

Men's practices in prostitution and their implications for social work

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Introduction

One of the central questions for understanding prostitution must deal with *what* is bought, that is to say, in the case of heterosexual prostitution, it must deal with men's motives and demand for prostitutes. In this article, I discuss some of the results of Swedish and other Scandinavian research about prostitutes' clients. However, whenever called for, I will compare these findings to the results from other research in other countries. Clearly, the demand for prostitutes is a global issue, and only drawing upon research in a Swedish context has its limitations. Although, I do think that some of the observations made in Scandinavian research have some general implications for understanding men's role in prostitution. Four main questions are asked: (1) Who are the men seeking out prostitutes? (2) Which are their motives? (3) How can these motives be understood in the context of changing gender relations in society? And (4) which are the implications of men's practices in prostitution for social work.

Who are the men seeking out prostitutes?

We know that far from all men buy sex. Some do it, others don't. And there is evidence that men's disposition to pay for sex varies strongly from country to country, or rather from culture to culture. The following table is based on a review of studies of sexual habits in a number of European countries and the United States carried out during a ten year period between 1989 and 1999.

Table 1. *The proportion of men in various countries who have paid for sex at some time in their life*

Country	Percent	Base rate (N)	Year	Source
Finland	13	624	1999	Haavio-Mannila & Rotkirch, 2000
Norway	11	1 617	1992	Leridon et al, 1998
Sweden	13	1 475	1996	Lewin et al, 1998
Great Britain	7	7 941	1991	Wellings et al., 1993
Netherlands	14	392	1989	Leridon et al, 1998
Switzerland	19	1 260	1992	Leridon et al, 1998
Spain	39	409	1992	Leridon et al, 1998
Russia*	10	870	1996	Haavio-Mannila & Rotkirch, 2000
United States	16	1 709	1992	Michael et al, 1994

* The data from Russia only concerns St Petersburg

The presentation shows that Spanish men top the "sex buying league"; practically four out of ten Spanish men (39 percent) have paid for sex at some time during their life. British men have least experience of paying for sex (7 percent). The proportion of sex buyers seems to be approximately the same in the three Scandinavian countries (Finland, Norway and Sweden); a bit more than every tenth man have paid for sex at some time in their life.

Unexpectedly, the figure from the Dutch study (14 percent) is relatively low taking into consideration the extensive sex trade that exists in this country, and the official liberal approach to it. One possible explanation of the low figure may be that the proportion of foreign visitors among buyers of sex is very high, which is not reflected in the nationally

based statistics. It should be noted that the figures from the Netherlands and Spain (and to a certain extent Finland and Russia) are relatively uncertain due to low base rates.

Apart from statistical uncertainties there is, of course, every reason to question the reliability of this type of data. The actual act – paying for sex – is considered to be a clear violation of norms in many countries and something that people therefore wish to keep concealed from those around them. An interesting example of this can be seen in a study of 661 German speaking men on vacation in Thailand, the Philippines, the Dominican Republic, Kenya and Brazil. All of them reported having had sex with one or more local women. Thus the researchers classified them as ‘sex tourists’. However, as it appeared, this classification did not coincide with the men’s self-definition. Probably well aware of the strong public condemnation of sex tourism, a vast majority of the men (almost 80 percent) rejected the label (Günther 1998:71).

Instead, the men’s own definition of their relationship with the women comes close to what Cohen defines as *open-ended prostitution*, that is a relationship that maybe starts with an exchange of money for sexual services but later, during the men’s stay in the country, develops “into a more protracted, diffused, and personalized relationship, involving both emotional and economic interest” (Cohen 1996:275; see also Bang Fossum 2001). Furthermore, for some men, paying for sex simply does not fit in with a strong, positive sexual self-identity. To admit, to oneself and others, that one is obliged to – “needs to” – go to prostitutes can be felt to be the same as not being good enough on the normal sex market.

On the other hand, it is, of course, also quite conceivable that the opposite applies. Any shame involved in going to prostitutes is subordinated to another important norm in male-dominated society, namely having many different sexual experiences. Thus for example, one can see a clear pattern in a Swedish study that the experience of paying for sex is greatest among men with a lot of sexual partners (Månsson 1998:242). This is probably a fact that goes against the popular notion of the client as being “lonely” and “sexually needy”. In a similar North American study it was found that clients were much more likely than men in general to report that they had more than one sexual partner over the past year, 56 percent as compared to 19 percent (Monto 2000:72).

In this context, it may be appropriate to underline that the expressions and forms of prostitution are moulded by the prevailing social conditions at different times in history. The activity changes continually and new forms for contacts between buyers and sellers arise, something which, of course, also affects the number of men who get involved in prostitution. Today, prostitution is part of a continually expanding sex industry with a global range. A marked component of this development is the extensive traffic over national borders for the purpose prostitution. In the one direction, there is a more or less organized import of women from the third world and the East European countries to the brothels of the rich countries in the western world. In the other direction, there is a more or less organized transport of sex buyers from the rich to the poor part of the world. When asked where the last sexual contact for payment took place, close to 70 percent of the Swedish sex buyers said that it took place abroad, either on holiday or on a work or business trip (Månsson 1998:243).

Another recent change in the structure of the global sex industry concerns the development of “computer pornography” and the buying and selling of sexual services via the Internet. There is no doubt that the introduction of this new technology has increased the availability of sex for money. So far, we have very little knowledge as to how exactly this has affected or maybe even changed the content and structure of demand. However, as sex industry analyst Donna Hughes argues: “Men are usually secretive about their exploitation of women

and children and one of the factors in the success of the online sex industry has been men's ability to download pornography or engage in online prostitution from the privacy of their homes and offices" (Hughes 2000:10).

A recent study of Swedish Internet users engaging in online sexual activities found that the most common activity among men is viewing pornography (69 percent), which is also the most preferred activity (Cooper et al 2003). Furthermore, tentative results from a Swedish case study which analyzed the content of over one thousand e-mails from clients (given to the researchers by a woman who had decided to exit prostitution) suggest that the clients on the Internet are much younger and have a better socio-economic situation than for example the clients of street prostitutes (Nordvinter and Ström 2000:37).

Why do men seek out prostitutes?

In the following, I shall discuss in a more in-depth manner what we know today about men's motives for buying sex. Most of the Scandinavian studies conducted so far have been qualitative studies based on in-depth interviews with clients.¹ Analyzing these interviews and focusing on men's talk about why they seek out prostitutes, it is possible to discern a number of different narrative themes. Roughly these can be divided into five major groups. The themes are not mutually exclusive; in some cases more than one theme would be found in the same interview.

<i>The dirty whore fantasy</i>	Expressions of contradictory feelings of curiosity, excitement and contempt. Image of "the dirty whore" adds to sexual arousal
<i>Another kind of sex</i>	Images of a certain kind of sex which cannot be experienced with a non-prostitute women
<i>No other women</i>	Referring to shyness, fear, advanced age, physical and mental disabilities. "There are no other women for me"
<i>Shopping for sex</i>	Images of sex as a consumer product
<i>Another kind of woman</i>	Images of a true and natural femininity. Expressions of strong anti-feminist notions

Before looking a bit closer at these themes, let me point out a somewhat remarkable fact. With the exception of *shopping for sex*, none of the themes explicitly refers to men's bodily needs as the reason why they visit prostitutes. How are we to understand this? In actual fact the same phenomenon was pointed out by Charles Winick in his famous study of American sex buyers way back in the early sixties (Winick 1962). The interpretation offered by Winick is that it seems possible that the emotional meanings and overtones in visiting a prostitute are much more salient for the man than a desire for a sexual experience. Another way of expressing this is that the desire for a sexual experience manifests itself and is translated into different ways of looking at and talking about the prostitute and himself. This means that sometimes the actual content of the visit to the prostitute is of less importance than the meaning that it has in the man's fantasy. Notably, this is not the same as saying that it is usual that men have no sexual needs or desires when they buy sex. It only means that they do not talk about this when they discuss why they visit prostitutes. They talk about other things, however, through which this demand expresses itself. For example they frequently talk about things like "curiosity" and "excitement".

Theme 1: *The dirty whore fantasy*

One example of this is the dirty whore fantasy. For some clients, the image of the “whore” is sexually exciting in a distinct and very immediate way. The “whore” stands for the sexual animal, for urges and longings, sexual longings that to a great extent are loaded with secrecy and guilt. The “whore” represents one side of the split female image which men in patriarchal society carry around. This image guides men’s manner of relating to women in different situations, not only in prostitution. In fact, both images – “madonna” and “whore” – objectify women, but while the one is met with respect, the other is met with contempt.

However, not only contempt, but also enticement. The “whore” is the most distant of the two, but at the same time close as a source of erotic dreams and fantasies. In many men, there exists a curiosity – at least once – to come into contact with, to see, experience, and to be sexual with a “whore”. Also the prostitution milieu itself evokes curiosity and excitement. In the red light districts or other places where sex trade occurs, the milieu itself functions as an “invitation” to sex. This is underscored by the pornographic framework, for example the sex clubs and porno stores, which border “the stroll” in the big cities, or the porno advertisements on the web sites of the Internet. In no other places are women found, who so openly expose themselves sexually.

This experience of excitement is presumably caused by the contradictory character of the sex trade, as being both repugnant and attractive at the same time. It is repugnant because there is an element of self-contempt in relation to one’s forbidden or secret impulses. At the same time, it’s well known that secrecy attached to sexual fantasies adds to the arousal in a number of ways. And there is the temptation of giving in to forbidden erotic lust. British sociologist Julia O’Connell Davidson (1998:141) discusses how some clients handle the contradictory feelings of enticement and self-contempt by projecting the image of “dirty whore” on the woman who makes herself publicly available.

This labelling degrades her, at the same time as it serves as a form of liberation from guilt, marking the man off from the prostitute; he is the socially respectable and moral innocent, not she. The following quote from an e-mail written by a Swedish man represents a fierce and extremely hostile attack on a woman displaying her services on the Internet. It is clear from the message that the image of the “dirty whore” can be both repugnant and sexually arousing at the same time:

You dirty, slimy whore!!! I just hate you, the next time I visit Stockholm I will try to find you and beat you so that you will never be able to fuck again, you disgusting whore!!! If you were a relative of mine I would beat you until your cunt ends up in your own face... all people like you should be shot!!! Though, of course, I could imagine your panties, it would be really fucking nice to jerk off in them... Had I been you, I would not let people like me into your apartment, so take fucking care! Don't you have any pride at all, I feel pity over you. At the same time, I could fuck you in the arse with my foot. Hug to you! PS. Don't you ever forget to answer...!!!

Of course, it’s impossible to judge the seriousness of the threat that the man directs against the woman. In any case it gives a sense of the dangers in prostitution; that, in fact, there are no safe places to hide from intimidation or violence, not even on the Internet.

Theme 2: Another kind of sex

Men’s fantasies around prostitution often involve encountering a sexually advanced and experienced woman, who is willing to perform the kind of sex that they can’t have with their wives or steady partners. Moreover, it is interesting to note that some men openly demand a different and more passive sexual role for themselves in their contacts with prostitutes, compared to how they behave in their ordinary relationships. In other words, the man buys himself the right to be passive and to be “seduced” by the sexually aggressive

“whore”. In a study conducted by American sexologist Martha Stein (1974) on the clients of call-girls, it appeared that the act most requested was the woman performing oral sex on the man. Many clients, especially the older ones, expressed displeasure with their wives’ unwillingness to perform this particular act. The second most requested act was the woman sitting on top of the man.

According to Stein, about half of the men assumed a passive role and left it to the prostitute to lead the encounter and take all the initiatives. Furthermore, some men pay prostitutes to be sexually dominated by them, to be hurt, humiliated, bullied, or in other ways degraded. It therefore appears as though, when possible, men prefer to abandon their socially constructed power position and take a role that allows them to release control and ignore all demands concerning the sexual performance.

What is displayed here is a power game that is both complex and contradictory. Obviously, the man does not surrender to the woman in any real way. On the contrary, he uses his power to construct a situation where the traditional sexual roles are reversed. Thus the woman’s power connected to her dominant position in the sexual act is only illusory and so is the man’s willingness to release his control. Ultimately the woman’s value is attached to the fact that “the prostitute *is* a prostitute.” She doesn’t have any real value as a full human subject. On the contrary, her only value in the eyes of the client lies in her body and her sexual agency. In fact, one can argue, that the client dehumanizes her and refuses to recognize her as anything more than her body and her sexual agency (O’Connell Davidson 1998:150).

However, it is likely that this view would be contested by the men themselves, at least those that engage in what Cohen defines as open-ended prostitution (see page 3). Such relationships presuppose a tacit understanding where both parties contribute to a “romantic” staging of the relationship, which tones down the visibility of the economic and commodified aspects of the transaction (Bang Fossum 2001:72).

Theme 3: *No other women*

Most of the narrative themes under this heading have in common that they express a longing for *women*, not primarily prostitutes, but rather women in general. First of all we are talking about men who do not live in relationships with women or who consider themselves having great difficulties in making contact with women. These findings are substantiated by Martin A. Monto’s North American study, where the data suggest that some men pay for sex because they consider themselves having difficulties becoming involved in conventional relationships. “Forty-two percent (out of 700 interviewees, *my remark*) agreed that they were ‘shy and awkward’ when trying to meet women, 23 percent felt unattractive physically, and 23 percent ‘had difficulty meeting women who were not nude dancers and prostitutes’ “ (Monto 2000:80).

An expression like “there are no other women for me” does not necessarily mean that those who say it in reality have no opportunities for making contact with women. It rather refers to men’s own subjective view of what is available on the sex market. However, O’Connell Davidson criticises what she calls the discourse about prostitution as a form of sexual therapy or healing. She argues that presenting the prostitute as a kind-hearted “comforter” permits the client to tell himself that it is not simply lust but rather his loneliness that makes him seek out prostitutes. “But behind such narratives there are generally sexual scripts which have as much with vengeance and control as those enacted by any other client”, says O’Connell Davidson (1998:152). Because as the client sees it, in his inner world of illusions, it is the duty of the prostitute to make him feel potent and to support his sense of being in control. The client simply transfers his urge for potency on to her.

This is one of the keys to his vulnerability, but also to his potential dangerousness. Transferring the opportunity to become potent (and sexually released) on to the prostitute, also means that he projects his possible impotence on her. And that's a dangerous position of power (for her). A man who cannot get an erection can become a dangerous man. In such cases there is a close connection between sexual inadequacy and violence. Shutting him out, not only from the sexual act, but also in a deeper sense, from experiencing himself as potent and feeling alive, may very well end in her being murdered (Månsson 1988:39).

Theme 4: *Shopping for sex*

Prostitution use is predominantly a male practice and in order to reach an understanding of what men seek in prostitutes, it is necessary to take into account men's sexuality and gender relations. At the same time, it is clear that both sexuality and gender are socially constructed, which makes it fair to argue that the way men act and talk about prostitution is dependent upon particular social and economic arrangements prevailing in society at certain times. For instance today, there is a group of clients, consisting primarily of younger men, whose views about gender and sexuality are shaped by late modern society's mass-produced images about sexuality in pornography, advertisement and TV-talk shows. For these men all is understood as possible, not least in the area of sexuality. Such expectations also provide fertile soil for prostitution. Within prostitution the possibilities seem to be endless - as long as the customer is willing to pay. This points to a commodified perspective toward sexuality, in which sex can be compared to a consumer product rather than an aspect of intimate relationships. Sex is viewed primarily as a bodily need demanding attention at regular intervals, as a sort of recurrent "cleaning of the pipes".

From a historical point of view this is nothing new. Rather it has been the recurrent theme of an old patriarchal ideology defending heterosexual prostitution as a natural and unavoidable phenomenon. According to this ideology, prostitution is seen as a timeless institution and as women's oldest profession. In the late capitalist era this view has found its typical time-bound expression in what Blanchard calls *McSex*, signifying the whole idea of shopping for a sex partner, wherever she is available. According to one man he interviewed, going to a prostitute is "like going to McDonald's; most people are looking for a good quick cheap meal. It's satisfying, it's greasy, and then you get the hell out of there" (Blanchard in Monto 2000:80).

Norwegian sociologists Prieur and Taksdal (1989; 1993) call this buyer of sex *the cheater*. Cheaters, they say, are "the most modern players of the sexual game", men who avoid actual meetings with women out of fear of losing themselves in a relation with an equal partner - "disenchanted, but safe". Afraid of being seduced, the cheater/sex-buyer withdraws to a world he can control through the power of money. These men complain that women have too high expectations of them, and are afraid they will not be able to meet all of the demands from family, employers and society. They are tired of all the responsibility. In prostitution, on the other hand, no demands are placed, and men are free to go their way after paying up, no fuss about feelings and no binds.

Theme 5: *Another kind of woman*

For many European and North American men, the extension of equal rights to women is experienced as a loss of male supremacy. Some react strongly to this development, showing strong regressive and anti-feminist attitudes. They cannot accept the changes, instead they cling to old notions of men's dominance over women. It is probably not unreasonable to interpret these reactions as an expression of an obvious feeling of loss and a need to compensate for this through suppressing or misdirecting aggression towards women in various contexts.

In my view, it is fair to argue that many men's compulsive sexual odysseys into prostitution can be seen in light of these changes. Also the rising demand for trafficked and imported women can be regarded in this perspective. It becomes clear just by looking at the marketing of prostitution, in which sexual-racist and ethnic stereotypes play a big role. Asiatic women are portrayed as loving and submissive, African women as wild, and Latin American women as free and easy (Månsson 1995). It is not difficult to visualise how these stereotypes can give rise to men's talk and fantasies about "another kind of woman" as a compensation for the reduction of masculine and sexual power in their own everyday relationships.

Julia O'Connell Davidson who has studied sex tourism is of the same opinion. She says: "The sex tourists... are certainly not alone in their disquiet, but they are distinguished by the fact that they attach such an immediate *erotic* significance to this sense of loss" (O'Connell Davidson 2001:13). These men project their images of a true and natural femininity on the women they encounter on their trips abroad. These are regarded by the men as being close to a "state of nature" (of true femininity), implying that they have recognised the essential differences between the sexes and that they have accepted their "natural born" roles as comforters of men's sexual needs. Again, O'Connell Davidson argues, this has to be understood in the context of the anxieties and discontents that some men feel about the "new" political order of the Western World (ibid:14).

I agree with this analysis. In fact, there are other expressions of modern day prostitution which substantiates this line of thinking. One is the tightening of homosocial bonds among male clients, a phenomenon that can be observed through the rising number of "communities" on the Internet, where men get together on certain web sites to exchange and trade off information and experiences about their contacts and transactions with prostitutes at home or abroad. Some of these all male associations on the Internet remind us of older days' fraternal lodges which used to oil the wheels of friendship, business, politics and leisure at the same time as they sustained and reproduced the powerful myth that masculinity is all about the exclusive company of men (Tosh, 1994). In this respect, the modern version of these homosocial alliances on the Internet can probably be regarded as a nostalgic resurrection of gender privilege, justifying men's free access to and use of prostitutes.

Implications for social work?

Following this analysis of men's talk about their reasons for buying sex, it is clear to see that this is an action, which carries meaning at many levels. It has both individual and social dimensions, and in order to understand it completely one must comprehend the complex interplay between these dimensions. On the psychological or social-psychological level, it seems to concern the satisfaction of different sexual demands and/or the solution of problems that men have in their relations with non-prostitute women. However, at the same time, it is a fact that most women in the same situation do not choose the same solution. Prostitution use is predominantly a male practice and in order to reach an understanding of what men seek in prostitutes, it is necessary to take into account men's sexuality and gender relations.

From this follows that a reduction of the demand for prostitution implies changes on many levels, both individual and societal. Until now it has been women who have played the leading role when it comes to working for such a change. However, a radical change would presuppose men's own participation. If so, the crucial question is: Is there reason to believe that a substantial number of men are prepared to engage in counter-sexist politics challenging existing beliefs about gender difference, the idea of men's sexual "need", and the stigma that attaches female sexuality to "promiscuity"? Looking at the situation today in Europe and North America we find that there are dynamic relations of tension between old

and new images of male life at all levels of society – in working life, in the family, and in the field of love and sexuality. Some men are engaged in developing a broader repertoire of male lives – socially, emotionally and sexually.

On the other hand, there are simultaneous tendencies towards a consolidation of traditional male patterns with strong elements of objectification of the opposite sex. In the wake of this follows various expressions of an aggressive anti-feminism and extensive sexual violence towards women. The truth of the matter is that these tendencies are reaffirmed by most of the cultural machinery surrounding our everyday lives in late modern society. This machinery is institutionalized in the state as well as in the market, not least within the framework of the global sex industry dealing in prostitution, trafficking in women and other forms of human and sexual exploitation. Challenging this industry is of major importance.

Obviously, there is a need for extensive and long-term awareness raising and educational work to bring about a fundamental re-visioning of sexuality, gender relations and prostitution. Such campaigns would need to target children and young people in particular (Anderson & O'Connell Davidson 2003). However, some would say that educational campaigns are not enough to put a stop to men's exploitation of women in prostitution; the seriousness of the situation, they argue, calls for penal measures, i.e. laws that prohibit the buying of sexual services. Such a law was introduced in Sweden in 1999ⁱⁱⁱ.

Few if any changes in legislation have attracted so much attention and caused so much debate, both within and outside the country. There are many reasons for this, one of them being that this law cuts right into some of the most burning issues of the ongoing international debate on prostitution, issues that have to do with public control and regulation of prostitution. Sweden's attempt to do away with the 'world's oldest profession' through making criminal the buying of sexual services has been met by quite a bit of ridicule and dismay by those who argue for the acceptance of prostitution as work and for commercial sex as a legitimate industrial sector of society. However, to those who view prostitution as an expression of men's sexual exploitation and violence against women, the law is considered a major breakthrough and an important step towards a more equal society.

Traditionally social workers have been sceptical to the use of repressive measures as a means for changing people's attitudes and behaviour. And the argument against such a strategy among members of the profession in Sweden has been, that this law is contraproductive in that it forces both the clients and the prostitutes to go "into hiding", withdrawing from efforts to help and influence their behaviour. However, those in favour of the law point at the positive consequences of the anonymity around prostitution being broken, with the client to a great extent being forced to confront the social and human implications of his actions. In the short run, they argue, this will probably give rise to a lot of frustrations and restrictions regarding questions of comfort and privilege. In the long run, however, it will mean that in his relations to women the "cheating" may end. Confrontations provoking men's consciousness about the implications of their purchase of prostitutes may actually mean freedom for the man to choose the challenges which lie in a relationship between socially equivalent partners.

On the other hand, such a change is not likely to happen by itself. Most probably, it presupposes active intervention, not only by using legal measures to prevent men from going to prostitutes, but also measures of a social supportive and treatment nature. The reason for saying this is that there is a lot to indicate that at least two main groups of men can be distinguished who pay for sex. One group we may call *occasional* buyers. This group includes men who buy sex on a few occasions during their whole life course. This is

the group most sensitive to legal measures. In many cases, the risk of public prosecution probably has a discouraging effect on their behaviour.

The other group we may call *habitual* buyers. This includes men who for shorter or longer periods of their adult life regularly visit prostitutes. They are relatively few in number but they "consume" a large amount of prostitution contacts (Månsson 1998). The sexual lifestyle of this latter group of clients is discussed by Sandell et al (1996). Their relation to women is described as "sexualised" and "deeply troubled". Among these men we also find those who suffer from heavy sexual dependency problems and whose excessive involvement in prostitution and pornography results in a number of difficulties including financial, occupational, relationship, as well as personal. The "deeply troubled" also refers to those that project their own psychological problems on the women by using more or less excessive violence to humiliate and degrade them. Ultimately, this group is probably not very sensitive to legal measures, in other words, fining or imprisoning them for buying sex will not stop them from coming back. To work with these men and to treat their problems is surely a challenge for social work.

Since a few years back, experiences from such interventions in the form of social counselling do exist in Sweden and the tentative results are promising (Hedlund 2002). A majority of the men who have used the opportunity to talk to counsellors describe their problems as "out of control", "it's like a poison", "I'm always thinking about sex", etc. Some of them have been referred to long-term psychotherapeutic treatment. However, irrespective of which problem that seems to be the most prominent in each individual case, common to all is the relief of having broken the silence around a behaviour which has caused excessive feelings of guilt, loss of relationships and other social and psychological problems. To these men the way back to the old order definitely seems like a blind alley.

Finally

From an historical point of view, focusing on the clients both in research and in social and penal practices, constitutes a major shift in perspective. The fact is that the client's role in the sex trade has rarely been challenged. The fundamental idea of prostitution, throughout time, has been that a group of women shall be accessible for men's sexual purposes; she is there for the man's lust. "The whore" as an expression of the darker side of men's image of femininity is connected with enticement, but also with contempt and disgust and she is defined exclusively by her sexuality that can be purchased with money. Around the man as a consumer there has been no such emotionally charged images. He has been anonymous or entirely invisible.

If there has been an image of the client, it has mainly built upon a very rigid and one-dimensional view of men's sexuality, that is a biologically deterministic view of men's sexual desires as being constantly high and never changing. This view disregards the fact that sexuality is socially and culturally constructed and has to be understood in that perspective. For instance, surveys on male sexual behaviour made in different countries show that the number of men who visit prostitutes, ranges from a few percent in one country to 40 percent in another. From this we can conclude that the understanding of what men are looking for in prostitution has to be related to the specific cultural and historical circumstances surrounding men's sexuality. And as these circumstances are liable to change, so is men's sexuality and their demand for prostitutes.

It is obvious that a real change in this field presupposes a radical reconsideration of men's responsibility in prostitution. The basis of such a reconsideration is that prostitution must be defined as a male issue. Prostitution is about men's sexuality, not women's. Without men's demand for prostitute women, there would be no such women.

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ⁱ Borg et al. 1981; Persson 1981; Månsson and Linders 1984; Varsa 1986; Prieur and Taksdal 1989; Andersson-Collins 1990; Hydén 1990; Lantz 1994; Sandell et al. 1996; Månsson 1998; Llyngbye 2000.

ⁱⁱ This quotation is from an undergraduate thesis by Nordvinter and Ström (Department of Social Work, Göteborg University, 2000, p.35) studying prostitutes' clients on the Internet. The letter is one out of 1200 letters from clients that were given to the authors by a woman who had decided to exit prostitution.

ⁱⁱⁱ The law entered into force 1 January 1999 and it is called Act prohibiting the purchase of sexual services (1998:408). It says that 'a person who obtains casual sexual relations in exchange for payment shall be sentenced – unless the act is punishable under the Swedish Penal Code – for *the purchase of sexual services* to a fine or imprisonment for at most six months. Attempt to purchase sexual services is punishable under Chapter 23 of the Swedish Penal Code.'

Prostitution as Male Violence against Women

Speech by Ms Louise Eek, Lund University, Sweden.

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen! First I would express my appreciation to the fact that I have been given the opportunity to speak here at this conference. I will speak in a subjective way because I made my “fieldstudies” in seven years inside the pornindustry. And I will speak from an actors perspective because I entered and were there in the same conditions as the other participants.

Most of my former sisters are dead today. Some of the Women have been killed, and others have taken their lives. I am here today to honour and tell parts of their stories. So their short lives were not in vein – just to be forgotten. Not so they only were to the benefit for the Men they had to offer sexual services to.

I have them with me constantly. I carry them in a special place in my heart,

In the 70's it was legal to buy sexual services in Sweden. Lena, was one of the Women that I have been working with in the clubs. It was a period where all pornoclubs were veiled brothels. That's because it wasn't legal to earn money on the Women who were prostitutes as clubowners, propertyowner and pimping. Anyway it was a period in Swedens sexual history that aloud everything. Not sanctioned by the government but in general by the clubowners.

In her spare time Lena had a sexual relation with her brother-in-law. Her husband found out. He entered their kitchen in rage. She had betrayed him, she had sex with someone who didn't pay her. He hit Lena unconscious. When she laid on the floor on her back he seized the moment and broke off one of the kitchen table legs– and kicked it up Lenas

vagina. Then he carried her to the bathroom and threw her into the bathtub. After a while he returned with 5 litres of oil that was heated up. He poured it over her. The couple had a 2-year old son. She was one of the Women who had told her customers days before that she earned more money than her doctor – with no responsibility.

I could speak about more violence that has been directed to the Women who have experience from prostitution. From their boyfriends as well as from guests. The violence has always been there – as a companion. No matter if prostitution as a phenomena is legal or not.

I think it's extremely important to meet and exchange different experiences in these serious matters, as prostitution and trafficking are. So we all speak the same language. And I don't make any difference between so called voluntary prostitution and trafficking – the difference that I make is between the direct violence and the indirect. Let me explain.

We need understand that this is neither an individual problem nor a structural problem. Instead it's a complex issue with many levels of difficulties. Therefore the problems are combined beneath one hard surface. That's why the governments in Europe need for example project as "Nordic- Baltic Campaign Against Trafficking in Women 2002".

At least the countries must have a mutual plan and the same definition on this task. One day I am sure that You also will see prostitution through the same realistic glass that we use and understand that Women never positively choose to prostitute themselves. The way that the government in Netherland is handling the problem is the same as Sweden did – in the 19th century. Germany has moved the issue to become a labour market policy. And the Women haven't got any benefit from the move the only ones that earn on this change of policy is the buyers.

From my point of view prostitution shall be treated in the same way as trafficking – both of them belong to the boil of society.

For me, the possibility to separate the phenomena of prostitution from trafficking is a question of nuances not differences in species.

Present research shows that what is "willingness" from the beginning is sliding; sooner or later she have to do things and offer services that she never would have accepted before she entered the industry. None of the Women know what they are getting themselves involved in before it's to late.

This is one of the industries best selling argument that the Women have been given her approval at the same time they forget to see their own dishonesty as a part of it. And they will never tell the Woman the whole truth about what she will be doing. Instead the pimps and the clubowners were / still are very manipulative and often good sweettalkers.

They sell their ideas in a nice package and it's just a matter of time until the Woman gives her acceptance. Sentences like "With your sexy body", "You look so sensual, so beautiful", "why aren't you making money on your goldmine?" is just a strategy to turn her into merchandise. The feminization of poverty is one of the ingredients from start or the final factor that push her into the industry.

Always she has arrived with a dream about a better life. But the bodyhunters forget to speak about the prize she must pay – sooner or later. It's like the Women participate in a game of

Russian roulette. Where the thrill and entertainment is his – and the target for the bullet is her mind and mental health.

It's very important to see what is going on around us with very clear glasses and realize that this organized buying and selling of human beings will not end by itself. But it's also important to decide where our society is headed. Which direction? Should society allow and sanction that Women in general get labelled as "good" or "bad"? That some women are available for buyers and some are not?

Speaking about Trafficking and Prostitution and at the same time we striving to have equality in our societies will therefore be difficult. Who should in that moment decide who should become a prostitute? The family? The school? The government or the pimps? Many times speakers from different areas see prostitution as the oldest work in history – I mean that this is the oldest lie ever told.

If we look in our history it's nothing new with Women who are leaving their homes to move where the job is. What is new at present is that many Women are transported to other countries around Europe, and the world, for one purpose only: to be sold and held as slaves for sexual exploitation.

What the Women really need is education and possibilities to have a ordinary job that cover her expenses and let her earn so much money so she also can save money for her future. In other word: Women must have the same possibilities as Men always have had opportunity to, to earn Money.

The questions we need to take seriously are also:

1. Is it possible to speak about prostitution as a voluntary or a free choice?

And

2. Is it possible to speak about equality in our societies at the same time we allow prostitution?

Normally the buyer is a Man with money in his hand. Normally it's a heterosexual situation. It's "he" who is setting the rules in the moment of buying sex. It's "his" demand, wishes and sexual fantasies that will be satisfied. Not the selling part.

The reason for this is that we in many cases have a traditional, old patriarchal view of sexuality – his sexuality – and "she" is the one who will serve him. Basically it's the view where the man with a sexual desire, meets the woman with no sexuality. "His" lust makes "him" just a victim to "her" deceitful and luring appearance. **The game** is just to make it look as if "she" is the promiscuous, free and emancipatoric woman. In reality "she" has nothing to demand for "her" own sake and "she" is in no position to claim any rights. What so ever.

When the sex-workers-rights lobby says that we just give "her" the opportunity to live out "her" wishes, it is still just about a state of mind that corresponds to the old views of responding on male sexuality.

For me it's obvious with my past – to answer on one the first question (above) NO! Prostitution is neither a choice nor a job – this is a state of mind. Period.

The way I saw my situation during my period at the clubs was an advantage for me. No one could spank me with a belt and call it a bad temper anymore. Instead it was I who held the belt - with spikes. And I got payed to do it.

It was cleaner and nicer and cosier than the drug-related surroundings where I had been before. It was safer because no-one could touch my body anymore without my permission. It was a better way compared to when three young boys stole my virginity in a group rape when I was fourteen years old.

Many times people talk about the phenomena as a speech of freedom. Me and my sisters have all been drilled and tamed until we were so deformed, until that day we fled into the club. As we had done until that day we couldn't feel any longer. Or anything. We who were running *from* our past *more than going towards* a freedom of some kind. A freedom of what?

In these surroundings I also had the opportunity to feel that I was Somebody. Someone to count with. I didn't realize that it wasn't just these young girls who confirmed me. Even I confirmed them. Only with my presence – not because of who I *was* it was instead just because of that I – or someone else – *arrived* there.

Most of the Women I met at the pornoclubs in Sweden and Denmark – didn't even know what was expected from us the day we entered. We looked so healthy. So beautiful. So young. On my question "how long will You work here?" all of them answered with one mouth: just this year, just this year.

At that moment I thought that they were very strange because I just wanted to be there for one week to earn money so I could pay my debts. Some of the Women I met are dead and some are still in the industry. And for me that week ended up in seven years.

One problem that the newcomer has to become familiar with is to sell sexual services. In general she will serve about five customers every day. Five different Men she isn't related to in any way. Five different Men with, you could say, odd demands. And all the time it's his demand and wishes that is not only countable its superior and final.

If You asked me back then, I would certainly have given You the answer: that this is something that I have chosen - what would You have expected me to answer? About the abuse that I have been exposed to earlier in life? About being abandoned not only from my father but also from my mother? About the angst and the demons that hunted me? Instead I would say: this is what I want to do...

Just to have some dignity left.

You need to understand that Women in prostitution are women that along the road teaches themselves to have sex with almost none physical or mental contact at all. She goes into sexual roles as a confident woman with heritage all from the spirit of Madame de Sade to a young virgin with a naive glance in her eyes. She has about 15 to 30 seconds to decide which role "he" who just entered the door wants her playing.

It's never "her" sexuality. Instead it's about the buyer with money in his hands, who is setting the rules. Again and again and again...

It's his fantasies that she has to answer to. The better she learns this lesson the more the industry will love her. At the same time she also will become almost like an idol for her sisters that honestly believe that she has so many buyers because she is so beautiful, sexy, good dancer etcetera...

All of my former sisters, included myself, had entered with the same dream of a better life than the present. The door marked "Promises" felt safe, but most of the time we neither knew what we actually would be doing, nor where we would end up. We the girls, who

couldn't see and calculate with the consequences that would follow. It was more of an experience and feeling of freedom.

During several years I have met Women with different colour of their hair, skin and passports. Race and class has nothing and everything to do with it. But the superior premise is her sex and gender. And the things that matters if we should become Women with experience of prostitution was their – as well as mine – earlier and earliest experience. A weakness that other people took advantage of.

And on the individual level it doesn't matter if the Women with experience from prostitution live in Mexico, Estonia or Sweden it seems that the same parameter had been fulfilled for her subjective part.

At the time we where inside the industry we dreamt on about the future. At that time we all would have our own family – where the “knight in shining armour” would have entered our lives and saved us. In the future we shouldn't have to deal with the tricks that we despited as well. And the knight/ prince should never ever had used any pornographic magazines or bought anyone...

He would save us from the situation where we were stuck in – and some sisters dreamt of children and others didn't. The glue that united us was our past. A childhood that included abuse, abandon – not only from our fathers but also from our mothers and in many cases rape.

The most important issue for the industry were that they welcomed us because of the fact that we had arrived **not** for who we were. We had even walked through the door on our own legs. And none had put a gun to our skulls – they didn't needed to. A minor group is still running – inside the industry – where they don't see any way out of it.

If we don't understand the stigma that the actors/the selling part in this phenomena are held into, it's hard to understand why they don't stop their way of living. But it isn't just the stigma that the society put on them. Women in prostitution, in general, also feel that they are marked for the rest of their lives, feeling dirty, marginalized and so on – maybe because of the inner stigma.

If the societies in this area of the world it's serious to work towards same goals. You must put not only trafficking as well as prostitution as a high priority-call. It means money to different longterms programs, at different levels. It means everything from finance of education for special needs (for example sex- and relation-tasks in school), to offer therapy for the women with experience in prostitution and educate them in basic subjects. Where some programs needs even to train them in social relations etc etc...

The opinion of those who think that this is a free choice and working with the phenomena. It's going to be hard not so much for You as for the Women. And You must understand that You need to hold **your** sexuality separated from the issue. You also need to understand the importance to draw the line between the actors and the phenomena and try to stay focused. Otherwise your ego will pull the Women even stronger into the phenomena.

The Women in the industry are at least accepted as they are inside the industry. The pornoindustry is an industry made by men for other men. The Swedish legislation that criminalized the buyer is very unique. The Swedish model, with its innovative view; To spot the buyer and give him the responsibility that he should have, is an important step towards equality and not making the issue to just a migration-problem. But Sweden isn't an isolated country therefor its difficult to fight the industry alone.

The governments in the EU-area not only can but also must do something!
At least give an affirmative answer and not ignore the problem as if prostitution isn't a
problem. It is a social, economical and cultural problem. And it still exists.
Thank You.