference echoed the Progressive Era "new women" advocates who sought for young women to maintain their moral chastity in the face of deep economic poverty.

Many second wave feminists established their authority by declaring themselves the protector of the unenlightened Sexualized female other. Like the municipal housekeepers, the second wave feminists justified their social value on the backs of the weak and exploited sex industry sister (the Sexualized female other). As established in Chapter One, the presence of the Sexualized female other is most evident in the text of the feminists. Andrea Dworkin, in *Right-Wing Women* (1983), clearly removes all possibility of self-authority of the Sexualized female other:

No prostitute provides any model for freedom or action in a world of freedom that can be used with intelligence and integrity by a woman; the model exists to entice counterfeit female sexual revolutionaries, gullible liberated girls, and to serve the men who enjoy them. The prostitute is no honest woman.¹⁵

The gender hierarchy that valued women's chastity (or lack of heterosexual contact as was the case with Dworkin) was firmly intact even within the second wave women's movement. Inherently, many modern feminists did not necessarily agree with this historical interpretation of the Sexualized female other as explained by Ruth Rosen in *The World Split Open: How the Women's Movement Changed America*:

The anti-pornography movement grew at a furious pace in the early 1980s. Meanwhile, a group of feminist intellectuals and activists, who did not necessarily approve of or like pornography, began to argue that feminists ought to mobilize to protect the rights and working conditions of sexual workers in the industry. They accused MacKinnon and Dworkin of attempting to protect women by thoroughly desexualizing them, by embracing Victorian ideals of women's passionlessness, encouraging censorship, these activists' worries that any attempt to weaken the First Amendment—such as banning pornography—would likely be used against feminists, Marxists, and gays and lesbians. They also worried that their opponents had recast sex as an exclusively dangerous and frightening activity.¹⁶

Rosen's observation collapsed the anti-pornography movement and the sex workers' movement into a singular force. Each movement had its own separate agenda with the latter being organized by transnational sex workers to advocate for their civil and labor rights whereas feminist intellectuals and writers sourced and fueled the anti-pornography movement. Nonetheless, it was not only Rosen's "group of feminist intellectuals and activists" who spoke out against a movement that disempowered the Sexualized female other and gave unquestionable authority to the enlightened anti-pornography feminists. The anti-pornography/anti-sex-worker position caused Carol Leigh, a politicized prostitute and veteran advocate, to ask:

Why are feminists most divided our sex roles as lesbian, wife, and whore? [sic] We're all in this together, surviving this gender oppression, but the tug-of-war over the righteous of the whore stands in the way of the unified effort. Horizontal hostility...internalized self-oppression...the mood is right for oxymoron.¹⁷

The feminist "sex wars" of the 1980s raged on the battlefield of conferences and the academic frontiers of women's studies departments.¹⁸ "I was horrified by the bloodletting within the feminist community occasioned by the difference of perspective on prostitution and pornography," stated Wendy Chapkis in the introduction of *Live Sex Acts: Women Performing Erotic Labor* (1997). By the end of the 1980s, Chapkis argued that feminists were divided into several camps based on their views of heterosexuality:

“Pro-Positive Sex Feminism,” “Anti-Sex Feminism,” “Sex Radical Feminism,” “Sexual Libertarianism,” etc.¹⁹ The complexity of the feminist “sex wars” era in women’s history has remained relatively under the radar since the mid-1990s and is in need of serious scholarly examination especially while many of the major players are still alive. Thus, it should be noted that I dramatically oversimplified this discussion to keep it tightly corseted. Many important events and discussions are simply not mentioned. Nonetheless, one example of bloodletting was in 1993 when Karen Lerum, as a young sociology graduate student presented her paper “Is it Exploitative if I Like it?: Sex Workers Compare Notes with Feminists and the Social Problems Industry” at the University of Washington.²⁰ Unbeknownst to her, one of the prominent scholars of prostitution was front row center. As soon as applause subsided, the scholar began chastising Lerum for being an irresponsible researcher who had denied “the vast amount of evidence that proves that most sex workers have been sexually abused, of trivializing the pain of sex workers, of being swept up with the glamourized visions of prostitution.”²¹ Lerum refuted that she had followed the lead of Dorothy Smith—the approach that if the sex worker claimed to like certain aspects of their work then she, as the researcher, would report that. Yet, the renowned scholar claimed that sex workers did not have the authority over their own experiences:

The scholar responded that if my interviewees claimed that they liked their work, they only said that to impress me (the authority) or to maintain some pride under extremely humiliating circumstances. She also pointed out (and I think this is valid) that the unequal power dynamic between research and subject makes it virtually impossible for subjects to tell the “truth.” And yet she did not offer a solution to this problem...other than to suggest that I educate myself about which statements are untruthful and become aware that “they’re not going to *admit* they’re victims.”

Despite the sophisticated transnational sex worker networks of 1990, most feminists showed few signs of accepting sex workers as an authority on their own experiences. Just as reformers spoke for the prostitutes of Washburn's era, modern feminist scholars claimed the authority to speak for the sex workers of the late-twentieth century. "Any theory that comes out about prostitution should come from the inside out, not from the outside in; otherwise it's arbitrary,"²² argued Margo St. James, former prostitute and founder of COYOTE. She added, "So when they [Catharine MacKinnon and the rest of the theorists and ideologues] slide into their 'Oh, they're all victims, we must save them!' trip, it supports the continued stigmatizing because it's patronizing and condescending."²³

Lerum argues the "institutionalized feminists" of the 1980s reinforced prostitutes (and other feminist's issues) as a reductive "doable" social problem.²⁴ According to Lerum, activists needed to simplify the complicated situations of women's lives to successfully compete and justify the funding of organizations and women's studies departments; she stated that complicated theories that cast women as both empowered and victimized threatened the growth of feminist organizations that worked in concert with state welfare agencies. Lerum argued that state institutionalized feminists had to compress patriarchy into scientifically "doable" problems that could be articulated as conditions with measurable results. Feminists fit social problems into the empirical processes and perspectives of the "sociology of science and social problems of theory"²⁵ to navigate and conform to state agencies such as the welfare system. Lerum explains:

Institutionalized feminism is soft on structural critiques and heavy on individual solutions for at least two reasons: it fits better into state and other institutions, and it makes sense within our cultural frame. After "The State" squishes the radical out of any feminist thought, one crucial essence of the feminist anti-sex work position remains, and it remains because it resonates with state-sanctioned approaches. This crucial idea is the idea that sex workers are victims with no choices.²⁶

Lerum speaks outside of a historical framework when arguing that “the fact that the state now sees sex work as a “women’s issue” as well as a moral shift or public health issue, is reflective of a significant cultural shift; it is a sign that feminism continues to succeed in heralding women as a legitimate group with interests and concerns independent of men.”²⁷ Leigh reminds her readers in *Unrepentant Whore* (2004) that the modern issues facing prostitutes are not Lerum’s recent “significant cultural shift.” Instead, Leigh argues that the problems facing modern sex workers are the result of more than a century of *enlightened* feminist women advocating for the Sexualized Other *victim* women: “the criminalization of prostitution was a cruel mistake, promoted by feminists near the turn of the century.”²⁸

Second wave feminists justified their social value in public politics, using similar strategies as the twentieth century reformers and suffragists who advocated municipal housecleaning. The Second Wave Feminist Movement did so despite evidence that sex workers of the late-twentieth century were just as capable of self-advocacy as Washburn, her fellow madams, Pinzer, and the other lost potential histories of women in red light districts across the United States. “Never have prostitutes been legitimized as spokespersons or self-determining agents, not by those who defend them against male abuse and not by those who depend upon them for sexual service,” argued Pheterson. “It is a radical political stance to assume prostitutes’ legitimacy.”²⁹

Sex Workers Claim Authority

Washburn’s self-advocacy foreshadowed the Sex Workers Movement that emerged in late 1960s. The evolution was similar to when turn-of-the-century women’s

movements, and their predecessors, continually morphed throughout the twentieth century into the crescendo of the Second Wave Feminist Movement. Gail Pheterson contended, in *The Vindication of the Rights of Whores* (1989), that prostitutes were never allowed to be—even by those advocating on their behalf—legitimate or authentic “spokespersons or self-determining agents” in the public debates and policy making on the issues directly effecting their professions, and thus, their bodies and lives.³⁰

Washburn is the first known source of a sex worker who sought to represent herself (as representative of a silenced group) in the public arena. Some of Washburn’s ideas were incorporated into the radical theory of her contemporaries. The lineage of Washburn’s work can be traced through an ambiguous citation in Emma Goldman’s influential article “The Traffic of Women” (1917). Dolores French (former president of HIRE and politicized prostitute) and Andrea Dworkin, a staunch anti-pornography activist and former clandestine prostitute, in return, cited Goldman in a wide range of twentieth-century feminist publications.³¹ This means that Washburn indirectly inspired the next generation of revolutionaries who then spawned modern feminist thinking.³² “In many ways, the feminist analysis and program Emma Goldman developed before World War I resembles more that of 1960s’ feminists than that of her own contemporaries,” argued Alix Kates Shulman in 1970.³³ The complicated lineage of feminist ideas is located at the “crisis-ridden intersection of social difference and its controlled surveillance and documentation.”³⁴

Unlike the feminist movement, it was, and still is in the United States (prostitution is only legal in one county of Nevada), illegal for most prostitutes to organize. Sex worker advocates argue that laws tie their hands and prohibit them from successfully

organizing. Valerie Jenness explained that organizing leaves prostitutes “vulnerable to arrest, conspiracy, and/or pimping and pandering.”³⁵ Pimping and pandering laws, as explained by Leigh, were designed to protect women, “but they are always used to control and stigmatize us.”³⁶ Children, husbands, and lovers can be arrested for accepting money made by prostitution. “Laws against pandering [encouraging prostitution] make my life into one big felony,” railed Leigh. “Theoretically, if I say anything besides ‘I hate prostitution,’ I could be locked up for years.”³⁷ Norma Jean Almodovar, an ex-Los Angeles Police Department (L.A.P.D.) officer turned prostitute, was arrested and convicted of pandering while writing a book on the corruption found within the police department. Almodovar explains:

The charge was one of pandering, a felony in California with a mandatory three- to six-year prison term on the first offense. (Despite its being mandatory, very few people actually go to prison—most get probation.) Usually the charge of pandering is brought only against a madam or a pimp, and I was neither, so both the media and seasoned court watchers were positive I would be acquitted. Victor [her husband] and I weren’t so sure.³⁸

The original conviction consisted of a ninety-day mental health evaluation that found that Almodovar was no threat to society. Almodovar received a sentence of three years’ probation with no motion from the state to appeal. Consequently, Almodovar became a staunch, public advocate of prostitutes’ rights. She remained an advocate against the corruption of the police force. Two years into her probation, State of California that cited that her unpublished manuscript as harmful against the public. The court then overturned her original sentence. The court sent Almodovar to prison for another three years.³⁹ “In essence, the prostitutes’ fear of being identified publicly and fear of reprisal from law enforcement hinders recruitment and visibility for a prostitutes’ rights movement,” argues Jenness.⁴⁰ It should also be noted here that the outlaw status of prostitutes complicates

their organizing in comparison to other sex workers in legal industries, such as exotic dancers, peep show dancers, phone sex workers, and pornography actors and models. Moreover, the whore label produces a stigma that negatively impacts the civil and human rights of all women, in and out of the sex industry.

In the early sex workers' movement, politicized whores integrated feminist theories into their sex work. For example, Margo St. James, founder of the first prostitute advocacy group, COYOTE, stated, in an article published in *Good Girls*Bad Girls: Feminists and Sex Trade Workers Face to Face* (1987), her preference to use the term "whore" to "prostitute."⁴¹ Prostitute, she argued, identifies the talent for a dishonorable cause. St. James further argued, "I prefer the word *whore*, and I want to reclaim it like lesbians have reclaimed the word *dyke* over the last decade."⁴² Just as Washburn navigated the prominent ideas of the feminist and suffragist of her contemporaries, the amalgamation of feminist ideas into sex work produced a unique politicization of women's labor. "Ti-Grace Atkinson once wrote that the women's movement wouldn't really make it over the hump until whores evolved as the leaders," stated St. James.⁴³ She then added, "Well, here we are!"⁴⁴ Two years later, St. James described the process of her "politicization":

"What's a nice girl like you...?" was the usual reaction of men to my becoming a feminist as well as to my becoming a prostitute. The difference for me was that I *chose* to be a feminist, but I *decided* to work as a prostitute after being labeled officially by a misogynist judge in San Francisco at age twenty-five. It was 1962. I said in court, "Your Honor, I've never turned a trick in my life!" He responded, "Anyone who knows the language is obviously a professional." My crime? I knew too much to be a nice girl.⁴⁵

The core theme of veteran activist Carol Leigh's latest book, *Unrepentant Whore: Collected Works of Scarlet Harlot* (2004), was that she became a politicized prostitute to internally merge feminism with her other libertine beliefs.⁴⁶ "In the early 1970s, I read

feminist authors starting with Betty Friedan, Germaine Greer, Kate Miller, Phyllis Chesler and Ti-Grace Atkinson, who helped me understand how my power was thwarted by ‘internalized oppression.’ ”⁴⁷ The invention of the term “sex work” was “motivated by my desire to reconcile my feminist goals with the reality of my life and the lives of the women I knew.”⁴⁸ Leigh sought to create tolerance “within and outside the women’s movement for women working in the sex industry.”⁴⁹

The sex workers movement and Washburn’s argument established the condition of women’s economics as a civil and human rights’ issue. “Poverty forces women into survival sex and sex for money” argued Leigh.⁵⁰ Dolores French, an infamous politicized prostitute and advocate in Atlanta, described the political creed of the group of sex workers who sought her organizational skills in her autobiography *Working: My Life as a Prostitute* (1988): they believed that “a woman has a right to sell sexual services just as much as she has a right to sell her brains to a law firm when she works as a lawyer, or to sell her creative work to a museum when she works as an artist, or to sell her image to a photographer when she works as a model or to sell her body when she works as a ballerina.”⁵¹ The “Statement on Prostitution and Human Rights” drafted by prostitutes and scholars at the 1986 meeting of the International Committee for Prostitutes’ Rights stated that:

The International Committee for Prostitutes’ Rights (ICPR) demands that prostitutes, ex-prostitutes and all women regardless of their work, color, class, sexuality, history of abuse or marital status be granted the same human rights as every other citizen.... Prostitutes are systemically robbed of liberty, security, fair administration of justice, respect for private and family life, freedom of expression and freedom of association. In addition, they suffer from inhuman and degrading treatment and punishment and from discrimination in employment and housing.⁵²

In 1986, Lin Lap, a sex worker from Singapore, argued that the globalizing of the sex industry as a tourist industry further weakened impoverished economies of nations. “As poor countries get poorer, more and increasingly younger women are regarding themselves and their sexuality as the only commodities which are marketable,” contended Lap.⁵³

In unison with the sex workers movement, a few second wave feminists argued poverty reinforced a gender-biased hierarchy based on the Sexualized female other. The gender-biased hierarchy upheld the intermeshed patriarchal economic, state, and social systems and structures that produced discrimination by sexuality, gender, class, and race. bell hooks reminds her readers in *Where We Stand: Class Matters* (2000):

Most American citizens do not acknowledge the reality of class difference, of class exploitation, and they continue to believe that this is a classless society. What they mean by this is not that citizens do not occupy different class positions, but that these class positions are not fixed. Despite grave injustice and all the barriers that make it practically impossible to change your class position, if you are born on the bottom of this society’s economic totem pole, it is still true that a teeny fraction of that population squeezes and militantly forces their way from the bottom up.⁵⁴

Poverty, the Sexualized female other, and misogyny are inseparable within this framework. “By setting a strict standard which judged women as ‘deserving’ or ‘undeserving’ the welfare state has upheld a certain view of women’s roles and has simultaneously helped to meet the economy’s need for women’s unpaid labor in the home and their low-paid labor in the market,” argued Mimi Abramowitz in *Regulating The Lives of Women: Social Welfare Policy from Colonial Times to the Present* (1988).⁵⁵ Angela Y. Davis articulates the devaluing of all of women’s work in *Women, Race & Class* (1981):

...the incipient industrialization of the economy was simultaneously eroding women’s prestige in the home—a prestige based on their previously *productive* and absolutely

essential domestic labor. Their social status began to deteriorate accordingly. An ideological consequence of industrial capitalism was the shaping of a more rigorous notion of female inferiority. It seemed, in fact, that the more women's domestic duties shrank under the impact of industrialization, the more rigid became the assertion that "woman's place was in the home."⁵⁶

Therefore, the Sexualized female other cannot be assigned the role of municipal housecleaner. Thus, she becomes victim to the volatility of the free market. She loses civil and labor rights as she navigates the terrain of the "whore stigma." On the other hand, the intellectual feminists and female social reformers attempt to increase their social value through a revised municipal housecleaning argument. They continue to juxtapose their value against the lack of value of the Sexualized female other and the loss of value of women's domestic laborers. Therefore, the sex workers' advocates' alignment of prostitute politics within the larger context of feminist politics is just. Jenness argued that representatives of COYOTE "have ongoingly situated the prostitutes' rights movement firmly within largely publicly legitimated issues and community values."⁵⁷ Thus, these feminist arguments support the assertion made by the modern sex workers, Washburn, and Alder, that the function of the whore stigma kept women's poverty and misogyny inseparable. Thus, the results are an ample supply of women vulnerable to the more lucrative labor option of the sex industry.

Therefore, sex workers saw their plight in terms of labor rights as well as civil and human rights. "By keeping the debate about sex work focused on sex, and not *work*, the true nature of this issue is obscured," argues Janelle Galazia in "Staged," an article found in *Working Sex: Sex Workers Write about a Changing Industry* (2007). When the debate stays focused on ideas of obscenity, appropriate and inappropriate sexualities, representations of femininity, and notions of morality, it creates a "smoke screen" that obscures the real issues at hand for sex workers, argues Galazia. "In this framework

women are sluts instead of workers, or victims instead of cognizant participants in an economy.”⁵⁸ Galazia explains:

What are the economic realities that make the sex industry the most viable choice for many people? That’s where feminism comes in. That’s where the outrage is appropriate. The wage gap, welfare “reform,” sexist and racist hiring practices, the decline in the real value of the minimum wage, lack of universal access to healthcare or rehab services, and the widening disparity between the rich and poor: these are the things that undermine the social fabric and degrade the status of women more than me tramping about in high heels could ever hope to.⁵⁹

Successful unionization honored some sex workers’ labor. Unionization was only an option for branches of the legalized sex industry such as burlesque, and its evolved form, exotic dancing. The first known successful organizing of burlesque performers came in 1933 when the New Deal NRA codes finally recognized the genre (as it was thought to be low art—in the high art/low art dichotomy—to be under the same union as vaudeville performers). According to Irving Zeidman in *The American Burlesque Show* (1967), the Burlesque Artists Association (BAA) organized to address issues such as the minimum wage, working hours, and booking practices. The 1300 member charter was granted an AFL charter in 1934. Yet, it wasn’t until 1936 that the interests of the strippers were represented when Carrie Finnell was elected to the executive board. The union lost its power when a 1937 censorship campaign against burlesque crippled its effectiveness. The working conditions of all burlesque performers went on a slow descent. The next known union of strippers was the League of Exotic Dancers founded by the infamous Jennie Lee in 1955. According to the July 19, 1955, *Los Angeles Times* article “L.A. Strippers Protest Their Take-Off Pay,” the League of Exotic Dancers were an independent organization within the American Guild of Variety Artists (AGVA) (the gig scheduling organization for union members). The union sought to confront unfair wage practices and other labor issues affecting independent strippers. The union placed Los

Angeles as the lowest paying city of all major U.S. metropolitan areas. The most successful exotic dancers unionizing effort to date was that of the Exotic Dancers League. The Exotic Dancers League successfully unionized a peep club in San Francisco in 1993.⁶⁰ The Exotic Dancers League took a historically unique position by aligning themselves with the sex workers' movement instead of the usual attempt to distance themselves from the illegal aspects of the sex industry. "Our mission is to address the lack of civil, human and labor rights on behalf of exotic dancers and other sex industry workers. Our primary objective is to support all sex industry workers by providing information, referrals and non-judgmental, empowerment-based services while collectively advocating for sufficient working conditions for everyone including Asian, Black, Latina, Native American communities and other people of color; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning individuals; persons with disabilities; low-income women, and those who may have barriers accessing services," reported their official Web site.⁶¹ The now defunct Exotic Dancers League took a radical stance that was not held by all stigmatized performers.

The internal hierarchy within the sex industry, articulated by Washburn and her contemporaries was still evident in the mid-twentieth century. For example, the 1960s sexual revolution brought topless bikini modeling, topless waitressing, and go-go dancing into the spaces that used to house the traditional burlesque striptease artists. The traditional burlesque striptease artists quickly began to distinguish themselves from the new generation of topless dancers. "The strip is the only thing remaining from the old days of burlesque, but the ecdysiasts [striptease artist] of today don't have the opportunity to polish their dancing and timing by starting out in a chorus line and working their way

up to be headliners,” Betty Rowland explained in “Lifetime of Bumps, Grinds ‘Good for Figure,’ ” a February 16, 1969, *Los Angeles Times* article. “Now it’s instant nudity,” argued Rowland. “They hand a girl a little costume and she’s a go-go dancer.” Rowland started her career as a striptease artist at the age of 14 in a Depression-era Burlesque show that also housed variety acts, comedians and orchestras. Foley articulated the distinction made by a veteran burlesque artist, Susan Mills, between herself and beauty contestants, a common cultural thread that was “a widely held and deeply personal investment in maintaining the cultural disassociation of the forms, a disassociation grounded in every case on some form of moralistic ideology.”⁶² Mills applied to herself, and lower forms of topless dancing, the gender-biased hierarchical distinction within the Sexualized female other (equivalent to Robert Sanger’s grades of prostitutes discussed in Chapter One). “But Mills distinction was based on more than chronology: for her, the girls in “real burlesque” had been “very nice,” a quality that separated them, on implicitly moral grounds, from latter-day female performers who degraded true burlesque with “coke bottles between their legs,” explained Foley.⁶³ These sex workers would probably not identify themselves with the modern sex workers advocate as the members of the Exotic Dancers League did. Yet, in historical context, traditional burlesque has a long history of tangling with the state over obscenity and censorship.⁶⁴ In the context of their times, was the first forward thrust of the hips that appeared in a public performance at the 1893 Chicago Exposition any less risqué than the three waitresses who were arrested for dancing topless in the Cat’s Meow in 1966? According to the *Los Angeles Times* February 10, 1966, article “Three Waitresses Placed on Probation,” the Cat Meow’s waitresses were fined \$166, received 18-months’ probation, and their 90-day jail

sentences were suspended “on the condition the women obtain employment approved by their probation officers and not commit a similar offense.” That same year topless American models were walking U.S. runways in the latest European bathing suits. And were the stiff fines of the topless waitresses in proportion to the crime? How does their conviction compare to the Progressive Era prostitutes’ \$15 court fines in Lincoln, Nebraska?

The modern sex workers’ movement complicates the feminist movement and related women’s issues: often producing more questions than answers. The self-advocacy of sex workers illustrates the intersections between feminist authority, sexual knowledge, patriarchy, and feminized poverty. At these intersections, feminism’s gender-biased hierarchy is identifiable. These intersections identify how feminism’s gender-biased hierarchy assimilates and emulates that of the gender-biased hierarchies found within the larger patriarchal systems and structures found in the American culture.

This thesis, as a whole, has centralized all self-advocating sex workers as contemporaries in their own history rather than maintaining their social marginalization even in the scholarship about them. Washburn was a pioneer in the self-representation of prostitutes. Her argument was firmly rooted and well versed in the contemporary debates on prostitution, women’s labor, and politics. The modern sex workers’ movement of the late-twentieth century created a sophisticated global network that called into question feminist critique and theory while being inspired by and incorporating the very rhetoric used against sex workers. The issues that Washburn addressed were the same as those addressed by the modern sex workers. Despite all challenges, modern sex workers have engaged in a global social movement to self-advocate for their civil rights since the mid-

1960s.⁶⁵ Scholars have celebrated the historical impact of sex workers building networks similar to those found in other second wave women's movements such as the battered women's movement and the National Organization of Women (NOW). "Never before had prostitutes emerged to act as their own advocates by challenging commonly held notions about prostitution and offering proposals for reform," explained Valerie Jenness in *Making it Work: The Prostitutes' Rights Movement in Perspective* (1993).⁶⁶ Still, as the above questions emphasize, there is still much research left to do.

In this thesis, I sought to explain some of the complicated mechanisms of gender-biased hierarchies. These hierarchies excluded women from their own history. Sex workers are marginalized and devalued in American culture. Therefore, these same women are devalued and marginalized in history. The whore-stigma excuses feminism from its own purpose: to stop the dehumanization of all women. Feminists have historically placed their value above that of women they considered whores. Yet, this thesis proves that the whores' experiences and expertise centralize them within their own history. I argued that the history of the whore is intimate to the history of American culture. Therefore, scholarship should view whores as major players of history who risked their selves with the same courage as any advocate who resists the oppression of race or sex. I wrote this paper in hopes that the devaluation of women due to sexuality would no longer exist. Perhaps, if not in my lifetime, I hope that the whore-stigma is lifted in my daughter's generation.

Introduction

¹ Josie Washburn, *The Underworld Sewer: A Prostitute Reflects on Life in the Trade, 1871 – 1909* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 139.

² Susan Meiselas, *Carnival Strippers* (Steidl & The Whitney Museum of American Art, 2003), 140.

³ Sharon Wood argues that this is the only confirmed work by prostitute on prostitution to emerge from this era of history—an era in which the anti-white slavery campaign was active and social purity campaigners were actively seeking to shut down red light districts as a means of stamping out the so-called social evil. The anti-white slavery campaign sought to bring stop the trafficking of white women into prostitution through legislation. See Ruth Rosen's *The Lost Sisterhood*.

⁴ Meiselas reveals little else about Shortie except that they lost touch after years of correspondence. She sought Shortie out again at the 1999 reprinting of the book. She found Shortie in a hospital bed dying of years of chronic alcoholism and drug abuse. "The liquor habit is so interwoven with the underworld that it is impossible to explain our condition without bringing into notice one of the chief causes which applies directly to the social evil," noted Washburn almost a hundred years earlier (Washburn, 165).

⁵ See Susan Meiselas *Carnival Strippers* and A.W. Stencell *Girl Show*.

⁶ Meiselas, *Carnival Strippers*, 140.

⁷ A.W. Stencell, *Girl Show: Into the Canvas World of Bump and Grind* (Toronto: EWS Press, 1999), 86.

⁸ Meiselas, *Carnival Strippers*, 124.

⁹ Using the word "sexualized" helps to elevate some of the stigma that is evoked when using the word "eroticized." To eroticize is to bring forth Eros. Often, the topic of this thesis is a business transaction and does not necessarily have a measure of sincere Eros for the laborer. This study is concerned with the labor and/or sexualized economic strategies of low income women. Eros is implied by the sexualized labor, but not necessarily experienced. It is also provides the necessary separation from those who have found a measure of sexual freedom through the sexual revolutions and changing American mores. For definition of "sexualized" please go to:

<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/sexualized>

¹⁰ Please see: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/sexual>.

¹¹ Ed. Gail Pheterson, *A Vindication of the Rights of Whores* (The Seal Press, 1989), 4.

¹² Timothy J. Gifoye, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790 – 1920*. (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992), 60.

¹³ Ruth Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900 – 1918* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 8

¹⁴ Margaret Jacobs, *Engendered Encounters: Feminism and Pueblo Cultures, 1879 – 1934*. (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska, 1999), 21.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁶ Valerie Jenness, *Making it Work: The Prostitutes' Rights Movement in Perspective* (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1993), 1.

¹⁷ Rosen is the only historian mentioned in this list that focused on prostitution during the Progressive Era in the United States. The Bulloughs produced the history of prostitution in western civilization. Walkowitz work focused on 19th Century prostitution in Britain.

¹⁸ Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, xii.

¹⁹ Judith Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State*. (Cambridge University Press, 1980), 256.

²⁰ Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, xiv.

²¹ Ruth Rosen Sue Davidson, and Maimie Pinzer, *The Maimie Papers: Letters from an Ex-Prostitute* (New York: The Feminist Press at The City University of New York in cooperation with The Schlesinger Library of Radcliffe College, 1977, 1996.), xiv.

²² Joanne J. Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 124.

²³ Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 6 - 8.

²⁴ Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift*, xxii.

- ²⁵ Ruth M. Alexander, *The "Girl Problem:" Female Sexual Delinquency in New York, 1900 – 1930* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), 2.
- ²⁶ Regina G. Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls: Unmarried Mothers and the Professionalization of Social Work, 1890 – 1945* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1993), 1-2.
- ²⁷ Mimi Abramovitz, *Regulating the Lives of Women: Social Welfare Policy from Colonial Times to the Present*. (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 4.
- ²⁸ Olive Logan in 1870 as quoted by Foley, 73.
- ²⁹ Brenda Foley, *Undressed for Success: Beauty Contestants and Exotic Dancers as Merchants of Morality*. (Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 9.
- ³⁰ Robert C. Allen, *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture*, (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Tracy Davis, *Actresses as Working Women: Their Social Identity in Victorian Culture*, (London and New York, 1991).
- ³¹ Katie N. Johnson, *Sisters in Sin: Brothel Drama in America, 1900 – 1920*. (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 8 – 9.
- ³² Ed. Gail Pheterson, *A Vindication of the Rights of Whores*. (The Seal Press, 1989), 28 – 29.
- ³³ Shannon Bell, *Reading, Writing and Rewriting the Prostitute Body* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 2.
- ³⁴ Carol Leigh, *Unrepentant Whore: Collected Work of Scarlet Harlot* (San Francisco: Last Gasp, 2004), 5.
- ³⁵ Nickie Roberts. *Whores in History: Prostitution in Western Society* (HarperCollinsPublishers, 1992).
- ³⁶ Annie Sprinkle. *Post-Porn Modernist: My 25 Years as a Multimedia Whore*. (Cleis Press, 1998).
- ³⁷ For more explanation of the different camps of second wave feminism see: Wendy Chapkis. *Live Sex Acts: Women Performing Erotic Labor*. (New York: Routledge, 1997).

Chapter One

- ¹ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 3.
- ² Barbara Smith Corrales, "Prurience, Prostitution, and Progressive Improvements: The Crowley Connection, 1909-1918," *The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (Winter, 2004), pp. 37-70 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4233986> (accessed July 16, 2009), 37.
- ³ Joanne J. Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880 – 1930* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), xvii.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, xvii.
- ⁵ Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Rereading Sex: Battles Over Sexual Knowledge and Suppression in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 14.
- ⁶ Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, xi.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, xi.
- ⁸ Timothy R. Mahoney, "The Great Sheedy Murder Trial and the Booster Ethos of the Gilded Age in Lincoln, Nebraska." *Nebraska History*, Vol. 82, No. 4 (Winter 2001): 163 – 179.
- ⁹ William Sanger, *History of Prostitution: Its Extent, Causes, and Effects throughout the World* (New York: AMS Press, 1876), 550.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 557.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 557.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, 557.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 559.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 562.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 565.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 87.
- ¹⁷ Vern Bullough and Bonnie Bullough, *Women and Prostitution: A Social History* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1987), 226.
- ¹⁸ Karen Abbott, *Sin in the Second City: Madams, Ministers, Playboys, and the Battle for America's Soul* (Random House, 2007).
- ¹⁹ Timothy J. Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790 – 1920* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992), 18.
- ²⁰ Ellen Baumler, "Devil's Perch: Prostitution from Suite to Cellar in Butte, Montana," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*, Vol. 48, No. 3, Special Butte Issue (Autumn, 1998): pp. 4-21, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4520070>.

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- ²² See Sharon Wood, *The Freedom of the Street*, and Joel Best, "Careers in Brothel Prostitution."
- ²³ Joel Best, "Careers in Brothel Prostitution: St. Paul, 1865-1883," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (Spring, 1982): pp. 597-619, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/203547> (accessed on July 10, 2009).
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- ²⁵ James B. Crooks. "Jacksonville in the Progressive Era: Responses to Urban Growth." *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 65, No. 1 (Jul., 1986): pp. 52-71 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30146318> (accessed on November 1, 2009). And Best, 599.
- ²⁶ Wood, *The Freedom of the Street*, 9.
- ²⁷ Best, "Careers in Brothel Prostitution," 598.
- ²⁸ Petrik, "Capitalists with Rooms," 30.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, 39.
- ³¹ Wood, *The Freedom of the Street*, 28.
- ³² Foley, *Undressed for Success*, 28.
- ³³ U.S. Bureau of Census. 1900 Census. *Lancaster County Nebraska*, 1900.
- ³⁴ American Memory. "American Life Histories: Manuscripts from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 – 1940, C.E. Kinsey," The Library of Congress, <http://memory.loc.gov>.
- ³⁵ Digital Sanborn Maps, 1867 – 1970, "Lincoln [Lancaster Co.] 1891" & "Lincoln [Lancaster Co.] 1903," University of Lincoln Library, <http://0-sanborn.umi.com.library.unl.edu/cgi-bin/auth.cgi?command=AccessOK&CCSI=2074n>.
- ³⁶ U.S. Bureau of Census. 1900 Census. *Lancaster County Nebraska*, 1900.
- ³⁷ The Cherrier Directory Publishing Company, *Lincoln Directory, 1889* (1889). Digital Sanborn Maps, 1867 – 1970, "Lincoln [Lancaster Co.] 1891" & "Lincoln [Lancaster Co.] 1903," University of Lincoln Library, <http://0-sanborn.umi.com.library.unl.edu/cgi-bin/auth.cgi?command=AccessOK&CCSI=2074n>.
- ³⁸ Ruth Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900 – 1918* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1982), 80.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, 80.
- ⁴⁰ Wood, *The Freedom of the Street*, 26.
- ⁴¹ Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift*, 110.
- ⁴² See Kathy Peiss' *Cheap Amusements*, Robert Allen's *Horrible Prettiness*, and Rachel Shteir's *Striptease: The Untold History of the Girlie Show* (2004).
- ⁴³ Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, 142.
- ⁴⁴ Mary Van Kleeck. "Working Hours of Women in Factories," *Charities and Commons* 17 (1906-07): 13-21, <http://tenant.net/Community/LES/hours10.html>.
- ⁴⁵ Wood, *The Freedom of the Street*, 28.
- ⁴⁶ Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, 107.
- ⁴⁷ Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, 66.
- ⁴⁸ It should be noted that Cather is thought to have written this editorial, but it is not confirmed by scholars. Willa Cather. *The Home Monthly*, 6 (January 1897): 12. <http://cather.unl.edu/nf048.html>.
- ⁴⁹ See Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality*, Ruth Rosen's *The Lost Sisterhood*, and Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz's *Rereading Sex*.
- ⁵⁰ Corralles, "Prurience, Prostitution, and Progressive Improvements," 37.
- ⁵¹ Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, 11.
- ⁵² *Ibid.*, 11.
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*, 12 – 13.
- ⁵⁴ Daphne Spain. *How Women Saved the City* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 9.
- ⁵⁵ Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, 9.
- ⁵⁶ Mary Kingsbury Simkhovitch. "A New Social Adjustment" found in Author Unknown. *The economic position of women* (New York: Academy of Political Science, Columbia University, 1910), 81 - 89, <http://pds.lib.harvard.edu/pds/view/2585929?n=7&s=4>.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 82.

- ⁵⁸ Ibid., 83 – 84.
- ⁵⁹ Gilfoyle, *City of Eros*, 62.
- ⁶⁰ Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, 62.
- ⁶¹ Ibid., see chapter 8: “The Lost Sisterhood: The Causes of Prostitution.”
- ⁶² Ibid., 139 – 143.
- ⁶³ Simkhovitch, “A New Social Adjustment,” 83.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid., 86.
- ⁶⁵ Ibid., 84.
- ⁶⁶ See Gail Bederman *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880 – 1917* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 25 for the definition of civilization used here.
- ⁶⁷ Robert Johnston. *The Radical Middle Class: Populist Democracy and the Question of Capitalism in Progressive Era Portland, Oregon*. (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), 16.
- ⁶⁸ Author Unknown. *The economic position of women* (New York: Academy of Political Science, Columbia University, 1910), 5, <http://pds.lib.harvard.edu/pds/view/2585929?n=7&s=4>.
- ⁶⁹ See Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 16.
- ⁷⁰ Johnson, *Sisters in Sin*, 11.
- ⁷¹ Shannon Bell. *Reading, Writing and Rewriting the Prostitute Body* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 2.
- ⁷² Johnson, *Sisters in Sin*, 11.
- ⁷³ Harry B. Woolston, Ph.D. *Prostitution in the United States: Prior to the Entrance of the United States in the World War*. (Monclair, New Jersey: Patterson Smith, Reprint 1969, c1921), 44 – 45. See Chart I *Comparison of Age and Experience* and Chart II *Per Cent of Women with Given Term of Experience in Business & Prostitution*.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid., 63. See Table VIII.
- ⁷⁵ Woolston, *Prostitution in the United States*, 63.
- ⁷⁶ Department of Interior, Census Department. *Statistics of Women at Work: 1900* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1900).
- ⁷⁷ Gilfoyle, *City of Eros*, 290.
- ⁷⁸ Tracy C. Davis *Actresses as Working Women* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 69.
- ⁷⁹ Ibid., 77.
- ⁸⁰ Ibid., 86.
- ⁸¹ Johnson, *Sisters in Sin*, 27.
- ⁸² Foley, *Undressed for Success*, 114.
- ⁸³ Ibid., 111.
- ⁸⁴ Ibid., 111.
- ⁸⁵ Johnson, *Sisters in Sin*, 24.
- ⁸⁶ Ibid., 24.
- ⁸⁷ Woolston, *Prostitution in the United States*, 63.

Chapter Two

- ¹ The book was originally published in 1909 and was subsequently republished in 1997 by University of Nebraska Press’s Bison Books.
- ² Havelock Ellis, *Studies in Psychology of Sex Volume VI: Sex in Relation to Society*. (Philadelphia: F.A. Davis Company, 1910).
- ³ Josie Washburn, *The Underworld Sewer: A Prostitute Reflects on Life in the Trade, 1871 – 1909* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 139.
- ⁴ Ibid., xviii.
- ⁵ Kwakiutl Dreher, *Dancing on the White Page: Black Women Entertainers Writing Autobiography* (State University of New York Press, 2008), 4.
- ⁶ Washburn, *The Underworld Sewer*, 68.
- ⁷ The Comstock Laws were a series of laws passed to control the delivery of obscene material through the mail that was often used to inhibit the distribution of books such as William Sanger’s *History of Prostitution*. As footnoted in Emma Goldman’s essay “The Traffic of Women” (originally published 1911), “It is a significant fact that Dr. Sanger’s book has been excluded from the U.S. mails. Evidently the authorities are not anxious that the public be informed as to the true cause of prostitution.” For more on the Comstock Laws see Janice Wood’s *The Struggle for*

Free Speech in the United States, 1872 – 1915: Edward Bliss Foote, Edward Bond Foote, and Anti-Comstock Operations (2007).

⁸ Washburn, *The Underworld Sewer*, 27.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 93.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, Chapter I: “The Evil.”

¹² *Ibid.*, viii.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 182.

¹⁴ Josie Washburn, letter to Nebraska State Historical Society that accompanied a copy of her book, 27 July 1925.

¹⁵ Washburn, preface.

¹⁶ I use this definition in accordance the definition of Global Microstructures found at http://p2pfoundation.net/Global_Microstructures. The industry that Washburn describes does not “stretch across time zones” but it most certainly differs from: “Modern, industrial society created ‘complex’ forms of organizations that managed uncertainty and task fulfillment through interiorized systems of control and expertise. But complexity was institutional complexity ; it meant sophisticated multi-level mechanisms of coordination, authority and compensation that assured orderly functioning and performance.” The common ground that I use liberally with the global microstructures is: “Global systems based on microstructural principles do not exhibit institutional complexity but rather the asymmetries, unpredictability’s and playfulness of complex (and dispersed) interaction patterns ; a complexity that results, in John Urry’s terms, from a situation where order is not the outcome of purified social processes and is always intertwined with chaos. More concretely, these systems manifest an observational and temporal dynamics that is fundamental to their connectivity, auto-affective principles of self-motivation, forms of ‘outsourcing’, and principles of content that substitute for the principles and mechanisms of the modern, complex organization.” The idea is that Washburn points out is that each institution of prostitution no matter where it was found had similarities in how was structured as a business and its interconnectivity with the state and those similarities of exploitation could be traced back historically. Yet, do the fickle nature of public sentiment, the volleying of political power, and outlaw status of the industry, it would could not maintain the “sophisticated multi-level mechanism of coordination, authority and compensation that assured orderly functioning and performance.” Therefore, the industry resorted to the use of a loose based “connectivity, auto-affective principles of self-motivation, forms of ‘outsourcing’, and principles of content that substitute for the principles and mechanisms of the modern, complex organization” that could be argued predicted the global industries of contemporary society.

¹⁷ Washburn, *The Underworld Sewer*. This argument is made and reiterated throughout the book. The core of the argument is developed by the end of Chapter VIII.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 330 – 331. Use of capitalization for emphasis hers.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 329.

²⁰ Emma Goldman, *The Traffic in Women and Other Essays on Feminism* (Times Changes Press, 1970).

²¹ Dr. Alfred Blashcko as cited by Emma Goldman, 22.

²² Washburn, *The Underworld Sewer*, 16.

²³ Havelock Ellis as cited by Emma Goldman, *The Traffic in Women*, 23.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

²⁵ Washburn, *The Underworld Sewer*, 16.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 68.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, see Chapter V: “The One Year War.”

²⁸ American Memory, “American Life Histories: Manuscripts form the Federal Writers’ Project, 1936 – 1940, C.E. Kinsey,” The Library of Congress, <http://memory.loc.gov>.

²⁹ Washburn, *The Underworld Sewer*, see Chapter III and Chapter V.

³⁰ Ann Longeman, *Seeing Lincoln* (Lincoln: The Nebraska State Journal, 24 May 1954), 917.8265 L86 C4

³¹ Richard E. Dudley, “Nebraska Public School Education: 1890 – 1910,” *Articles of Nebraska History*, Volume 54: Nebraska Historical Society (1974).

³² Washburn, *The Underworld Sewer*, 106.

³³ *Ibid.*, 107.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 107.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 159.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 159.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 163.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 163.

- ³⁹ Ibid., 202.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., 202.
- ⁴¹ Ibid., 213.
- ⁴² Also see Katie N. Johnson's *Sisters in Sin*, Kathy Peiss' *Cheap Amusements*, Brenda Foley's *Undressed for Success*, and Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz's *Rereading Sex*.
- ⁴³ Havelock Ellis, *Studies in Psychology of Sex Volume VI: Sex in Relation to Society*. (Philadelphia: F.A. Davis Company, 1910), 223.
- ⁴⁴ Katie N. Johnson, *Sisters in Sin: Brothel Drama in America, 1900–1920* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 7.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., 7.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid., 263.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid., 204.
- ⁴⁸ Washburn, *The Underworld Sewer*, 287.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid., 289.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid., 180.
- ⁵¹ Bronson Howard as quoted by Johnson, 6.
- ⁵² Johnson, *Sisters in Sin*, 6.
- ⁵³ Washburn, *The Underworld Sewer*, 265.
- ⁵⁴ Johnson, *Sisters in Sin*, 8.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid., 6.
- ⁵⁶ Brenda Foley, *Undressed for Success: Beauty Contestants and Exotic Dancers as Merchants of Morality* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 14.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid., 35.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid., 73.
- ⁵⁹ Tracy Davis, *Actresses as Working Women: Their Social Identity in Victorian Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), xvi.
- ⁶⁰ Washburn, *The Underworld Sewer*, 185-186.
- ⁶¹ Ibid., 187.
- ⁶² Ibid., 187.
- ⁶³ Ibid., 265. Washburn may be referring directly to *A Concise Compilation of Nebraska Laws of Special Interest to Women* (Lincoln: Franklin Press) published in 1897 by a local member of the Women's Christian Temperance Union. The only laws that the document referenced was the laws against prostitution of children and running a house of ill fame. There was an absence of acknowledging prostitutes - let alone accepting prostitutes as women. Also, Washburn could be described as understanding the laws well and therefore also understanding that all the property laws in that document did not apply to her as an outlaw female. Document was accessed at <http://pds.lib.harvard.edu/pds/view/2585929?n=7&s=4>.
- ⁶⁴ Ellis, *Studies in Psychology of Sex Volume VI*, see chapter on Prostitution.
- ⁶⁵ Goldman, *The Traffic in Women*, see "Marriage and Love."
- ⁶⁶ Ibid., 185.
- ⁶⁷ Polly Alder, *A House is not a Home*. (New York & Toronto: Rinehart & Company, Inc., 1953).
- ⁶⁸ Ibid., 40.
- ⁶⁹ Ibid., 128.
- ⁷⁰ Ibid., 128.
- ⁷¹ Woolston, *Prostitution in the United States*, 63.
- ⁷¹ Washburn, *The Underworld Sewer*, 27.
- ⁷² Ibid., 64 – 65.
- ⁷³ Woolston, *Prostitution in the United States*, 64.
- ⁷⁴ A. Despres, *La Prostitution en France*, 1883 as quoted by Ellis, 264.
- ⁷⁵ Ellis, *Studies in Psychology of Sex Volume VI*, 289.
- ⁷⁶ Ibid., see "The Causes of Prostitution," 254 – 266.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid., 255.
- ⁷⁸ Ibid., 255.
- ⁷⁹ Woolston, *Prostitution in the United States*, 289.
- ⁸⁰ Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, 148.
- ⁸¹ Ellis, *Studies in Psychology of Sex Volume VI*, 288.
- ⁸² Goldman, *The Traffic in Women*, 25.

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- ⁸³ Ibid., 19.
- ⁸⁴ Ibid., 19.
- ⁸⁵ Ibid., 20.
- ⁸⁶ Ibid., 20.
- ⁸⁷ Ibid., 20.
- ⁸⁸ Ibid., 82.
- ⁸⁹ Washburn, *The Underworld Sewer*, 141.
- ⁹⁰ Simkhovitch, "A New Social Adjustment," 81.
- ⁹¹ Ibid., 82.
- ⁹² Ibid., 86.
- ⁹³ Ibid., 86.
- ⁹⁴ Ibid., 86.
- ⁹⁵ Washburn, *The Underworld Sewer*, 325.
- ⁹⁶ Author Unknown, *Early Leaders of American Nursing*. (New York City: National League of Nursing Education, 1922), forward. <http://pds.lib.harvard.edu/pds/view/2574836?n=5&s=4> .
- ⁹⁷ Washburn, *The Underworld Sewer*, 261.
- ⁹⁸ Ibid., 261.
- ⁹⁹ Ibid., 261.
- ¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 118.
- ¹⁰¹ Ibid., 261.
- ¹⁰² Ibid., 248.
- ¹⁰³ Ibid., 248.
- ¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 249.
- ¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 249.
- ¹⁰⁶ Wood, *The Freedom of the Streets*, 7.
- ¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 8.
- ¹⁰⁸ Johnson, *Sisters in Sin*, 11.
- ¹⁰⁹ Richard Phillips, "Unsexy Geographies: Heterosexuality, Respectability and the Travellers' Aid Society," *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies*, 5(2), (2006): 167.
- ¹¹⁰ Please Brenda Foley's *Undressed for Success*, chapter "Artifice and Authenticity: Parallels in Performance Approach" for an excellent examination of codified public performance. I applied her examination of the constructed juxtaposition of beauty queens and strippers - that collapsed stage performance into authentic revelations of self - to the women's labor as a public performance that also was thought to be a authentic revelation of self.
- ¹¹¹ Goldman, *The Traffic in Women*, 28.
- ¹¹² George Templeton Strong as quoted by Gilfoyle, *City of Eros*, 56.
- ¹¹³ Phillips, "Unsexy Geographies," 165.
- ¹¹⁴ Washburn, *The Underworld Sewer*, 36.
- ¹¹⁵ Ibid., 36.
- ¹¹⁶ Ibid., 37.
- ¹¹⁷ Ibid., 39.
- ¹¹⁸ *State of Nebraska v. Olin M. Routzahn et al.*, 81 Nebraska 133. Opinion filed March 19, 1908.
- ¹¹⁹ Washburn, *The Underworld Sewer*, 40.
- ¹²⁰ Ibid., 42.
- ¹²¹ Ibid., 42.
- ¹²² *State of Nebraska v. Olin M. Routzahn et al.*, 81 Nebraska 133. Opinion filed March 19, 1908.
- ¹²³ Washburn, *The Underworld Sewer*, 27.
- ¹²⁴ Ibid., 244.
- ¹²⁵ Ibid., See Chapter XXI "Reform Schools."
- ¹²⁶ According to *The Lincoln Journal* Tuesday October 18, 1904.
- ¹²⁷ "Nebraska Blue Book, 1926," NEGen Web Project Resource Center Online Library, www.rootsweb.com/~neresour/OLLibrary/Blue_Book/1926/pages/bb260231.htm
- ¹²⁸ "History Page," West Kearney High School, <http://www.esu10.k12.ne.us/~westkrny/wkhistory.htm>.
- ¹²⁹ Dave Carew, *Lincoln Journal Star* March 29, 2008. It should be noted that this article also states that it was still illegal in 1943 to be pregnant out of wedlock. "Adoptee grateful for Nebraska Industrial Home"

http://www.journalstar.com/news/local/article_e0996b5b-a7cb-5821-918d-a3c3358265d3.html Accessed on September 1st, 2009.

¹³⁰ Susan I. Strong, "The First Women of Nebraska Law" found in *The History of Nebraska Law* edited by Alan G. Gless, Athens: Ohio University Press 2008, 266.

¹³¹ Francis E. Willard and Mary A. Livermore, Charles Well Moulton, *A Woman of the Century: Fourteen Hundred-Seventy Biographical Sketches Accompanied by Portraits of Leading American Women in All Walks of Life*, 1893 [On-line Article] (Nebraska Gen Web Project, accessed on 9 May 2006, 87); available at <http://www.rootsweb.com/~neresour/OLLibrary/hdrne/pages/hdrne228.htm>.

¹³² <http://sdr.lib.uiowa.edu/iwa/findingaids/html/WCTUofIowa.html>

¹³³ Wood, *The Underworld Sewer*, x.

¹³⁴ An interesting note is that E.B. Quackenbush was cited by a July 27, 2008 The News Tribune article as "a Spokane attorney and grand dragon of the state chapter of the Ku Klux Klan, welcomed 200 delegates to the annual convention in Bellingham" three months before the great crash in 1929. This is pertinent to Washburn because Wood cites in the Introduction that in an August 1925 letter to A.E. Sheldon, director of the Nebraska State Historical Society, of her intentions of going to Spokane to live with her "niece." (xi) Accessed on August 1, 2009: <http://www.thenewstribune.com/1047/story/424940.html>.

¹³⁵ Indexed in the Legislature Journal under Prostitution--Woman's institution for the abolishment of the social evil at Omaha.

¹³⁶ Wood, *The Freedom of the Streets*, x.

¹³⁷ Washburn, *The Underworld Sewer*, 10.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹³⁹ Goldman, *The Traffic in Women*, 32.

¹⁴⁰ Josie Washburn, letter to Nebraska State Historical Society that accompanied a copy of her book, 27 July 1925.

¹⁴¹ Josie Washburn, letter to Nebraska State Historical Society that accompanied a copy of her book, 27 July 1925.

¹⁴² Josie Washburn, "The First Drink Saloon and Dance Hall" (Omaha: Washburn Publishing Co., 1914), dedication.

¹⁴³ Eds. Ruth Rosen and Sue Davidson. Maimie Pinzer. *The Maimie Papers: Letters from an Ex-Prostitute* (New York: The Feminist Press at The City University of New York in cooperation with The Schlesinger Library of Radcliffe College, 1977, 1996.), xxxi.

¹⁴⁴ See Ariel Levy, *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture* (New York, London, Toronto and Sydney, 2006).

¹⁴⁵ Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, 37.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁴⁷ Washburn, *The Underworld Sewer*, 340.

¹⁴⁸ See the following authors Carol Leigh's *Unrepentant Whore*, and Norma Jean Almodovar's *Cope to Call Girl*.

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Chapter Three: Conclusion

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³ Levy, *Female Chauvinist Pigs*, 199 – 200.

⁴ Foley, *Undressed for Success*, 171.

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¹² Nickie Roberts. *Whores in History: Prostitution in Western Society* (HarperCollinsPublishers, 1992), 325.

¹³ Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 189 – 190.

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- ¹⁵ Andrea Dworkin. *Right-Wing Women* (Perigee Books, 1983), 61.
- ¹⁶ Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 193.
- ¹⁷ Carol Leigh. *Unrepentant Whore: Collected Work of Scarlet Harlot* (San Francisco: Last Gasp, 2004), 36.
- ¹⁸ See Wendy Chapkis, *Live Sex Acts: Women Performing Erotic Labor* (New York: Routledge, 1997).
- ¹⁹ See Wendy Chapkis, *Live Sex Acts*.
- ²⁰ Kari Lerum. "Twelve-step Feminism Makes Sex Workers Sick: How The State and The Recovery Movement Turn Radical Women into "Useless Citizens" in eds. Barry M. Dank and Roberto Refinetti. *Sex Work & Sex Workers: Sexuality & Culture, Volume 2* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 1999), 8 -9.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 8 – 9.
- ²² Margo St. James. "The Reclamation of Whores." Ed. Laurie Bell. *Good Girls*Bad Girls: Feminists and Sex Trade Workers Face to Face* (The Seal Press, 1987), 85.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, 86.
- ²⁴ Lerum, "Twelve-step Feminism Makes Sex Workers Sick," 19.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.
- ²⁸ Leigh, *Unrepentant Whore*, 29.
- ²⁹ Pheterson, *A Vindication of the Rights of Whores*, 4. Also see preface written by Margo St. James.
- ³⁰ Pheterson, *A Vindication of the Rights of Whores*, 3. Also see preface written by Margo St. James.
- ³¹ See Dolores French with Linda Lee. *Working: My Life as a Prostitute* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1988), 135. Also see Andrea Dworkin. *Woman Hating* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1974).
- ³² For history of second wave feminism as seen by the second wave feminists see Ruth Rosen's *The World Split Open*.
- ³³ Emma Goldman, Alix Kates Shulman (biography), *The Traffic in Women and other essays on feminism* (Time Changes Press, 1970), 6.
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- ³⁵ Jenness, Valerie. *Making it Work: The Prostitutes' Rights Movement in Perspective* (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1993), 2.
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- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, 34.
- ³⁸ Norma Jean Almodovar. *Cope to Call Girl: Why I left the LAPD to Make an Honest Living as a Beverly Hills Prostitute*. (New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Tokyo and Singapore: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 12.
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- ⁴³ *Ibid.*, 82.
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⁶¹ *Ibid.*

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⁶³ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁶⁴ See Robert C. Allen’s *Horrible Prettiness*.

⁶⁵ See Carol Leigh, Margo St. James, Gail Pheterson, Valerie Jenness, Shannon Bell, Annie Sprinkle, and Norma Jean Almodovar.

⁶⁶ Jenness, *Making it Work*, 1.

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