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THE TEEMING BROTHEL: SEX ACTS, DESIRES, AND SEXUAL IDENTITIES IN THE UNITED STATES, 1870-1940

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By
Heather Lee Miller, M.A.

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The Ohio State University
2002

Dissertation Committee:

Professor Leila J. Rupp, Adviser
Professor Birgitte Søland
Professor Susan M. Hartmann

Approved by

Adviser
Department of History
ABSTRACT

At the margins of women's sexuality, so-called deviant women—masturbators and nymphomaniacs, and especially prostitutes and lesbians—set the boundaries for "normal female sexuality" in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Despite the supposed nineteenth-century ideal of women's "passionlessness," sexually "deviant" women enjoyed, desired, and participated in numerous sex acts with both men and women, much to the chagrin of "respectable" white middle-class men and women who tried, but usually failed—if judged by the increased shrillness of their voices over the period between 1870 and 1930—to determine the outlines of what constituted acceptable female (and male) sexual and gender behavior. "The Teeming Brothel" is a cultural, social, and medical history of women's sex acts and sexualities within the commercial sex context. The title can be read in two ways: literally, as in an actual brothel teeming with divergent sex acts and sexualities; and figuratively, to represent society's fears of what the world might become if deviant female sexualities were allowed to run rampant in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This study combines analysis of published sexological treatises and surveys from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with examination of prostitutes' diaries and autobiographies, guides to and descriptions of brothels and red-light districts, one man's "erotic autobiography," pornography, and written reports of the men and women who participated in purity campaigns and vice
reform in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century United States. Ultimately, I conclude that the sexual history of prostitutes is complex and does not easily follow the historiographical models that have preceded this work. Sexual behavior, desire, and identity among commercial sex workers, although always categorized as “deviant,” does not easily conform to the chronology laid out by previous historians. Scientific methodology and some conclusions about the nature of female sexuality changed, as did the historical and social context within which scientific research was being conducted. However, many of the parallels sexologists drew among so-called deviant groups of women—masturbators, nymphomaniacs, prostitutes, lesbians, and feminists—remained strikingly similar. The multiple and varied sex acts in which prostitutes participated for money and the complexity of these women’s sexual identities and desires persisted throughout the period (and has continued through to the present). This dissertation lays out the trajectories of and complex links among changes and continuities in social discourse and then assesses how they were reflected in and also affected the lives, sexual activities, and sexual identities of commercial sex workers in the United States between 1870 and 1940.
For James Gardner Miller, III, who was there at the beginning, and Ruby James Keeton, who will be there at the end.
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VITA

August 23, 1969 ................................................. Born – Bremerhaven, Germany

1993 .................................................................. B.A. History, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo

1994 – 1995 ....................................................... Graduate Reference Librarian, Knight Library University of Oregon

1995 – 1996 ...................................................... Graduate Teaching Fellow University of Oregon

1996 ................................................................. M.A. History, University of Oregon

1996 – 1997 ....................................................... Graduate Research Assistant The Ohio State University

1997 – 2001 ....................................................... Managing Editor, Journal of Women’s History The Ohio State University

1999 ................................................................. Instructor, Ohio Wesleyan University

2001 – present .................................................... Humanities Acquisitions Editor The Ohio State University Press

PUBLICATIONS

Journal articles:


Book Reviews:


FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: History
Concentration in United States Women's History

Minor Fields: Latin American History, History of Sexuality
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INTRODUCTION

At the margins of women’s sexuality, so-called deviant women—masturbators and nymphomaniacs, and especially prostitutes and lesbians—set the boundaries for “normal female sexuality” in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Despite the nineteenth-century ideal of women's “passionlessness,” sexually “deviant” women enjoyed, desired, and participated in numerous sex acts with both men and women. This behavior chagrined “respectable” white middle-class men and women who tried, but usually failed—if judged by the increased shrillness of their voices over the period between 1870 and 1930—to determine the outlines of what constituted acceptable female (and male) sexual and gender behavior. Historian Carl N. Degler outlined almost three decades ago that “what ought to be and what was” were not always the same thing when it came to female sexuality in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the United States.1 Degler sparked work among women's historians that questioned the idea of passionlessness and tried to restore women's sexual agency and the existence of sexual

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1 Carl N. Degler, “What Ought To Be and What Was: Women's Sexuality in the Nineteenth Century,” American Historical Review 79, no. 5 (December 1974): 1467-90. See also, Carl N. Degler, At Odds: Women and the Family in America from the Revolution to the Present (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), esp. chap. 11. Arguing against the idea that passionless was a symptom of nineteenth-century America or something imposed on women by men desiring to control female sexuality, Degler’s main argument was that downplaying women’s sexuality was a strategy both feminist women and men used to advance women’s social power in the nineteenth century. His descriptions of female sexual pleasure came
acts to the past, especially among those who were engaged or married, and heterosexual. However, historians—especially, and ironically, those studying “deviant” sexual identity, desire, and sexual behavior—have often concentrated more on describing social attempts to control and shape what ought to have been than describing on what actually went on in people’s sex lives. This dissertation examines the interrelationship of both aspects of sexuality among so-called deviant nineteenth- and twentieth-century women—most notably prostitutes, lesbians, nymphomaniacs, and masturbators—emphasizing the importance of rendering as visible as possible women’s actual sex practices and desires (what was) alongside contemporary social, medical, and legal prescriptions and proscriptions (what ought to have been).

I originally set out to write a history of the relationship between prostitutes and lesbians in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the United States. In previous research and writing on prostitutes, I had concentrated (as have most historians of the subject) on municipal vice reform, paying some attention to the possibilities for independence (albeit complicated) that prostitution might offer to women who practiced the profession. Like my colleagues, I assumed that prostitutes were heterosexual women who sold sex to heterosexual men. My curiosity was piqued, however, after being immersed in the sources and coming across numerous references to lesbians and same-sex sexual acts among prostitutes. Why, I wondered, did historians of prostitution rarely, if ever, mention such behavior? What did it mean to find prostitutes who had sex with

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other women? Did these women consider themselves to be lesbians in the manner in which we think of lesbians today—women who are often depicted proudly and openly to love and desire other women, to shun men sexually, and to have strong feminist politics? If so, how could they continue to provide sexual services for men and even, in some cases, enjoy it? What about the women I had encountered in my research who made it clear that they preferred men sexually but had sex with women, either as a paid service for a customer (male or female) or occasional pleasure?

I realized that the story entailed much more than whether prostitutes had sex with women or considered themselves lesbian or not. What I found was a complex world in which sexual binaries—heterosexual versus homosexual—broke down; a world in which sexual acts did not correlate with sexual identity or even desire in any simple manner.

While my findings come mostly from examining the world of commercial sex, I believe that complexity and variety also existed among more “normal” women, many of whom were classified as nymphomaniacs or who masturbated or desired sex (with men or women) too much. By examining the sexual practices of such women in the past, I show the history of female sexuality to be as varied as each individual woman I encountered.

As I explored the prostitute/lesbian connection, even more questions arose. Most pressing, I wondered why historians of prostitution or sexuality have rarely mentioned sex acts? How could one describe the life of a prostitute or the sexual life of women (whether heterosexual or homosexual) without discussing the sexual activities in which they engaged, the desires they experienced, or the images around which they fantasized? Was the fact that prostitutes had sex for a living unimportant? Was it simply taken for granted? Or was the assumption that prostitutes were inevitably participating in sex that
they could not have enjoyed and were simply the sexual and economic victims of men and capitalist society? How did modern interpretations of nineteenth- and twentieth-century female sexuality—for example, the longstanding belief in so-called female passionlessness in the nineteenth century—influence how historians have ignored or examined sex acts and sexuality in the past?

Oddly enough, in both the history of sexuality and the history of prostitution, little attention has been paid to women’s sexual activities and desires. Overlooking sex acts raises questions about what actually transpired in commercial sex settings and how these acts reflected women’s understandings of their own sexuality. The result has been a narrow historical understanding not only of manifestations of women’s deviant sexuality and gender roles—most notably masturbation, nymphomania, prostitution, lesbianism, and feminism—but also of “normal” female sexuality and gender.

Looking specifically at sex acts in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, however, reveals the complexity of female sexuality in the past. Although the sources are more abundant and detailed for the twentieth century, evidence exists to show that “normal” women (i.e., noncommercial sex workers), for example, enjoyed sex with both men and women, worried that they were nymphomaniacs if they masturbated too much, and consumed pornographic images and writing both with and without their husbands. Prostitutes perhaps more than their nonprostitute counterparts participated in numerous so-called deviant sex acts and had complicated sexualities, as did their male, and occasionally female, customers. Contrary to the stereotype of twentieth-century sex work that holds prostitution to be a strictly heterosexual exchange between a female prostitute and a male customer, sexual activity in the brothel came in a mind-boggling array of
combinations and permutations. Women had sex with men and/or women (along with various objects and animals) for the consumption of both male and female customers.

Although such women as prostitutes and lesbians might have appeared to be opposed diametrically, in public discourse, these women, along with nymphomaniac women and women who masturbated too frequently (or admitted to the practice at all in the nineteenth century) were both implicitly and explicitly linked by their “deviance.” Evidence exists that prostitutes engaged in sexual relations and romantic relationships with women and that lesbians often became sex workers. This homoerotic behavior in the overwhelmingly heterosexual, yet homosocial, milieu of brothels reveals the complicated nature of women’s sexuality in a world that on first glance appears to cater only to male sexual gratification.

A number of scholars have looked at sexologists’ conceptions of sexual deviance among both men and women in this period. Perhaps most well known was Michel Foucault, who argued that prior to the late nineteenth century, same-sex acts were often illegal but rarely defined categories of sexuality, whereas following the rise of “scientia sexualis” sexual object choice, acts, and desires came more to define people’s so-called sexual identity.3 George Chauncey and others have looked specifically at the impact this transformation had on women. These historians have noted that between 1880 and 1930, medical scientists changed their conception of same sex behavior (what they often broadly define as sexual “deviance”) in women from one of “sexual inversion,” which meant a reversal of one’s sex role, to one of “homosexuality,” or possessing a deviant

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sexual object choice. Chauncey has been careful to point out, however, that over-reliance on medical literature places too much stress on doctors’ roles as creators and definers of social categories, believing instead that the sexual categories were the result of more complex and fundamental social processes. As Chauncey put it, “The differentiation of homosexual desire from ‘deviant’ gender behavior at the turn of the century reflects a major reconceptualization of the nature of human sexuality, its relation to gender, and its role in one’s social definition.” This change was directly related to men’s response to women’s increased gender insubordination during the time, and their need to continue their social, political, and economic domination of women. Thus, Chauncey found that sexologists correlated so-called female deviants (lesbians, in this case) with “emancipated” women and feminists; similarly, sexologists often deemed female prostitutes to be “perverted” because they catered to the “perverse” demands of clients, and because they supposedly sometimes turned to female lovers once their systems had been overwhelmed by excessive heterosexual sex.

Where Chauncey, Faderman, and others have connected gender insubordination with sexual deviance at the turn of the twentieth century, historians Siobhan Somerville and Estelle Freedman have pointed to the importance of race in the construction of the binary categories of heterosexuality and homosexuality at the time. Somerville has argued that the emergent discourse about sexuality to which Chauncey and others have pointed paralleled a discourse about race at the time that was increasingly focused on

strengthening, naturalizing, and maintaining the boundaries between “white” and “black.” Within this context, Freedman has shown how twentieth-century references to lesbianism among incarcerated women were almost always racialized. African American women thus were depicted as sexually aggressive, “natural” lesbians who preyed on passive white women who, it was presumed, would quickly revert to their “natural” heterosexual state upon release.

In this dissertation, I emulate the work of Chauncey, Faderman, Somerville, and Freedman. I draw as well on a number of methodologies and theoretical frameworks in the history of sexuality and queer theory. My analysis of sexologists and deviant women relies on Jennifer Terry’s conception of deviant historiography. Terry (like others) has posited that fears over the changing nature of “normal” female sexual and gender behavior can be read through medical history of such “abnormal” female sexuality as lesbianism and nymphomania. As Chauncey pointed out before her, though, these sources must be read against the grain as doctors did not simply define and create the categories that they supposedly described. The fluid nature of such categories of deviance and overlaps among these categories in sexological literature tell us as much about society’s and sexologists’ fears surrounding the potential ambiguity of women’s

6 Chauncey, “From Sexual Inversion to Homosexuality,” 139-45, 135-36.
“normal” sexuality as they do about the manifestations of that deviance. Although the primary focus of this dissertation is the desires, identities, and possible practices of deviant women in the past, I make tentative suggestions about the implications such deviant behaviors had on perceptions of so-called normal female sexuality as well.

As Michel Foucault argued, social discourses about sex and deviance proliferated in the nineteenth century, as did a growing need among people to know these stories. Similarly, sexual subjects often felt impelled to confess. Confessions translated into discourses of power—by knowing and naming sex, some people, especially scientists and other figures vested with professional authority, achieved a measure of power in relation to (but not necessarily over) their subjects. The presence of a power discourse among scientists and their subjects has remained constant since the early nineteenth century, although the motivations and stories within that discourse have changed.

In addition, ambivalence about female sexuality and women’s economic position in society, mixed with scientific scopophilia/medical voyeurism, has persisted throughout the past two centuries. Queer and performance theories, such as those espoused by such scholars as Donna Penn and Lisa Duggan for the former and Judith Butler for the latter, have made it clear that deviant subjects not only participate(d) in the creation of those categories through their bodies, acts, and discursive practices but also perform(ed) those identities in ways that both replicate(d) and further alter(ed) or construct(ed) them.


11 Foucault, History of Sexuality.

Despite previous historical forays into the connections between female sexual deviance, gender behavior, and race, most historians of female sexuality and especially historians of prostitution have rarely discussed sex acts in detail. Furthermore, they have neglected to examine how the women who engaged in such acts or society perceived these behaviors, except to make blanket assumptions about their distastefulness or coerced nature.

Historians of prostitution have concentrated primarily on the legal and social aspects of prostitution, typically examining vice reform, venereal disease, and, occasionally, the concept of “sisterhood” or community among prostitutes. In the few instances when historians have considered sex in their analyses of prostitution they have primarily focused on the nineteenth-century “sporting culture” of men who frequented prostitutes; feminists’ and reformers’ ideas about the sexual double standard, age of consent, rape, and seduction; the geography of commercialized vice districts; or such medical issues as venereal disease, abortion, and birth control. Rarely, though, have historians historicized prostitution as a category of sexuality.

Although those who have studied lesbianism in the past are more apt than historians of prostitution to discuss sex acts, the necessity of describing lesbians' sexual contacts has been questioned by scholars who find such acts largely irrelevant (or wish to downplay their importance) to historical analysis about lesbian identities, communities, and activism. Similarly, few historians have examined autobiographies, journals, or memoirs of "normal" women (or men) for evidence about their sexuality and sex practices, commercial or noncommercial. To rectify this omission, I draw here upon a wide variety of sources to explore the histories of prostitution, lesbianism, and "normal" female sexuality in ways that complicate the historical narrative in each of these fields of study. I use the methodology of such scholars of autobiography as Phillippe Lejeune, who has argued that historians should utilize autobiography, albeit cautiously, as evidence because authors of autobiography are ultimately creating narratives that may be taken to be "true" in important respects. By doing so, I am able to include alongside more traditional sources a wealth of previously ignored historical evidence found in autobiography and pornography, which reveal that female sexualities took multiple forms and that "deviant" sex acts were far from uncommon, especially among commercial sex workers.

The relationship among sex acts, (externally imposed) categories, and what people today refer to as sexual identities is a complex one. Medieval historians Judith M. Bennett and Ruth Mazo Karras have theorized about ways to use these broad definitions


of sexual categories in the past when sources about actual genital contact among people are scarce and such terms as “lesbian” are believed not to have existed. Bennett’s work has shown how the dearth of sources about everyday medieval women’s sex lives, especially that of women who participated in same-sex behavior or saw themselves as somehow different sexually, has perpetuated heteronormative stereotypes of sexuality in the past as well as an elite, male-centered point of view about female sexuality (for example, refusing to recognize that male same-sex behavior operated in a completely different social, familial, and religious context than that between women15). Bennett proposes that to research and write effective social histories of lesbian behavior in the past requires historians to widen their view of what might constitute same-sex relations among women to include all things “lesbian-like”: women in situations conducive to homosexual opportunities, women resisting heterosexual marriage in some way (single women or prostitutes), or women in nurturing and supportive relationships with other women, for example.16 Karras, following the lead of David Halperin, has defined prostitution as a historical category of sexuality, not simply an occupation. Rather than delineated by their acceptance of money for sexual acts, Karras argues that the law and society perceived “meretrices” to be “whores”—women with an innate propensity to sexual sin and excess (much the same as homosexuals have been categorized since the

15 Judith M. Bennett, “‘Lesbian-Like’ and the Social History of Lesbianisms,” Journal of the History of Sexuality 9, no. 1-2 (January/April 2000): 1-24, 7. I thank Stephanie Gilmore for pointing me to this article.
late nineteenth century in the United States). Her evidence shows that Western European
medieval prostitutes embraced the label meretrice, however, consciously demarcating
themselves as a separate sexual category—or identity, in more modern terms. I apply
this theory to my own thinking about prostitution as a potential category of sexual
identity—one within which the modernly imposed boundaries between heterosexual and
homosexual did not exist or were fluid and often held no relevance to lived experience,
except in the minds of the “experts” who examined prostitutes in the late nineteenth and
early twentieth centuries.

Joan Nestle was one of the first scholars to point to explicit parallels between
prostitutes and lesbians, arguing that the two groups of women have formed “a historical
sisterhood” and asking historians interested in the intersections of female deviance and
female sexuality in the past to examine this connection. Nestle pointed out the
relationships among prostitutes and lesbians that she witnessed in the 1950s’ bar culture
where she came of age as a lesbian. “In the bars, . . . whores were part of our world. We
sat on barstools next to each other, we partied together, and we made love together.”
They also survived the periodic raids of the vice squad together. Nestle used the term
“sisterhood” with an admittedly political intent. She hoped to affect the 1980s feminist
antipornography movement (which cast pornography as one of the mainstays of
patriarchy and refused to acknowledge sexual agency among women who performed sex

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17 Ruth Mazo Karras, “Prostitution and the Question of Sexual Identity in Medieval Europe,” *Journal of
Women’s History* 11, no 2 (summer 1999): 159-77. See also David Halperin, “Forgetting Foucault: Acts,
18 Joan Nestle, “Lesbians and Prostitutes: A Historical Sisterhood,” in *Sex Work: Writings by Women in the
Sex Industry*, ed. Frédérique Delacoste and Priscilla Alexander (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 1987), 231-47,
quotation on 231.

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work) by showing that feminists, particularly lesbian feminists, had forgotten that, only twenty or thirty years earlier, prostitutes and lesbians recognized that they were both sexual deviants in the eyes of society and the law when a vice raid was on.

Nestle herself had entered the domain of public, commercial sex—writing sex stories for lesbian magazines, posing for explicit sex photographs, and taking money from women for sexual acts. In many ways, she admitted, she too was a prostitute. Sisterhood existed among prostitutes and lesbians but was being lost in the antipornography fight and the quest of militant, separatist lesbian feminists who believed any sex with or for men facilitated sexual subordination and was, therefore, repugnant. Nestle realized with approbation that, in this fray, the 1980s prostitute once again had become the feminine “Other,” much as she had been to nineteenth-century feminist purity campaigns. Thus Nestle looked to the past for clues as to how to reconcile the two groups.

Nestle called for historians to add detail to her broad brushstrokes and “show how lesbians and prostitutes have always been connected, not just in the male imagination but in the actual histories of both.” To her, the fact that meanings and realities of such categories as lesbian and prostitute have changed over time and that such women’s experiences also varied is politically and personally significant to both contemporary feminist and queer projects. Perhaps most important, such a project questions the “naturalness” of heteronormativity. For example, as historian Jonathan Katz has pointed out, the term “heterosexuality,” which is often thought of as something eternally “normal,” was not actually coined until after the term “homosexuality,” sometime in the

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late nineteenth century. When the term was introduced into the English language, heterosexuality was itself originally a category of sexual deviance, meaning that one had sex with many people in many ways. Although it quickly came to mean “normal” male/female sex, those who today speak of “normal” heterosexuality (and traditional marriage and family), would do well to remember the historical specificity of the term.

Historian and queer theorist Donna Penn has specifically correlated prostitutes and lesbians in the past, arguing that medical and psychological professionals and cultural critics increasingly concentrated on the twin menaces of lesbians and prostitutes after the Second World War. By positing these two groups of women as the epitomes of female sexual degeneracy, postwar society was able thereby to “define, bind, and contain,” so-called normal, heterosexual women. Although Penn noted that earlier examples of the prostitute-lesbian connection existed, she has discounted their cultural importance, asserting that the “lesbian threat” did not really come to the forefront until lesbian subcultures increased in visibility during and after World War II. Yet, my research has shown that much evidence exists to push Penn’s periodization back at least fifty years, if not further. Social reformers, vice investigators, scientists, and even lesbians and sex workers drew parallels among female sexual deviants and juxtaposed their behaviors with that of so-called normal women as early as the mid-1800s. By the last decade of the nineteenth century, such associations occurred with striking frequency,

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22 Penn, “The Sexualized Woman.”
albeit not in as public a manner as those seen in the postwar period in movies and in such national magazines as *Life*, and other forms of mass media that Penn examined.24

Despite the relative paucity of historical research for the period prior to World War II about links between female sexual deviants and the actual sex acts in which they have participated, especially among prostitutes, medical and reform literature from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries concerning both prostitutes and lesbians explicitly discusses these marginalized women, often connecting them implicitly and explicitly. “Scientists” of sex and social reformers alike found much of interest in deviant female sexualities—often conflating nymphomaniacs, female masturbators, prostitutes, lesbians, and feminists. They also offered detailed descriptions of and explanations for the supposedly disproportionate number of women having sex with other women to be found living in brothels as well as in-depth discussions of excessive female sexuality in the form of nymphomania and masturbation. Scientists and doctors drew significant parallels among sexually deviant groups of women. For example, they often pointed out or insinuated that prostitutes were indeed often lesbians), or at least noted prostitutes’ participation in so-called perverted sex acts in the course of a day’s work.

Similarly, many extant diaries and autobiographies of prostitutes and madams mentioned sexual relationships among female “inmates” of brothels. (There is also some evidence of brothels catering to lesbian sex and, perhaps even more common, brothels providing males to paying [male] customers.) Evidence from prostitutes, their customers, and the social reformers who studied them provides numerous examples of same-sex behavior and masturbation among sex workers, as well as what was described as

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hypersexual behavior among lesbians and masturbation supposedly leading to lesbianism. Furthermore, these deviant sex acts were often linked to feminism and other potentially unruly female behaviors such as smoking, drinking, dancing, participating in criminal behaviors, riding bicycles, and driving automobiles.

Deviant women in the nineteenth and twentieth century United States occupied complicated cultural sites in the past. Prostitutes, for example, accepted money for heterosexual and homosexual sex acts although their sexual identity did not necessarily reflect either their status as a commercial sex worker or their participation in either straight or lesbian acts. They can, however, be recognized as “lesbian-like” in Bennett’s sense because they existed in situations conducive to homosexual opportunity, resisted heterosexual marriage and monogamy norms, and often (although not always) participated with other women in nurturing and supportive relationships. Furthermore, commercial sex workers saw themselves as fitting within a separate and complex sexual category in which labels and acts may have meant nothing more than pragmatic performances intended to garner a profit or in which such labels may have been closely held (as in prostitutes who called themselves lesbians and shunned male sexual contact outside work) or such acts indulged purely for pleasure (for example, self-identified heterosexual prostitutes who had gratifying sex with women).

"The Teeming Brothel" is a cultural, social, and medical history of women’s sex acts and sexualities within a commercial sex context. The title can be read in two ways: literally, as in an actual brothel teeming with divergent sex acts and sexualities; and figuratively, to represent society’s fears of what the world might become if deviant
female sexualities were allowed to run rampant in the late nineteenth and early twentieth
centuries. In this study, I combine an analysis of published sexological treatises and
surveys from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with an examination of prostitutes’
diaries and autobiographies, guides to and descriptions of brothels and red-light districts,
one man’s “erotic autobiography,” pornography, and written reports of the men and
women who participated in purity campaigns and vice reform in the nineteenth- and
twentieth-century United States. Since my conclusions are based on widely varied
sources, I use diverse methodologies.

Divided into two parts, the first section of the dissertation is an investigation of
female sexuality through the lenses of the “professional” reformers, lawmakers, and
doctors who investigated both “normal” and “deviant” behavior in the nineteenth and
twentieth centuries. Although the bulk of the analysis here concentrates on the period
after 1870, data on prostitutes and female sexual “inverts” that scientists began to
compile in the first half of the nineteenth century and the conclusions they drew about the
women they studied provide essential background and depth to my work as does the
wealth of articles and debates these surveys and investigations produced throughout the
period under study.

Chapter 1 explores how the medical community along with social reformers
perceived female sexuality by focusing first on the bodies and acts of “normal” and
“deviant” women, specifically their masturbatory practices and women who came to be
called nymphomaniacs. Sexologists and reformers in the nineteenth and twentieth
centuries were concerned about the nexuses of different yet similar categories of female
sex “deviants.” Scientists’ and reformers’ methodologies, foci, and explanations for
deviant female sexual behavior changed throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Despite these changes, fears of potential female sexual and economic independence from men permeated the research and writing of scientists and social reformers alike throughout the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century (and have persisted through today). These changes and continuities reflected an increasingly complex industrial, commercial, and urban world, which made the existence of “perversions” more visible. Increased calls for sexual and social justice from feminists and Marxists alongside vehement arguments promoting consumer capitalism based in ideas of colonialism, social Darwinism, and “progress,” created a profoundly chaotic matrix within which ambivalence about female sexuality flourished. Scientists and reformers alike attempted to make sense of the modern world by categorizing, describing, and prescribing cures for social and sexual behaviors that fell outside the so-called norm. Immersion in the scientific and reform literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries about female sexual deviance raises many questions. In what ways did almost exclusively upper-class white male sexologists conceive of excessive female sexuality (nymphomania), masturbation, prostitution, and lesbianism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? What does it mean that these men, who made the study of sex their life’s work, almost without fail saw a distinct relationship among deviant female sexual behaviors, most notably prostitution and female same-sex desire and behavior? How and why did their interpretations change over time? How were categories of female deviance related to one another in scientific and reform writing?

To trace the discourse of female sexual deviance over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, I first look at the published studies of those who investigated sex
beginning in the late 1830s, when Alexandre-Jean-Baptiste Parent-Duchâtelet published
his magisterial study of Paris brothels, and ending in the 1930s, when Robert Latou
Dickinson and others conducted and published their studies of American female sex
behavior. The literature is international in scope, since members of the sexological
community from Italy, Germany, England, France, Sweden, Denmark, and the United
States communicated with one another through journals and at conferences. To examine
this dialogue, I survey the vast medical literature (especially articles published in the
American Journal of Obstetrics and the Diseases of Women and Children and the
Urologic and Cutaneous Review, which boasted a regular sexology column), as well as
doctors’ and scientists’ personal correspondence and papers. In addition to the medical
literature, I include many social reform tracts, which circulated in the late nineteenth and
everth twentieth centuries, especially those concerned with “social purity” and vice
reform.

The changing meanings and methods of science warrant a broad definition of the
“science of sex.” I have taken the liberty of somewhat anachronistically lumping all
those who used scientific methodology to look at the existence, variety, and causes of
sexual behavior in society into the category of “sexologist.”25 The category as I use it
here includes doctors, psychiatrists (or alienists as they were known in the nineteenth

25 Scholars have debated about the origin of the terms sexologist and sexology and whether it may be used
accurately as a historical term for the scientific study of sex during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.
A lively discussion surrounded this topic in an exchange on the History of Sexuality listerv
(histsex@topica.com). In recent email correspondence on the subject (in response to my query about
whether anyone remembered the earlier debate), British historian Lucy Bland noted that “the American
term ‘sexology’ was first adopted in the UK in the early twentieth century, the term ‘sexualogy,’ invented
by eugenist Karl Pearson, having not caught on” (Lucy Bland to histsex@topica.com, 21 March 2002,
9:53). Noted historian of sex Vern Bullough pointed out in the same discussion that the first American
reference he had found to the term “sexology” was Elizabeth Osgood Goodrich Willard,’s Sexology as the
Philosophy of Life (Chicago: J. R. Walsh, 1867) (Vern Bullough to histsex@topica.com, 21 March 2002,
century), neurologists, urologists, gynecologists, social scientists, social reformers, and self-identified sexologists interested in collecting data about sex in society. Casting the net broadly has yielded a large body of material on women’s sexual behaviors, while also showing how scientific methods in the study of sex have changed over time. In this way, my research contributes to a better understanding of the theoretical evolution of what counts (or has counted) as “sexology,” as well as a clearer picture of how sexologists constructed the meanings of such deviant categories of women as “nymphomaniac,” “masturbator,” “prostitute,” and “lesbian.” Scientists, although they usually argue otherwise, have never simply and objectively described their subjects. Rather, as such historians as George Chauncey and Jennifer Terry have argued regarding the early twentieth century, sex “deviants” both reacted to and participated in the construction of their own deviance (and continue to do so today). Scientific and social discourse classified them and gave their behaviors names (albeit “abnormal”), and they, in turn, transformed those categories through their interactions with those who observed them.26

After an extended discussion of scientific studies and reform literature in which I outline the changing methodologies and justifications scientists and reformers marshaled in their public discussion about sex and sexuality, Chapter 2 takes a more detailed look at specific connections scientists and reformers drew between prostitutes and lesbians, the most commonly addressed groups of deviant women. Evidence exists that prostitutes engaged in sexual relations and romantic relationships with women and that lesbians sometimes became sex workers. This homoerotic behavior in the overwhelmingly

8:27). See also Ivan Crozier’s defense of the term despite its sometimes anachronistic use (Ivan Crozier to histsex@topica.com, 21 March 2002, 17:05).
heterosexual, yet homosocial, milieu of brothels reveals the complicated nature of women's sexuality in a world that on first glance appears to cater only to male sexual gratification. The chapter concludes with an examination of how deviant sexualities related specifically to feminism, which was perceived at the time as gender deviance. Important to the first section are the surveys of prostitutes and female sexual “inverts” that scientists began compiling in the first half of the nineteenth century and the wealth of articles that these surveys and investigations yielded throughout the period under study.

As early as the 1830s, French sexologist Alexandre-Jean-Baptiste Parent-Duchâtelet noted correlations between prostitutes and lesbians, and his successors over the next one hundred years continued to pick up on this thread. Criminal anthropologists, sexologists, and psychiatrists fueled by late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century concern with social hygiene concentrated on both prostitutes and lesbians in their quest to understand what they perceived as society’s “evils,” which encompassed not only prostitution and same-sex sexuality but feminism as well. As the twentieth century progressed, such scientists as Havelock Ellis, Robert Latou Dickinson, and James G. Kiernan perpetuated the relationship between the two groups of deviant women.

Although their research methods changed, the reasons for correlating prostitutes and lesbians remained much the same throughout the hundred years studied here. Woven throughout the first section is the story of how the veil of “professionalism” that doctors, lawyers, and reformers hid behind in their investigations of sexual behaviors allowed them to explore tabooed behaviors and speak explicitly about sex acts and sexualities without being perceived as pornographic by contemporaries. This curtain of

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26 Terry, *An American Obsession*; and George Chauncey, Jr., *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and*
respectability masked what has been described as scientific scopophilia, but which amounts to varying degrees of voyeurism whether intended or not.

In the second section of this study, I address the sex acts and subjective identities of lesbians and prostitutes themselves. Like Penn, my goal here is to bring sex back into the history of sexuality, while also using Karras's and Bennett's useful but broader theories about sexual categories and identities in the past. That many prostitutes and sex workers have referred to themselves and have been called "lesbians" by others, as well as the fact that they participated in same-sex sex acts (among many other variations), can be demonstrated historically. Harder to determine is what specific acts or identities/labels meant to these women and their customers. Moreover, sources prostitutes and lesbians generated themselves are much more difficult to locate than the published medical and reform literature on which I rely in Chapters 1 and 2. This combination of a lack of sources and the need for a theoretically sophisticated framework within which to examine such amorphous concepts as identity or resistance makes telling the story of sex workers and "deviant" women in the past a more challenging project than narrating the changing nuances of sexological ideas over time.

Chapter 3 examines how prostitutes, lesbians, and consumers of commercial sex perceived themselves by analyzing a number of prostitutes' diaries and "erotic autobiographies," as well as pornographic representations of prostitutes and lesbians. Interestingly, prostitutes' autobiographies and pornography, perhaps because they were written by already sexually suspect authors for an equally questionable audience, have been little used as evidence of the sex practices and self-perceptions of prostitutes in


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historiographical literature. I explore why historians have disdained and ignored such sources, which I argue to be as valid as vice commission reports and sexological treatises.

Because of their contested nature as historically truthful sources, I examine autobiographies, diaries, and oral histories of female sex deviants as well as pornographic writings with careful consideration of their limitations. Although some prostitutes' autobiographies, diaries, and oral histories appear to be accurate depictions of their lives, many are questionable. Reformers, not prostitutes themselves, for example, often wrote so-called prostitutes' autobiographies and greatly embellished the story to their own advantages. The majority of these kinds of works are moral tales or redemption narratives, almost always the story of a young girl seduced by an evil man who then tearfully renounced the "vicious" life after being rescued by a kind, white Christian female benefactor, usually from the middle class. Because of the power dynamics and often class differences that existed between prostitutes and reformers and the audiences for whom diaries and autobiographies were (or were not) intended, it is necessary to read such texts against the grain, calling attention to their many possible meanings and layers, fallibility, and subjectivity. For all prostitution narratives, one must recognize that these texts represent a multivoiced contest for authority, which took place at rising and falling decibels among prostitutes, doctors, reformers, police, and the like.²⁷

Pornography raises similar questions about authorship, audience, and narrative strategy. What can texts that were written specifically to titillate tell us about actual

²⁷ Although the stereotypical white, middle-class reformer was usually the norm and a class differential often existed between reformer and reformed, at least in some cases reformers hailed from the lower and working classes and some were even themselves rehabilitated prostitutes or sexually abused women. See, for example, Louise A. Jackson, "‘Singing Birds as well as Soap Suds’: The Salvation Army’s Work with Sexually Abused Girls in Edwardian England," *Gender and History* 12, no. 1 (April 2000): 107-26.
desire and practice? Are such fictional texts necessarily invalid because they discuss sex in formulaic ways? By dealing with such questions explicitly and by carefully unpacking the narratives, I find such sources invaluable for the study of sex because they can provide essential perspectives on historical sexual practices. Pornography must represent some kind of cultural truth or it would not be in demand—the images and storyline appeal to and reflect consumers’ imagination and desire. Thus pornographic narratives, which can be tracked over time as changing alongside prevailing notions of sexuality and desirability, are crucial to a better understanding of both the expected norms and lived realities of nineteenth- and twentieth-century female (and, of course, male) sexuality.

The remainder of Chapter 3 is dedicated to a close analysis of three “erotic autobiographies”—Memoirs of Madame Madeleine, the unpublished “Memoirs of a Pleasure Girl” (authored by the probably pseudonymously named Lola Ardley), and Wilbur Burton’s also unpublished “Erotic Autobiography”—which I define as personal narratives written specifically to tell an author’s sexual history. What these three sources (and others like them) reveal is that prostitutes and their customers in the early twentieth century not only took part in a wide range of sexual acts but also possessed fluid sexualities. The author/protagonists of these narratives did not define themselves as “heterosexual” or “homosexual” in ways that we might expect given the traditional outline of historiography among historians of sexuality, which posits the rise of modern “homosexuality” sometime around the turn of the twentieth century. Prostitutes, for example, who had sex with women (whether paid or for personal pleasure) did not necessarily see themselves as lesbians; nor did they always see themselves as heterosexual. They used and recognized these labels in relation to others whom they
knew, but such labels appear to have had little bearing on perceptions of their own sexuality or on their choices to engage in certain sexual acts. Thus I have found prostitutes describing in great detail the pleasure they found in having sex with women and men without any reference to or apparent care about whether such acts placed them into a deviant sexual category. Their main concerns were profit and pleasure (their own and that of their customers).

Chapter 4 combines the many different sources available to describe the many variations of sex acts available for purchase and to analyze how those acts confound predominant notions (both historiographical and contemporary) of prostitution as an act performed by presumably heterosexual women for presumably heterosexual men. In addition to the scientific and reform literature, autobiography, and pornography that provided data for the first three chapters, I also examine information about sexual vice that was generated in three specific geographical locations: New Orleans, New York City, and Chicago. These cities represent the United States' north, south, and Midwest, but they are also communities of varied population sizes, economic bases, and political makeups. All, however, contained red-light districts and a thriving sex trade. New Orleans' “Storyville” was a world-renowned area for prostitution (and jazz music) well into the twentieth century; New York and Chicago hosted not only large and (in)famous districts that catered to the sex trade but also the largest campaigns against prostitution and other forms of vice in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Such campaigns generated copious amounts of statistical information and analysis of prostitution by reformers and vice committees, as well as regulationists (those who argued that prostitution should be legalized and regulated). The New York and Chicago vice
committees also paid investigators to investigate and write up detailed reports on bars, brothels, and other haunts of so-called sexual deviants. Many of these investigators were actual residents of the areas under investigation rather than middle- or upper-class reformers, and their descriptions are essential to understanding the many varieties of sex and sexuality to be found in the urban underworld.28

This chapter explores the wide variety of sexual acts in which female commercial sex workers participated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. I describe in more detail than any previous histories of prostitution (or lesbianism) women’s experiences, pleasure, desire, and sometimes disgust with the acts in which they engaged for both pleasure and profit.

At first glance, the two sections of the dissertation may appear to be disconnected. In part 1, we hear the voices of scientists, doctors, and reformers; in part 2, the focus shifts, adding the voices of prostitutes and their customers to flesh out the picture of sexual acts, desires, and identities. Although both provide “stories” about the past, scientific discourse has been revered because of its supposedly objective point of view, whereas narratives by prostitutes or those produced specifically for consumers of sex have been dismissed as pornographic. However, I argue that both forms provide socially constructed narratives about female sexuality. And, in fact, as Lisa Duggan has pointed out for the journalism and scientific writing surrounding the sensational 1892 lesbian murder case of Alice Mitchell and Freda Ward, scientific and supposedly objective modes of discourse are often as fraught with subjective material, and even fictional

28 Chad C. Heap has pointed out that many of these middle- and upper-class reformers were as curious about the sex acts in which their subjects participated as they were appalled. See Chad C. Heap,
stories, as such totally subjective narratives as pornography encompass scientific truths. Only by looking at all such representations for their different, but often strikingly similar, evidence about what actually happened in the commercial sex environment, may one speculate and draw tentative conclusions about how sexual systems were constructed in the past.

Ultimately, I conclude that the sexual history of prostitutes is complex and does not easily follow the historiographical models that have preceded this work. Sexual behavior, desire, and identity among commercial sex workers, although always categorized as "deviant," does not easily follow the chronology laid out by Chauncey and others—the category "prostitute" did not change from one based on paid sex acts to one based on an innate desire to sell sex. Nor was it directly tied to—although it was certainly affected by—the need to maintain racial binaries in the United States. Conceptions of prostitutes' sexuality, however, were directly linked to larger discussions about female sexuality, in general, both "normal" and "deviant" and "white" and "black" and thus did change over time in ways related to the shifts historians have pointed to among these groups.

As I show in chapters 1 and 2, scientific methodology and some conclusions about the nature of female sexuality changed, as did the historical and social context within which scientific research was being conducted. However, many of the parallels sexologists drew among so-called deviant groups of women—masturbators, nymphomaniacs, prostitutes, lesbians, and feminists—remained strikingly similar.

Furthermore, as discussed in chapters 3 and 4, the multiple and varied sex acts in which prostitutes participated for money and the complexity of these women's sexual identities and desire persisted throughout the period (and has continued through the present). This dissertation lays out the trajectories of and complex links among changes and continuities in social discourse and then assesses how they were reflected in and also affected the lives, sexual activities, and sexual identities of commercial sex workers in the United States between 1870 and 1940.

CHAPTER 1

THE SOCIAL DISCOURSE OF FEMALE DESIRE, 1870-1940

Conceptions of sexuality and the meanings of certain sex acts in the United States between 1840 and 1940 depended on how people understood sexual desire and the acts in which people participated during that time. To tell the story of the complicated relationships among sexual acts, desires, and sexual identities in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries among sex workers, which is the primary goal of this dissertation, it is first necessary to understand the complex and conflicting conversations about female sex acts, desires, and identities in general at different times. This chapter traces those conversations among a variety of "expert" voices: doctors, scientists, social critics, social hygienists, municipal reform advocates, religious reformers, and feminists.

Examining this chaotic discourse and rhetoric of desire, nymphomania, masturbation, and perversion reveals the ambivalent nature of science and reform in relation to all manifestations of female sexuality. Although "respectable" heterosexual women were expected not to possess excessive sexual desire, to masturbate, or to participate in the same sexual acts as prostitutes or lesbians, scientific and cultural beliefs about female sexuality applied in many ways to both deviant and nondeviant women and thus makes it possible to speak about these seemingly different groups in the same breath. This chapter shows that the relationship between acts and perceived sexuality was never
clear cut, which sets up my argument in the next chapter about the fluid nature of sexuality among commercial sex workers and lesbians.

The nature of medical discourse and the evidence it was based on was folkloric during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the United States and abroad. Thus I often quote one doctor or scientist quoting another doctor, scientist, reformer, or feminist. I have at times purposefully chosen to quote lesser-known doctors writing in smaller medical journals in addition to more prolific sexologists to show that many of their conclusions were representative of argument trends. When smaller journals replicated the arguments of national or international scientists, it seems safe to assume that such ideas were achieving (or were about to achieve) either wider public circulation or resistance as those ideas filtered down to and reflected the experiences and knowledge of local doctors.

Scientific writing in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was also often quite unscientific by today’s standards, relying heavily on the work of others, marshaling anecdotal evidence, and occasionally even quoting fiction as evidence. Scientists and social critics alike borrowed heavily from their predecessors—both literary and scientific—when discussing sex and sexuality, often simply retelling stories they had read in journals or heard at meetings without first-hand knowledge of their veracity. For example, sexologists referring to the existence of lesbians among prostitutes continued to cite the findings of French investigator Alexander-Jean-Baptiste Parent-Duchâtelet almost a century later. ¹ Similarly, case studies of nymphomaniacs and homosexuals and

¹ See, for example, Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Psychopathia Sexualis (1886, reprint; Chicago: Login Brothers, 1931), 608; and James G. Kiernan, “Homosexuality among Harlots,” Urologic and Cutaneous Review 20, no. 2 (February 1916): 108.
the conclusions of one scientist reappeared in later articles as evidence for other studies. One example is the story of a young unmarried woman allegedly impregnated by her married sister, who passed along semen from her husband. The first version of this story I ran across was told in 1892 by doctor Irving C. Rosse, who noted that Columbia College doctor A. F. A. King had related the story to him. It reappeared almost forty years later in a somewhat altered form attributed to someone identified only as “Duhousset” in the 1931 English translation of Albert Moll’s *Perversions of the Sex Instinct*. In this case, after marriage, one of the women renewed an earlier sexual relationship with her girl friend who then became pregnant. “It must therefore be supposed,” Moll noted, “unless the whole story is a hoax, that the married woman had in passing from the arms of her husband to those of her friend transferred to the latter a small quantity of sperm.” Although Moll noted that the story might not be true, unlike many of his predecessors and contemporaries who often simply retold such stories verbatim and without disclaimers, he still chose to relate the data in his own study.

The constant reiteration of case studies, arguments, and evidence in subsequent sources by different people in various geographical locations makes it hard always to verify the authenticity of a source. This has proven at times frustrating and made getting to original sources sometimes impossible. Yet it also points to the fascinatingly folkloric and often fictional nature of scientific and public writing about sex in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Although we might not know exactly when a source was written, the unscientific nature of medical writing during this period and repetition of stories that

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scientists must have believed to be true illustrates continuity of thought, underscoring both scientists ambivalence and their desire to know more about female sexuality as well as the fact that all writing (even supposedly that done by "experts") on some level reflects social discourse.

Historians and feminists writing in the 1970s and 1980s pointed out that in the nineteenth-century, many white, middle- and upper-class Americans adhered to the ideal of female "passionlessness," believing that women—white, middle-class women in particular—had little or no sexual desire. Under this conception, what desire women did possess could be aroused only by a man.4 Many people living in the nineteenth century, scientists and laypeople alike, also held this belief, whether as a reality or a desirable social norm or both, despite much evidence to the contrary.5 And the idea persisted well into the twentieth century. Some argued that it was a good thing women possessed less desire than men; as New York doctor Carlton C. Frederick argued in 1907, “otherwise . . . this world would be one vast brothel.”6

4 Historian Nancy F. Cott has described how “passionlessness” came to be attributed to women in the nineteenth century (after centuries of belief in women’s strong sexual desire), and the ways in which white, middle-class women used to their advantage this supposed sexual anesthesia and concomitant moral superiority to men. Nancy F. Cott, “‘Passionlessness’: An Interpretation of Victorian Sexual Ideology,” Signs 4, no. 2 (1978): 219-36. Two classic studies of middle-class, white ideals of femininity and female relationships are Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood,” American Quarterly 18 (1966): 151-74; and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America,” in Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 1-29.
6 Frederick, “Nymphomania as a Cause of Excessive Venery,” 807.
Excessive sexual desire or sexual activity in white women was often portrayed by women and men, lay and professional alike as "unnatural."7 This idea, however, as many historians have more recently argued, does not adequately represent the myriad and shifting notions of female desire that existed during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The supposed Victorian ideal of female passionlessness had not always been the norm. Historian Thomas Laqueur and others have shown that prior to the Enlightenment and perhaps as late as the early nineteenth century many people—at least medical doctors—believed that women were equally or more sexual than men.8 Although Laqueur was more concerned here with how women and men became differentiated as gender categories in the late eighteenth century and how this was related to increased male power over women, his arguments about how perceptions of bodies changed in relation to gender are directly related to this chapter: As women became "women" during the nineteenth century, doctors and society perceived female bodies as opposite to those

of "men"—i.e., less sexual. Prior to this time men and women were seen as possessing similar (albeit hierarchical) bodies. Two basic differences existed between men and women: the external male penis and scrotum were inverted into a woman's internal vagina and uterus/ovaries, and men were thought to be warmer than women necessitating sexual friction to warm women up to ensure conception. Both sexes were believed to experience orgasm; indeed, female orgasm was believed to be necessary to conception. 9

In addition, during earlier times, women had often been considered to be potential sexual predators incapable of suppressing their overweening need for sex and orgasm.

The period on which I concentrate here is book-ended by this earlier conception of overt female desire and that which resurfaced during the first half of the twentieth century emphasizing women's sexual urges but deeming the proper outlet for such desire to be heterosexual unions within marriage. Threads of both were woven to varying degrees throughout medical and public discourse about female sexuality in the intervening years.

Jules Guyot's *Ritual for Married Lovers* provides a good example of the book-ending of the period in which I am interested. A French book originally published in 1859 upon the marriage of Prince Napoleon and Princess Clotilde of Savoy, *Ritual for Married Lovers* was translated and reprinted in English in 1931 and was "carefully scrutinized for the scientific meanings by Dr. Robert Latou Dickinson," whose comments on the original text appeared as footnotes in the reprint. 10 Since Dickinson's life work had

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been based on promoting healthy sexuality among married men and women, it is not surprising that he would have been interested in promoting Guyot’s work, which in 1859 was arguably both quite ahead of its time and reflective of eighteenth-century conceptions of female sexuality.\textsuperscript{11} Although Dickinson disagreed with Guyot that men and women were “equal and complementary in combination, like acid and alkali in a salt,” he did agree with Guyot that parenthood and marriage created superior beings (Guyot argued that mother was superior to wife, who was superior to woman; father was superior to husband, who was superior to man) and that sexual fulfillment in marriage was necessary to both male and female completeness.\textsuperscript{12}

Sexual fulfillment for both men and women, according to both Guyot and Dickinson, entailed orgasm (albeit for different reasons). As did many of his predecessors and contemporaries, Guyot believed that “until this acme occurs, the function is incomplete, the positive or male half has not ejected the living fluid, the negative or female half has not thrown forth the ovules from the ovaries into the uterus with requisite vigor.” Orgasm was physically implicated in the fertilization process. Orgasm was also essential to woman’s health. When women failed to climax, according to Guyot, “the depression, the fatigue, the disgust, and often a despair whose causes are unknown to her, overwhelm her life and bring in their train maladies which resist all healing treatment and all medical science. Then it is that the wife must seek in the support of her moral principles and her religion the only possible palliative, the


\textsuperscript{12} Guyot, \textit{Ritual for Married Lovers}, esp. 6-9, quotations on 7.
As a result, Guyot called on husbands to stimulate their wives' breasts and clitorises, noting (in direct opposition to later Freudian ideas of the vaginal orgasm) that the clitoris was the seat of female orgasm. He also lowered to the level of prostitutes those women who would provoke their husband's desire and engage in intercourse with them without desire, love, or sexual gratification. In other words, it was a woman’s responsibility to ensure that she engaged in pleasurable intercourse, for herself and her child-bearing capability. Not without blame, however, husbands who had sex with their wives without pleasuring them sexually were either egotists or fools in Guyot's estimation. It was also a man’s fault if his wife was unsatisfied with their lovemaking.

Speaking with more detailed and advanced scientific knowledge of female physiology than Guyot, Dickinson discounted as old-fashioned his predecessor’s hypothesis about the imperative of female orgasm to reproduction. “Only one modern author, Grosser, holds the belief that woman resembles the rabbit, in that ovulation is precipitated by intercourse,” Dickinson noted. Nonetheless, Dickinson agreed with Guyot about the essential relationship of orgasm to women’s health and to overall marital satisfaction for both women and men.

This concern with marital sexual compatibility and female orgasm with which Guyot and Dickinson were so concerned at such different periods in the study of

15 Guyot, *Ritual for Married Lovers*, 20-21, quotations on 21. For a fascinating history of the evolution of the scientific debate surrounding the importance of female orgasm to conception as it was tied to advances and setbacks in knowledge of embryology, see Maryann Cline Horowitz, “The ‘Science’ of Embryology before the Discovery of the Ovum,” in *Connecting Spheres: Women in the Western World, 1500 to the Present*, ed. Marilyn J. Boxer and Jean H. Quataert (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 86-94.
sexuality became of great importance to sexologists of the early twentieth century interested in "sex problems." James G. Kiernan, prolific author of the "Sexology" column that appeared in the scientific journal Urologic and Cutaneous Review in the second and third decade of the twentieth century, promoted the idea that women were as virile as men and that individuals of both sexes sought one another out for sexual relations.16 Unfortunately, according to Kiernan and others, married people's desire was often mismatched, rendering their sexual relations mutually unpleasant.17 He too reported that the marital sexual embrace could be considered abnormal or unnatural when desire was absent or deficient in either the man or the woman. Such cases were "a common feature of the ill-mated union" and the "bane of monogamy."18

Some scientists believed that mismatched marital unions led to sexual excess within or outside the marriage. Sexual excess was probably one of the most discussed sexual problems of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and manifested itself in nymphomania or masturbation (which I discuss in greater detail later). Other medical men of the time believed that there was no one explanation of what constituted sexual "excess," instead arguing that every person, man or woman, had different sexual needs.

16 The first instance of James G. Kiernan's "Sexology" column appeared in the Urologic and Cutaneous Review, 17, no. 7 (July 1913). In August 1923, a eulogy to Kiernan appeared. Following this, John F. W. Meagher apparently took over the column. By 1926, the sexology column seems to have become pretty peripheral. There were few articles in the section compared to those dedicated to urology, dermatology, syphilology, and radiology, which preceded it. Almost all the articles in each of these sections dealt with fiction and were "reviews" of other work, but the sexology column, in particular, concentrated on fiction, marriage advice, and writings about feminism. Mention of homosexuality and other "perversions," which Kiernan had exhibited a keen interest in, greatly decreased with Meagher's takeover of the section. Also, articles in the sexology column became more anthropologic in nature—seeming to take the place of those that had been previously published in "Musings in Historical Paths and By-paths" section, although this section still existed.

17 James G. Kiernan, "Sex Problems," Urologic and Cutaneous Review 18, no. 8 (August 1914): 430-34. In the "Sexology" column, Kiernan often paraphrased or reported on the work of others. In this case, he addressed the work of a doctor whose last name was Allen, who had published a number of articles on sex problems in the Lancet-Clinic.
A. C. Moore, a Wyoming, Ohio, doctor, responded to the many discussions of "hyperasthesia sexualis" circulating in the late nineteenth century, by asking: "What is the point of sensibility or frequency in indulgence that marks the excess?" In his forty-six years of practice, he claimed that he had encountered numerous cases of what might be considered so-called excessive libidos from which he could detect no mental or physical derangement. Among these cases, was that of Mrs. G, the mother of two children, who reported having sex with her husband an average of three times a day. Her husband later reported to the doctor that she had understated the frequency. Although the frequency was more than an earlier doctor had reported as being "excessive," Moore believed that what was too much for one couple might be the perfect amount for another. What became a problem, however, was when couples were mismatched and one or the other partner participated in "illicit love" outside the marital union.

As the twentieth century progressed and the existence of female sexuality became more commonly recognized and accepted as "normal" (within well-defined limits), twentieth-century social hygiene reformers also recognized the desirability of actually discussing and fostering the sexual instinct and sexual prowess in both men and women. As Chicago doctor Denslow Lewis said in 1908, "Did it not assert itself there would be neither marriage, children, home, nor the truest happiness." However, many scientists and social critics, often affiliated with what was called the "purity movement" or

21 Moore, "Hyperaesthesia Sexualis," 347.
22 Denslow Lewis, "The Control of the Sexual Instinct," Medical Examiner and General Practitioner 19 (April 1908): 105-9, quotation on 105. The paper was originally presented to the National Purity Congress, 31 October-6 November 1907, Battle Creek, Mich.
“social/sexual hygiene,” who were still somewhat ambivalent about female desire (despite their fears of white race suicide), focused their concern on self-control. Most agreed with Lewis’s assertion that seduction, criminal abortion, infanticide, masturbation, venereal infection, prostitution, marital discord, and divorce were all the result of “misdirection of the sexual impulse.” In other words, “IF SELF-CONTROL WERE EXERCISED THESE THINGS WOULD NOT BE.”

Women, hygienists believed, should be educated about sexual matters so that they might better understand their own sexual function—in fact, much of the early move toward sex education in schools stemmed from purity reform. They recognized the existence of female sexual desire; yet, according to Lewis, women’s “desire to be [sexually] continent exists almost as a rule.” Similarly, despite the detailed attention she paid to female sexuality in her 1919 *Sex Life of Girls and Women*, Arkansas Christian advice writer for girls Grace Reese Adkins noted, “it is probable that comparatively few young women ever experience conscious sexual desire before marriage. The sexual impulse within them is vague and indefinite, and its promptings are not to illicit sexual intercourse, but rather to the thrill which comes from more casual contact with one of the opposite sex.”

Statements such as these deemphasized female sexual desire in favor of continuing the sexual double standard. Although purity reformers paid lip service to the normality and necessity of female sexual desire and often advocated a so-called single standard of sexual purity for both men and women, many placed the responsibility for

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23 Lewis, “Control of the Sexual Instinct,” 105 (emphasis in original).
sexual control on women. Woman's role was to thwart male advances, to raise him to her own, presumably pure, level. More concerned with propriety than reality, some purity reformers believed that "a girl must always be on her guard to see that she is in no way personally responsible for arousing sexual desire in the opposite sex." Respectable ladies should always attend to their apparel, favoring plain clothes over fancy. Not only did plain clothes make it easier to work or study hard, but, "at the same time, those around you will not think you dressed up for a discreditable purpose."

Others purity reformers, although adhering still to the idea that men's sexual impulse was stronger than women's, believed men also had a responsibility to maintain sexual control. These men and women asserted that sexual control for men was far more difficult because it was "opposed to his natural instinct." Lewis, for example, believed that "as the pursuer," man was "influenced by nature to make sure that the race is perpetuated, and for that reason he becomes by nature an insistent aggressor."

Nonetheless, male control was possible with early education and recognition that while occasional erections and nocturnal emissions (and perhaps even masturbation) were normal, continence and avoidance of disease or premarital impregnation was more desirable.

As concern grew in the early twentieth century among some sexologists over the expression of natural female sexuality within marriage, so did concern with female

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27. Irving David Steinhardt, *Sex Talk to Girls (Twelve Years and Older)* (1914; reprint, Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1938), 117, quotation on 120.
frigidity and its detrimental impact on marriage. Frigidity was thought to be on the rise among the so-called higher cultural strata (in other words, white, middle- and upper-class people), and many concerned scientists—even if they themselves did not advocate for it—found themselves at the center of a growing anti-immigrant and eugenic movement, which feared that so-called race suicide was taking place in the United States and abroad among whites. While some scientists believed anatomy to be the cause of frigidity, others argued that there was a psychological basis. Originally from Poland, Viennese psychoanalyst and sometime compatriote of Sigmund Freud Wilhelm Stekel believed that frigidity was always a result of a struggle between the sexes. "Much depends always on the feeling-attitude of the sexual partners towards one another. If there is an undercurrent of animosity between them, if the ill-feeling, whether it be conscious or unconscious, is strong enough, an orgasm is regarded by the woman as a defeat and its onset is therefore avoided. . . . Many women refuse to be aroused; other women refuse to acknowledge their feelings."

In 1929, Atlanta doctor Newdigate Owensby reported, "the most common cause of sexual frigidity in the American women is disappointment." This disappointment stemmed from a number of factors. The first was the use of coitus interruptus or withdrawal as a means of birth control among newlyweds. Because men typically ejaculated before women during sexual intercourse, withdrawal meant that a woman never "reached the crisis. Therefore, she fails to have an orgasm and is disappointed."

31 Stekel, Frigidity in Woman, 2.
Continued disappointment soon became a self-fulfilling prophecy, as women learned not to expect gratification from marital intercourse.33 The second main cause of frigidity in American women, according to Owensby, was their often religious upbringing, which made taboo any discussion relating to anatomy or sexual intercourse. Religious upbringing and lack of access to sexual information led women to regard sex as something done only by prostitutes, and thus Owensby argued that women refused to enjoy sex with their husbands for fear of being regarded as such.34

Frigidity was not simply a female problem, however. Owensby blamed the so-called “lost manhood” genre and other quack literature targeted at young men as equally responsible. “Our boys are frequently so thoroughly frightened by the fallacious ideas promulgated by the ignorant laity, and unfortunately, also, too often by ignorant physicians regarding masturbation, that they often develop conditioned reflexes which subsequently produce sexual frigidity and impotence from which many never recover.”35

As the ideas of social hygienists shifted and sexual practices became more visible over the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, doctors and scientists increasingly adhered to pragmatic ideals of human sexual expression. In 1917, New Jersey doctor B. Onuf asserted that although “alienists” and “moralists” were often rightly concerned about masturbation it was more a medical question than a moral one: “Is masturbation a pathological phenomenon in itself or may it not be and is it not often an adaptation to special social conditions?”36 The answer to that question, he argued, was to be found in

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the statistics gathered "among civilized nations," which showed that "at least 90 per cent. [sic] of all adults have sometime in life been masturbators." Given the data, Onuf believed that masturbation could not be considered pathological per se, although frequency and motivation could prove to be pathological among some people.37 This line of reasoning found increasing acceptance in society over the twentieth century, especially as psychoanalytic theories of sexuality developed, most notably those of Sigmund Freud.

By the second decade of the twentieth century, many male and female sexologists, doctors, and social critics began to argue that women had a "right" to sexual expression and fulfillment (although this typically meant within heterosexual marriage) and placed much of the responsibility for female sexual satisfaction on men. Quoting the comments of Alyse Gregory about changing sexual mores in the period following World War I, sexologist John F. W. Meagher reported in 1923, ""However unwilling one may be to acknowledge it, girls began to sow their wild oats. Women of the aristocratic upper classes and the poorest women had never followed too rigidly the cast-iron rules of respectability because in neither instance had they anything to lose by digressing. But for the first time in memory of man, girls from well-bred respectable families of middle class broke through those invisible chains of custom and asserted their right to a nonchalant, self-sustaining life of their own with a cigarette after every meal and a lover in the evening to wander about with and lend color to life."38

37 Onuf (Onufrowicz), "On the Rôle of Masturbation," 566. For a similar argument, see Alfred Gordon, "Sexual Excesses in Relation to Nervous and Mental Diseases," Urologic and Cutaneous Review 33, no. 8 (August 1929): 532-34.
A 1924 article in the *Urologic and Cutaneous Review* quoted Havelock Ellis’s *Little Essays of Love and Virtue* to argue that social evolution had wrongly favored male superiority over women and caused the sublimation of women’s sexual desire.39 Founder of the London Psycho-Analytical and British Psycho-Analytical Societies (1913 and 1919, respectively) and friend of Sigmund Freud, Ernest Jones, in his foreword to K. Menzies’s *Autoerotic Phenomena in Adolescence*, asserted that masturbation was normal behavior. Even in cases where the practice was excessive or prolonged, Jones believed that it only demonstrated possible arrested development in the patient. Furthermore, he noted, what was most potentially harmful was not masturbation itself, but the internal conflict that old-fashioned social proscriptions gave rise to in the individual.40

Pragmatism about human sexuality especially abounded regarding heterosexual sex practiced within the bonds of marriage. Humanities and ethics scholar and medical doctor Millard S. Everett, in his 1932 *The Hygiene of Marriage: A Detailed Consideration of Sex and Marriage*, asserted that many of people’s “moral struggles and worries” about sex were due to mistaken beliefs instilled in children. “Valueless or positively injurious,” these false notions, “were instilled in us so deeply that they became fixations—habits backed up by such intense emotion that they came to be an end in

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themselves, which dominated us, instead of serving our means to happiness.” Instead, Everett believed, moral principles should serve greater human happiness. “A moral principle such as this gives one what may be called a liberal attitude toward sex. It sweeps away many of the old taboos and relieves the conscience of a heavy load of sin which ought never to have been put upon it. But this must not be taken to mean that the new morality gives the individual license to follow his sex impulses selfishly and ruthlessly wherever they may lead him. Modern morality is no less exacting than any previous code.”

Everett recognized that a new moral code in regard to sexuality might yield “startling results,” often reversing what had been considered wrong and right. Among these changes might be greater exposure of women’s body through changed clothing styles; abolition of the double standard of morals for women, “so that certain behavior, such as cigarette smoking, swearing, etc., which was formerly considered coarse or ‘tough’ or even sinful in women, is now regarded as not worse than for men, and often harmless for both”; and greater freedom of association among men and women. Most notable, however, would be the “franker admission of the legitimate place which sexual satisfaction has in a complete life.” Reflecting these changing mores, sexual satisfaction in marriage, especially female desire and orgasm, was increasingly the focus of 1920s and 1930s sex manuals.

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42 Everett, *Hygiene of Marriage*, 64.
44 For a good overview of this trend, see Neuhaus, “Importance of Being Orgasmic.”
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Although such conceptions of looser morality had become more socially acceptable by the 1920s and 1930s, they were not new to all people of the twentieth or even nineteenth centuries. Many scientists, feminists, and social hygienists believed that science, medicine, and rational thinking should take the place of morals, religion, and reactionary reforms where sex was concerned. Florida doctor DeWitt Webb proclaimed at a meeting of the 1893 Florida Medical Association that “the priests in the new world must be the men and the women of the medical profession, . . . for they will teach a physiological basis of the one phase of morals, which belongs to their sphere of life.” Webb did not care that this new model would “run counter to what has passed as the proper teaching” in the past. Instead, emphasizing “self-control and victory” over “repression and retreat” was a step forward in modern society. “Young men and young women shall learn from the doctor what they have not been able to learn from the priest, viz: That in amusements and business, it is possible to have a proper freedom of manners without loss of self-control and self-respect.”

In her 1916 study of forty women, Edith Livingston Smith, assistant professor of genito-urinary surgery at Harvard Medical School, grouped women into two types of “sexual morality” (apparently her term for desire): “(1) Emotional women who are physically awakened early, mental understanding coming later; and, (2) Intellectual women with mental realization of sex, who are either sexually cold or who have complete physical control.” In the second group, Smith classed women with strong maternal instincts, women whose “physical craving is to love and kiss children,” women who

“may hate or merely tolerate men.” Although often beautiful, these women were “not as a rule of the human, feminine type,” and made “very commonplace wives, are sometimes frigid, and in this even are frequently the cause of marital discord.” Despite their powerful maternal instincts, Smith found that among these women were also many “of the adventuress type, the pervert, and the calculating prostitute who is the mistress of a rich man. In such women, good or bad, the sexual feeling may be aroused but mental control is dominant.”

In the early twentieth century, concern was beginning to grow around just this latter type of woman whom Livingston had categorized—essentially, “independent” women (feminists), lesbians, and prostitutes, as Chapter 2 argues. Although these three kinds of women may seem quite different, their sexual and gender outlaw status lumped them together as perverts.

Although speaking more specifically about homosexuality in 1904, William Lee Howard declared that sexual perversion in America had been proven in the past decade to be far more prevalent than the “general practitioner” realized. Howard divided perverts into two classes, the congenital and acquired—divisions which other medical folks had applied to prostitutes and other female sex and gender deviants. [need cites] Howard also noted that perversion’s “victims do not belong to the vicious classes but to those of good birth—socially and mentally—and to those who have had educational advantages; many belonging to the professions.” Although the findings in this article were based on

case studies of two men, Howard's assertions echoed those of many contemporary sexologists.

Some sexologists believed that perversions were simply the result of thwarted natural desires. "Sexual perverts may be divided into two classes; in one they retain the power of deriving sexual pleasure in the ordinary way, and in the other this is lost" by forming the habit of relieving their desire in an abnormal manner. Nonetheless, doctors and social critics alike began to argue that such people should not be criminalized. C. Edwin Goodell argued in 1904 that perverts needed psychological treatment in order to prevent their eventual incapacitation or incarceration in asylums. Most important, treatment was necessary to prevent their becoming "progenitors of tainted issue to increase the ranks of perverts and criminals."49

Although lesbianism was not an unknown factor in female sexual behavior early in the nineteenth century, growing concern (if measured by writing) with homosexuality and innate perversion over the course of the 1800s and well into the twentieth century mostly centered around men. This was at least partly due to the fact that at least some of the early male doctors studying male subjects were themselves homosexual—for example, German scientists Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, Karl Maria Kertbeny, Karl Friedrich Otto Westphal, and Magnus Hirschfeld.50 Most scientists recognized that lesbianism

existed and cited numerous historical—often ancient or among other races—examples as proof, but usually noted that it occurred less in women than in men.51

As time went on, sexologists increasingly recognized that such was not necessarily the case. Krafft-Ebing, for example, noted in 1906 that after much investigation he had determined that inversion was as common in women as it was in men. However, in women, a more chaste education, less frequent opportunity for mutual masturbation, and slower development of the sexual instinct (coupled with timely introduction to the opposite sex at puberty) naturally led many otherwise inverted women into heterosexual activity.52 Scientists began to note that same-sex behavior was possibly more common among women than men because it was more easily hidden behind prevailing social notions of female passionlessness and the closeness of women's friendship. By the mid-1920s some doctors even went so far as to assert that homosexuality was more common in women than in men, maybe even as much as “four to one” one sexologist related, “according to the statement of Havelock Ellis.”53

This increased perception of lesbian behavior among women, as will be discussed in Chapter 2, was the result of two significant factors in women's lives in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In part, increased fear and ambivalence


52 Krafft-Ebing, Psychopathia Sexualis, 397.

53 Bernard Wolff, “Psychic Peculiarities of the Negro,” Urologic and Cutaneous Review 26, no. 9 (September 1922): 547-50, quotations on 549. Alexander Stone, an admirer and friend of the Wolff, read this paper posthumously before the Chicago Academy of Medicine.
surrounding women's increased social, economic, and sexual independence from traditional familial and patriarchal models led to increased perceptions of lesbianism in women. As more women (whether overtly feminist or not) claimed their right to participate politically, work outside the home, enjoy public entertainment alongside men, and express their sexuality outside traditional boundaries, more men (and some women) perceived that there were more "lesbians" in society. Partly, too, women appear to have been more willing and able to express their same-sex desires in a society that offered them increased opportunities for employment and independence, which allowed some women to escape detection and social sanction for their sexually transgressive behavior.

As concern about the existence of lesbians, especially in such sex-segregated environments as girls' schools and prisons, grew, and as sex education began to become more commonplace for women in the early twentieth century, social hygienists began to warn young girls about the potential dangers of becoming too close to their female friends. A 1914 book based on lectures geared toward young Jewish women admonished young, unmarried women to "Avoid girls who are too affectionate or demonstrative in their manner of talking and acting with you; who admire excessively your figure and your breast development; who are just a little too familiar in their actions toward you in touching you about your breasts and body; who are 'rather free and careless, deliberately and without any apparent reason, in the displaying themselves [sic] in your presence; who press upon you too earnestly invitations to remain at their homes over night, and to occupy the same bed together. When sleeping in the same bed with another girl, old or young, avoid 'snuggling up' close together. Avoid the touching of sexual parts, including the breasts, and, in fact, avoid contact of any parts of the body at all. . . . In sleeping in
bed with another female, keep your night gown or robe about you so that you are as well protected from outside contacts as the size of the bed will permit. Let your conversation before sleep be of other than sexual topics. Do not lie in each other’s arms when awake or falling asleep. . . . bear in mind that beds are sleeping places. When you go to bed, avoid sleeping with anyone else. It is more healthful and sanitary to sleep in a separate bed.”

Although most scientific treatises on lesbians in the first half of the twentieth century were reticent about race and seem to have assumed whiteness in their subjects, at least some sexologists believed that lesbianism was more common among African Americans than among whites. Bernard Wolff, for example, reading a paper prepared by the late Alexander Stone before the Chicago Academy of Medicine in 1922, reported that among black women lesbianism was common, although homosexuality was rare among black men. “These women are well known to the police and to others familiar with the negro criminal classes. They practice tribadism or lesbian love.” Alexander went on to note that some of this behavior occurred between women in sex-segregated environments, especially prisons. “In the prison farm at Milledgeville, I am told that these offenders are often caught in the act by the attendants. One very large black woman of a marked masculine type,” who often used one of her abnormally large labium “after the manner of the male organ, as a phallus, in copulation” was determined to have been spreading syphilis among the inmates. “This virago was a tribade who had her

54 Steinhardt, Sex Talk to Girls, 74.
sweethearts among her own sex. She was exceedingly jealous and would on occasion fight furiously for them."

Unlike what many sexologists had argued about lesbian behavior in white women—that it was almost always a result of being separated from men—Alexander also stated that the behavior in African American women seemed "to be practiced as a matter of preference and not for lack of a male partner." In one example, an unsuspecting "medical friend" witnessed "the act of tribadism performed by two sisters, negro girls who were not criminals in confinement. One took the position of the male and the other of the female and by pressure and friction of their external genitals gave every evidence of very lively sexual gratification. This may or may not have been sexually psychopathic, but in the instance of the virago and her sweethearts it was purely homosexual." At first glance, this belief about black female sexuality appears to have been related to persistent ideas about black women as more sensual than their white counterparts; their presumed hypersexuality being the link to their supposed lesbian behavior. In this case Alexander discounted the belief in African American hypersexuality, noting, "The instance of the two sisters is noteworthy, especially when taken in connection with the fact that negro women have rather dull genital sensitiveness and an almost utter lack of lascivious imagination." He went on to note that black prostitutes in French Guiana "could not be aroused by any perverted acts such as cunnilingus practiced upon them, and to all abnormal practices they were either frankly averse or coldly indifferent. In this country, when black prostitutes or black women generally who have no or very little moral sense, are questioned as to their complaisance

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55 Bernard Wolff, "Psychic Peculiarities of the Negro," *Urologic and Cutaneous Review* 26, no. 9

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or willingness to perform abnormal imitations of coitus, they invariably express loathing, and if the act of fellatio is confessed, they allege that it produces nausea and intense disgust. This argues strongly for the mercenary character of the act and against its perverseness.\textsuperscript{56}

Incarcerated African American and white lesbians engaged in same sex behavior that upheld the idea of white women's lesbianism as transitory while black women's lesbianism was more innate (and related to their more aggressive sexual desires). As historian Estelle Freedman has pointed out, lesbianism became synonymous with women's prisons between 1915 and 1965 in the United States. In the early part of the twentieth century, Freedman has argued, scientists such as Charles A. Ford believed that African American female prisoners were the aggressors while white women were their temporary partners.\textsuperscript{57} Although officials at Bedford Hills reformatory in New York noted that white girls found the African American women ""extremely attractive,"" they continued to mythologize black women as sexual aggressors and insisted on segregating the women by race.\textsuperscript{58} Freedman asserts that this myth allowed prison officials to deny black women gender privileges by correlating their aggressive sexuality with masculinity and thus feminizing them in relationship to the white women. By the 1960s, however, psychologists and criminologists had expanded the lesbian label to include white women,

\textsuperscript{56} Wolff, "Psychic Peculiarities of the Negro," 549.


\textsuperscript{58} Freedman, "Prison Lesbian," 423-43, quotation on 425.
whose supposed aggressive homosexuality was equally threatening as that of black women in the earlier period.

Acceptance of different forms of sexuality also saw increased discussion in the twentieth century about whether all humans were inherently bisexual, possessing degrees of both masculine and feminine sexuality within themselves. Discussion of bisexuality had begun in the late 1800s with James G. Kiernan, G. Frank Lydston, and Richard von Krafft-Ebing’s biogenetic explanations of homosexuality, which stressed the genetic bisexuality of human forebears in a world that had since evolved into monosexuality. Krafft-Ebing stressed the work of French sexologist Julien Chevalier, in particular, arguing that bisexuality could occur in one of two ways. In the first scenario, a normal human embryo, which is initially bisexual, a struggle occurred during the sexual differentiation phase of gestation in which one sex won over the other. If this struggle was not won, the individual would not have differentiated properly and would thus be bisexual or homosexual. Such cases were often referred to as psychic hermaphrodites (although they also manifested in genital hermaphroditism) and were thought to be a form of evolutionary degeneration. In the second scenario, the psyche of the evolutionary monosexual man or woman simply developed improperly, resulting in what was known as contrary sexual feeling.

Although Krafft-Ebing and others did not consider bisexual cases necessarily to be degenerate, he and his contemporaries still perceived them as abnormally developed and thought that bisexuality led more women, for example, to participate in deviant

sexual behaviors. Havelock Ellis noted that women with "deviant" sexuality—most often prostitutes or lesbians—had been thought by such sexologists as Lombroso to be bisexual, or of the more masculine type (although he himself believed that this was not always the case). In 1914, sexologist James G. Kiernan similarly correlated bisexuality, physical manifestations of masculinity or femininity, and prostitution.

Perhaps the most noted proponent of bisexual theory in the twentieth century was Austrian psychiatrist Sigmund Freud, who referred to bisexuality as "polymorphous perversity" in children. Freud argued that childhood bisexuality, which often manifested itself in homosexual experiences, was normal and should transform into heterosexuality with physical and psychological maturation. Although he did not cast homosexuality as necessarily perverted or criminal as did many of his predecessors, Freud portrayed heterosexuals as the most developed human form, whereas he cast homosexuals as having arrested development of the sexual instinct. Following this line of reasoning, at least some sexologists by the 1920s believed that some adolescent experimentation with homosexuality was acceptable but that if it persisted into adulthood, there was a problem. Despite concern with lesbianism, growing acceptance of female sexual expression over the course of the twentieth century led some of the more enlightened sexologists such as Freud to argue that homosexual experimentation was not so terrible as

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60 Oosterhuis, Stepchildren of Nature, 66.
62 Kiernan, "Bisexuality."
long as women turned sexually to men as they grew older and fulfilled their duties as mothers and wives.\textsuperscript{65}

**Nymphomania and Masturbation**

Some historians and feminists have argued that the Victorian ideal of passionlessness stemmed from a so-called obsession with controlling female sexuality, which in reality was passionate rather than passionless. Although fears of women’s potentially uncontrollable sexuality plausibly played a part in scientists’, doctors’, and other social critics’ occupation with how female desire might manifest, these people were also genuinely concerned with ameliorating aberrations of female desire—what they perceived as stressful, painful, and abnormal manifestations of physical or mental illness among women who they believed needed help. In their discussions of masturbation and nymphomania (often referred to as hypersexuality or sexual hyperaesthesia), for example, doctors vacillated between discussing how to “cure” such “problems” and deemphasizing the importance of eradicating such behaviors in favor of channeling it into more “normal” sexual outlets.

Unlike previous arguments of social control theorists that allow the subjects of research little or no agency, evidence shows that medical doctors were not simply trying to force female sexuality to conform to a norm with which they felt most comfortable, although this probably motivated many. Rather, a dialectical discourse surrounded female sexuality, whether perceived as normal or deviant, in which women and doctors, among many others, actively participated.\textsuperscript{66} Women asked doctors and scientists to cure

\textsuperscript{65} Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, 133-34.

them of sexual aberrations and doctors responded; at the same time, doctors diagnosed sexual disorders in women who refused to seek help.

Although in the late nineteenth century not all masturbatory women were perceived as nymphomaniacs and not all nymphomaniacs were reported to have masturbated, scientists who discussed female sexuality and gynecology concentrated to a great extent on both of these so-called sexual problems in women and often correlated the two. Well into the twentieth century, masturbation and nymphomania were the subjects of great debate. Scientists argued for years over whether one or both were the cause or a symptom of sexual perversion, degeneracy, or insanity among men and women alike. American doctors began regularly reporting on cases of excessive masturbation and nymphomania during the 1870s and 1880s. In an early example, the case of a thirty-year-old masturbator was related to an 1873 meeting of the Philadelphia Obstetrical Society in which the young woman reported having begun masturbating at age fourteen and had continued, sometimes seven times a day. In 1885, for example, William H. Morrison reported on one such case, originally documented by Philadelphia doctor Charles K. Mills, and included a lengthy "history" supposedly related by the twenty-nine-

year-old patient herself, but which the doctor would not read to his audience with her in the room.69

Doctors grappled with the question of whether men or women masturbated more. According to Philadelphia doctor Theophilus Parvin and many of his contemporaries, masturbation was more common in men than in women.70 But not everyone agreed. In his 1898 article "Auto-Erotism," English sexologist Havelock Ellis noted that his predecessors had debated this question for years, some arguing that it was either men or women, others insisting that there was no difference between the sexes.71 Ellis agreed with those who favored women as more avid masturbators, citing the work of Italian sexologist G. B. Moraglia, who noted that the configuration of women’s sexual organs, "with their sensitive cleft, in itself an invitation to manipulation," made it more "natural" that they should masturbate often. Another difference was that men possessed only one "sexual center," the penis, whereas women had several, the clitoris, vagina, uterus, and breasts.72 Furthermore, Ellis pointed out, men had been conditioned to believe that masturbation was harmful, found physical outlets in their more active lives, and by the end of puberty had found ways of gratifying themselves with the opposite sex (he never mentions if this is with prostitutes or young women of their own age). Women, however, were not restrained by verbal taboos against masturbation, had fewer opportunities to engage in physical play, and were shut out from premarital sexual gratification with

69 Morrison, "A Case of Nymphomania." Carol Groneman has discussed this case at length in Groneman, Nymphomania, 22-26.
72 Ellis, "Auto-Erotism," 284.
persons of the opposite sex. Because of this, Ellis argued, “after adolescence, . . . there
can be no doubt that masturbation is more common in women than in men.”73 Indeed, he
had been “much impressed by the frequency with which masturbation is occasionally
(especially around the period of menstruation) practiced by active, intelligent and healthy
women, who otherwise lead a chaste life.”74

When women did masturbate, there were many forms that this activity might take.
Especially among women classified as nymphomaniacs, not all of these forms were as
solitary as one might assume. Parvin reported that some young women would “procure
young animals to satisfy their desire; a young puppy will be used to provoke an emission
from the vulvo-vaginal glands.” Others used a “finger, a candle, or [a] wax instrument.”
Washington, D.C., doctor Horatio R. Bigelow reported that Miss H., a twenty-two-year-
old patient of his and confirmed masturbator from age twelve, sometimes resorted to a
“rubber imitation of the male penis.”75 One woman masturbated by rubbing herself
against a key protruding from a dresser; another kneeled in front of a chair and gyrated
her hips until she had an orgasm.76 Havelock Ellis reported that women used “pencils,
cotton reels, hair-pins, bodkins, knitting needles, crochet needles, needles cases,
compasses, glass stoppers, corks, tumblers, tooth-picks, toothbrushes, pomade pots” and
even eggs as masturbatory devices.77 Ellis also noted that French, English, and American

74 Ellis, “Auto-Erotism,” 286.
75 Bigelow, “Aggravated Instance of Masturbation in the Female,” 437.
3 (August 1910): 329-38, 335, 332.
doctors agreed that bicycling could lead to sexual excitement and masturbation in women.\textsuperscript{78}

Also included among nymphomaniac methods of masturbation were lesbian behaviors. Parvin noted that "among [nymphomaniac] women we may have lingual or Sapphic onanism, the one where the tongue, the other where only the mouth is applied to the sexual parts to perform the act." He also described what many of his contemporaries knew as tribadism, "where one woman with an exceedingly enlarged clitoris, will use this organ on a fellow being."\textsuperscript{79} Miss H. supposedly would have a female friend touch her cervix, or if that failed to bring orgasm, "she or her friend would seize the cervix, squeeze and pull it" forcibly ("the more forcible the action, the more intense was her satisfaction") while at the same time stimulating each other's clitorises. According to Bigelow, these young women pleasured each other several times daily and when they were separated practiced their techniques alone.\textsuperscript{80} Similarly, Carlton C. Frederick described the most frequent practice among nymphomaniacs as being tribadism, or "so-called 'Lesbian Love,'" which consists in various degenerate acts between two women in order to simulate the sexual orgasm." Not as common, but just as degenerate, was these women's alleged practice of fondling the genitalia of young boys or babies.\textsuperscript{81}

As early as 1869, Boston gynecologist Horatio B. Storer reported in the \textit{American Journal of Obstetrics} a case of "obstinate erotomania" in a postmenopausal fifty-year-old single American woman of apparently Irish descent.\textsuperscript{82} According to the report, the

\textsuperscript{78} Ellis, "Auto-Erotism," 270.  
\textsuperscript{79} Parvin, "Nymphomania and Masturbation," 51.  
\textsuperscript{80} Bigelow, "Aggravated Instance of Masturbation in the Female," 437.  
\textsuperscript{81} Frederick, "Nymphomania as a Cause of Excessive Venery," 810.  
\textsuperscript{82} Storer, who later became the vice president of the American Medical Association, reported a case of nymphomania in 1856. Horatio B. Storer, "A Case of Obstinate Erotomania," \textit{American Journal of Obstetrics} 60
woman had had sexual intercourse at age twenty-five with the overseer of the mill in which she worked and this incident had lived on in her memory ever since (whether she had had other sexual encounters was not related). Storer noted that the patient (whom he presented to the group in a mask) had often longed for the other sex and frequently indulged in masturbation. Interestingly, given the commonly held notion at the time that women had little or no sexual desire, Storer found these appetites, under the circumstances, "not at all unusual." He was more concerned with her paranoid belief that everyone in her town knew about the long-ago liaison and made veiled references to it in their dealings with her.

Doctors and scientists had many theories about what caused masturbation and/or nymphomania in women. Washington, D.C., physician Horatio R. Bigelow attributed masturbation to both psychic and physical causes. Under the psychic causes he distinguished between those that were subjective—"tainted conditions of heredity" (excessive libido), distorted mental views and consciousness, and an "internal propensity"—and those that were objective—"dwelling on subjective states of mind," moral degradation of nurses (he believed that nurses masturbated babies to soothe them and then taught the babies how to do it to themselves), the impact of civilization (unhealthy associations, reading, diet, and ventilation and theater, dancing, and dress), and improper physiological education. Among the physical causes were diseases of the brain, spine, and "sexual apparatus" (usually the ovaries or uterus) along with ascarides (worms), uncleanness leading to pruritis of the anus or vagina, and an elongated clitoris

Obstetrics 1, no. 4 (February 1869): 423-26. For more about Storer and the earlier case, see Groneman, Nymphomania, 13-16.
83 Storer, "Case of Obstinate Erotomania."
or preputial adhesion. Bigelow recognized that masturbation was often the result of combinations of these causes. A child might be born with a hereditarily enhanced libido (psychical) or a hyperaesthetic nervous temperament (physical) and then have a nurse who taught the child how to masturbate as a way to prevent fornication (psychical). Distorted consciousness (psychical) then came into play when, for example, after reading books that stimulated her desire or dancing with a man in public, the woman justified masturbation as a way to prevent illicit sex with men.

Although the relationship of masturbation to nymphomania was never quite clear, they were usually interrelated. Some doctors and scientists believed that masturbation caused nymphomania or vice versa. In 1905 and 1906, Baltimore doctor William Lee Howard blamed lack of proper education, early masturbation, and acquired inversion for a woman’s persistent nymphomania and argued that masturbatory practices in particular could easily lead to other “variant[s] of sexual activity” or “perversion.” Although he believed that such practices were common and to be expected among women incarcerated in asylums or houses of correction, he was more concerned with the masturbatory practices of “normal” girls and women as he believed masturbation left more permanent effects on women than it did on men. Whereas men as they aged typically ceased masturbation and directed their desire into a “normal” channel, among women, as they grew older, things became more complicated. “Her natural romantic nature is fed by kiss

84 Storer, “Case of Obstinate Erotomania,” 424.
86 Note that Bigelow called this a “universal cause” of masturbation, which is very hard to believe. Perhaps he himself had been taught to masturbate by a nurse and believed this to be true for other children as well?
87 Bigelow, “Aggravated Instance of Masturbation in the Female,” 439.
literature and poetry of the decadents, in which perverted passion is thinly disinfected by erotic mysticism. Under such a stimulating psychic pabulum a dormant sexual volcano may become active, and if it is only smoldering, suggestive dressing, the dance, and wine will soon bring about the complete explosion.” Young women, Howard asserted, soon sought relief in masturbation, “at home in bed with strange and abnormal psychic pictures.” Worse, when such a woman finally married, “her husband is certain to find he has for a wife a female who finds no pleasure in normal sexual intercourse, but an acquired pervert who will insist on some form of mutual masturbation.” According to Howard, and other such sexologists as James G. Kiernan, many couples with problems like these had presented themselves to him, and they often divorced.90

Howard’s case in point was that of the (presumably) white, forty-four-year-old “Mrs. M.” Mrs. M’s problems began with a puritanical New England upbringing, which kept her ignorant of sexual physiology or hygiene. At fourteen, the young, fearful woman was taken under the wing of an older woman while traveling on a train on her way to boarding school. Although Howard chose not to relate in detail what happened next, his description insinuates that the older woman took advantage of the younger or that the younger woman fantasized that such an encounter took place. “That night, the weak undeveloped sexual cells of the cortex were awakened—directed in the wrong channel, and a child masturbator with psychic imaginings and fancies of women constantly arising, was the result.”91 These “inverted pictures” persisted until she was thirty years old and caused significant problems in her heterosexual relationships.

Married at age twenty-four to a businessman five years her senior, Mrs. M was never satisfied by sexual intercourse with her husband and would ask him to leave the room after sex so she could complete for herself the job he did not finish. According to Howard, this behavior on her part led to their separation. As she had grown older, Mrs. M’s desire had increased to the point where passing a man on the street would lead her to have an uncontrollable impulse to masturbate, “which impulse she will immediately gratify by rushing up an alley, or into the closet of the first house, or even a saloon, to which she can gain access. . . . So uncontrollable [sic] has this morbid desire become that she often masturbated under the sheltering shades of a street corner, or any place offering the slightest idea of temporary seclusion.”92 Howard believed that this woman was not a congenital invert. Rather, he blamed her upbringing, and the lack of proper medical (and male) guidance during her youth to set her on path on the path of “normal” sexual activity and allow her to become a “happy wife and devoted mother.”93

Theophilus Parvin, masturbators and nymphomaniacs, much like the prostitutes and criminal women studied by such sexologists as Pauline Tarnowsky in Russia, Cesare Lombroso and Guglielmo Ferrero in Italy, and G. Frank Lydston and E. S. Talbot in America, might have distinctive physical characteristics.94 As with other studies that relied on psychometric and anthropologic techniques, the scientific “findings” often thinly veiled the racial and ethnic prejudices of the scientists, most of whom were men.

92 Howard, “Masturbation in the Young Girl,” 291.
93 Howard, “Masturbation in the Young Girl,” 292.
and all of whom were white. Nymphomaniac faces generally exhibited “coarse skin, large lips, black eyes, dark complexion and a more or less rigid, contracted and prominent condition of the muscles.” Their bodies usually possessed “less fat and connective tissue, so that on the whole the body is more angular and less rounded than in the perfect woman.” However, the general practitioner and layperson could not always be sure that such signs would be clear or absolute. “The evil,” he noted, “may grow in the blonde, and the passion become so imperious as to master the whole woman.”

Men who masturbated also supposedly exhibited distinctive features. In 1904, Hartford, Connecticut, doctor Joseph P. Bolton assuaged the hypochondriacal fear of many masturbating men that everyone they came across could tell by a look on their face that they were guilty of self-abuse. However, he did assert that the experienced observer could easily detect a masturbator: his “pale, pasty complexion, moist furtive eye, dilated pupil, listless, reckless, and depressed manner, the wet flabby, hyperaesthetic skin, all help to tell the story.”

Bolton’s cure for masturbating men was to make them wear what he called “masturbation drawers,” which consisted of “strong canvas drawers, fastened about the waist with steel bands, the side of which are padlocked.” More important was for men to channel their sexual impulse into heterosexual sex. Much like with women, those men who preferred masturbation over normal sexual indulgence showed evidence of congenital perversion and their masturbation habit was a “depressing and more or less


injurious act.” However, as with women, men also could not just force themselves into marriage to relieve their desire. If marriage occurred naturally, fine; “but to select a wife as a remedial agent for masturbation is unjust to the woman and a confession of moral and mental feebleness.” Rather, a man should exercise self-control and “raise himself above the animals by a determined effort of the will,” engaging in vigorous physical exercise to achieve mastery over his lust.

Depending on the perceived level of affliction, institutionalization was often perceived to be the only cure for some nymphomaniacs. Charles H. Hughes, a St. Louis professor and doctor of neurology and psychiatry, referred to such women as “erotopaths” and classified them as insane, although the point at which a nymphomaniac became an erotomaniac remained unclear in his writings. Female erotopaths, according to Hughes, appeared more frequently among “women of refinement in education and environment, of the wealthy, leisurely class.” They had also often been the cause of “real mischief in the world,” and had “disturbed nations, precipitated wars, and caused destruction of peoples.” Even in its milder nymphomaniacal form, Hughes believed that women possessed by such a disease should be “housed in a lunatic asylum or clitoridectomized.”

100 See, for example, Charles H. Hughes, “Erotopathia: Morbid Erotism,” *Alienist and Neurologist* 14 (1893): 531-78; Charles H. Hughes, “The Erotopath in Society,” *Alienist and Neurologist* 24 (1903): 72-78; and Charles H. Hughes, “Erotism and the Unwritten Law in Our Courts,” *Alienist and Neurologist* 28 (1907): 205, 378. Other writers echoed Hughes’ claim that nymphomania in women was a mental derangement. See, for example, Frederick, “Nymphomania as a Cause of Excessive Venery.”
102 Hughes, “Erotopath in Society,” 73.
Doctors performed numerous surgical procedures on nymphomaniac women to “cure” them of their excessive desire.\(^\text{103}\) Believing that the ovaries were “the prime movers and controlling spirits . . . in the sexual system,” doctors most often removed the ovaries and occasionally the uterus to relieve the symptoms of nymphomania.\(^\text{104}\) Afraid of scandal and hoping for a cure for her uncontrollable nymphomania, the family of “Miss C.,” a single, white, twenty-eight-year-old woman, placed her in a Providence, Rhode Island, asylum in the late 1880s.\(^\text{105}\) In May 1888, when it was determined that the asylum treatment had failed to cure her disease, a surgeon performed an ovariotomy, often called “Battey’s operation,” on Miss C.\(^\text{106}\) Although she died nine days later of peritonitis, the doctor felt justified in his diagnosis and treatment.

Many women feared and resisted their sexual urges and requested medical treatment for what they perceived as excessive desire.\(^\text{107}\) A thirty-year-old masturbator “begged” a Philadelphia doctor to remove her clitoris in the early 1870s.\(^\text{108}\) In 1893, twenty-four-year-old “Miss N.B.” asked doctor James E. Moore to “remove her ovaries or perform any operation that would relieve her nervousness, as she termed it.” Although


\(^\text{106}\) Battey’s operation, otherwise known at the time as “oöpherectomy,” “spaying,” or “castration” was usually performed on women at the “change of life” (menopause). See, Robert Battey, “Battey’s Operation and its Natural Results,” *American Journal of Obstetrics and the Diseases of Women and Children* 20, no. 10 (October 1887), 1061.

\(^\text{107}\) See, for example, Chunn, “Case of Nymphomania,” 121. Doctors continued well into the twentieth to report that women were approaching them for advice about and a cure for what those woman considered excessive masturbation. It is not clear if women actually sought doctors out for this or if the doctors simply believed this to be true since doctors typically report for the woman in the records I have used. See, for example, Robert Latou Dickinson and Lura Beam, *The Single Woman: A Medical Study in Sex Education* (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1934), 72-73.
Miss N.B. appears either not to have known or not to have wanted to use the word, Moore quickly determined that she was suffering from nymphomania. According to his account of the case, recorded in the *American Journal of the Diseases of Women and Children*, “The presence of most men, and even of some women, wrought her up to such a pitch that it caused her actual suffering and interfered with her usefulness as a nurse. She was a bright, well-educated, virtuous woman, who had learned at an early age that her condition was an abnormal one and that, in order to save herself from mental and physical wreck, she must avoid self-abuse.” Moore noted that Miss N.B. “had fought a good fight, but felt when she consulted me that she was ready to submit to any treatment, however heroic, that might promise her relief.” At the time, Moore declined to operate.109 Two years later, though, on 12 December 1895, he performed a hysterectomy on Miss N.B. Seven months later, he was happy to report that she appeared in fine health, claiming “that her nymphomania has entirely disappeared and that she has almost forgotten how to shed tears.”110

Moore’s initial decision not to operate on Miss N.B. echoed the concerns of some medical practitioners that surgery was not always the indicated means of cure in nymphomaniac women. Professor of gynecology at Long Island College Hospital in Brooklyn Alex J. C. Skene praised the efforts of scientists who had traced epilepsy in specific instances to the ovaries and eliminated the epileptic symptoms by removing the “offending organs.” However, he also noted that “to remove the ovaries under the guidance of a mistaken diagnosis, and find that the patient is no better, but perhaps worse

108 “Case of Excessive Masturbation,” 294-95.
for the treatment, is one of the greatest failures that can fall to the lot of anyone.” For nymphomania, Skene called on physicians to determine beyond a shadow of a doubt that ovarian disease was indeed the cause of the depravity rather than “indulgence or lack of moral control on the part of the patient.” In many of these cases, he noted, the ovaries would be found to be the “injured” organs rather than the “offending” ones and should not be removed.111

Other scientists were more adamant that surgery was not the best manner of dealing with nymphomania or other manifestations of sexual excess in women. William H. Morrison asserted in 1885 that although he had seen surgery bring some relief in some cases, he had “never seen a case in which these operations exerted a clear and absolute curative effect”; nor should his colleagues expect to find such a correlation, “for the simple reason that we cannot restore an impaired or imperfect nervous system by removal of the clitoris or ovaries.”112 Despite the fact that castration was known to eliminate male erotic desire, Baltimore doctor William Pawson Chunn believed that a similar correlation had not been proved in women and thus refused a patient’s request for an ovariotomy.113 Theophilus Parvin noted that he would not advise the increasingly fashionable ovariotomy because it was an “operation of mutilation,” although he did think that clitoridectomies might provide relief in some cases. Parvin’s favorite method of treatment, however, was application of cocaine to the clitoris. In one case, when he applied “muriate of cocaine” to the clitoris, “the effect was wonderful, the vagina at once

110 Moore, “Nymphomania Cured by Hysterectomy,” 555.
112 Morrison, “Case of Nymphomania,” 540.
113 Chunn, “Case of Nymphomania,” 121.
behaved as well as the most virtuous vagina in the United States.”¹¹⁴ One can only
assume that by this Parvin meant that a virtuous vagina was a sexually anesthetic one.

In addition to concentrating on the ovaries and/or uterus as the cause of excessive
sexuality in women, doctors also targeted the clitoris as a possible cause of excessive
masturbation. Scottish doctor J. Milne Chapman reported in 1883 that in treating a thirty-
six-year old patient for chronic masturbation they first applied dusting powder, then
“blistering fluid” to her clitoris in an apparent attempt to dissuade her from “troubling”
herself.¹¹⁵ In 1892, the attention of Robert T. Morris, a doctor and fellow of the American
Association of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, was drawn to the case of a young woman
who had unsuccessfully undergone traditional treatment for nymphomania under the best
physicians available. Eight years of incurable nymphomania had caused the “refined and
educated” woman to despair, whereupon she withdrew from society and declared further
treatment useless. Curiosity piqued, Morris determined that there must be “peripheral
irritation” somewhere, and “finally discovered that the patient’s prepuce was firmly
adherent to the glans clitoridis.” In a light surgical procedure that became quite common,
he stripped the prepuce from the glans and the nymphomania immediately disappeared.¹¹⁶
Morris and subsequent doctors concentrated heavily on the clitoris and other external
genitalia in cases of chronic masturbation and nymphomania, along with a host of other

¹¹⁴ Parvin, “Nymphomania and Masturbation,” 51.
¹¹⁶ Robert T. Morris, “Is Evolution Trying To Do Away With the Clitoris?” American Journal of Obstetrics
and the Diseases of Women and Children 26, no. 5 (November 1892): 823-24; and 26, no. 6 (December
1892): 847-58, quotations on 856.

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“nervous disorders.” As Morris succinctly stated, “The clitoris is a little electric button which, pressed by adhesions, rings up the whole nervous system.”

By the early 1900s, however, Morris and others had backed away from surgical intervention (removal of the ovaries, uterus, or clitoris), although they still performed minor procedures to lessen preputial adhesions, with some reported success. A 1901 report from the Woman’s Hospital Society, noted that a few women—most of whom were masturbators—had their clitorises amputated (clitoridectomy), but also stated that at least one doctor (W. Gill Wylie) saw little reason to perform such surgery anymore.

Thus as the nineteenth century progressed into the twentieth, discussion about masturbation gradually shifted its focus from curing the masturbator of the habit to recognition that masturbation, in moderation, was a natural outcome of the healthy sexuality of men and women. Hughes argued, “the poor unfortunate masturbator has been more sinned against than [is] sinning” and should be pitied rather than vilified. Hughes believed that only among insane people did masturbation persist to a fatal extreme.

“The observation of most alienists is to the effect that excessive masturbation is more often the result of insanity than the cause of it. The same is true of natural excess. A combination of depressing causes brings about lowered neuropsychic tone, the drain of sexual excess and the demands of an imperative daily occupation superadded with the additional exhausting influences of other vices, such as smoking, alcohol, etc. . . . It is only the psychically unstable who persist in this excess to the extreme fatal endings found among the insane. Sexual excess is therefore usually one of the predisposing factors to nerve break-down. The other

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117 Morris, “Is Evolution Trying To Do Away With the Clitoris?” 858.
and chief on is inherent nerve instability, born in the organism and brought from
latency into active life by this indulgence.\textsuperscript{120}

Normal men and women would eventually marry, at which time their sexual impulse
would be redirected to heterosexual intercourse, thus making masturbation unnecessary.
Unless masturbation was excessive or perceived to be physically harmful to a man or
woman, by the 1920s most doctors focused more on promoting healthy sexual expression
among heterosexual married couples than on their masturbatory habits.

Many doctors of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were concerned
and convinced that women found sexual gratification during gynecological exams.
Theophilus Parvin related this “peculiar phenomena,” which he first experienced in the
1880s during a routine pelvic exam. “When the finger was introduced into the vagina, as
soon as the clitoris was barely touched, there were produced irregular movements of the
hips and pelvis. As the finger was advanced the muscles about the vagina were thrown
into a state of contraction, which closed it tight on the finger, and this caused a sense of
gratification to the woman.”\textsuperscript{121} Horatio R. Bigelow was subjected to a “most
embarrassing” moment when his examination of twenty-two-year-old masturbator Miss
H. “provoked the most intense orgasm that I have ever witnessed.” Even worse,
according to Bigelow, Miss H.’s “moral nature is nil, and while she has never received
the embraces of men, she is a demon of sensuality, not hesitating to masturbate herself
upon the table, or in the chair while relating her history.”\textsuperscript{122}

\textsuperscript{120} Charles H. Hughes, “Insanity and Masturbation and Sexual Excess,” \textit{American Journal of Dermatology
and Genito-Urinary Disorders} 6, no. 4 (July 1902): 152.
\textsuperscript{121} Parvin, “Nymphomania and Masturbation,” 50.
\textsuperscript{122} Bigelow, “Aggravated Instance of Masturbation in the Female.” For other examples of women
supposedly enjoying gynecological exams, see Chapman, “On Masturbation as an Etiological Factor in the
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G. Frank Lydston reported that nymphomania was often the underlying cause for women's trips to male gynecologists and their requests for surgical procedures. He called on his male peers to be on their guard against such women, claiming that "the subterfuges and devices of such patients to induce handling of the sexual of the sexual organs on part of the physician are something remarkable." Most commonly, women would pretend that they could not urinate, but Lydston warned that they would complain of any disease they had heard of to get pleasure at the doctor's hand. Perhaps in a bit of hyperbole, Lydston went on to note that when gynecological manipulations no longer did the trick in such women, surgical procedures were then required to "secure an orgasm."1 2 3

It is impossible to know with certainty if these reports were manifestations of doctors' own fantasies or if women did indeed pursue and experience orgasm and erotic pleasure on the examining table. Theophilus Parvin cautioned his fellow doctors in 1886 to protect themselves against the "claims of depraved women that [doctors] have had intercourse with them while under the influence of chloroform." To avoid such accusations, he suggested that they always conduct examinations in the presence of a third party.124 Similarly, in 1903, St. Louis professor of neurology and psychiatry Charles H. Hughes remarked that he pitied any doctor or gynecologist who was unlucky enough to encounter such a "morbid erotopath" for whom they had been unable to secure commitment to an asylum. "Pity also the physician with a large office practice among women, who may happen to have one such among his office patients who has developed

123 Kieman was quoting an unidentified 1891 Alienist and Neurologist article by Lydston here. See James G. Kieman, "Responsibility in Sexual Perversion," Chicago Medical Reporter 3 (1892): 185-210, quotations on 202-03.
124 Parvin, "Nymphomania and Masturbation," 50.
morbid erotic yearnings after him and who insanely believes that not his moral sense and ethical obligations govern him, in his nonreciprocity of feeling, but his fondness for his other lady patients.” In such cases, Hughes suggested, the doctor should quickly “get such patients into the hands of women physicians if he can, notwithstanding their usual aversion to their sex as doctors for women, or into safe asylum treatment.”125

Robert Latou Dickinson was similarly vocal about the orgasmic experiences women had while undergoing examinations by him. In the midst of his clinical notes from the examination of a patient suspected of autoeroticism in 1895, in which he noted that she was “upset by brother’s death” and demonstrated signs of “cervicitis, mastitis, [and] labial corrugations,” Dickinson wondered, “did she possibly have an orgasm on the table?” In another case, a twenty-three-year-old woman who had come in for a dilation and curettage procedure denied “all throbbing, itching or sensation in the genitals,” but admitted that when she used a syringe (douche) or when Dickinson treated her “I have faintness, all flowing away down there.” At subsequent visits, the young woman reported experiencing the same “flowing away feeling” before her periods, “that awful local weakness, the way I am on your table.” Dickinson noted that her vulva was “very purple and she behaves erotically on the table, the levator jumping; hymen is easily two fingers.” Obviously experiencing sexual desire, the patient reported that she had had the same “weak feeling just sitting on a beach with a fellow; I felt it the same as when you hit a spot when I am on the table, I ached so down there I couldn’t go home for an hour.” This passion continued through her thirties; Dickinson reported that this woman had two “most obstinate variety[ies]” of constipation: of the bowel and of the thought. “For the

125 Hughes, “Erotopath in Society,” 73.
sexual blockade, she goes oftener and oftener to the specialist's table, notwithstanding the protests of both internist and gynecologist," presumably to find sexual gratification.\(^{127}\)

Although it is impossible to know if the following description given by Dickinson is true, he nonetheless believed the story plausible enough to record it. This woman, a chronic masturbator whom Dickinson described as "emotional, dreamy, [and] impractical, claimed, "the doctor who treated her for myositis made her strip for every massage and gave orgasm by vulvar pressure, took other liberties."\(^{128}\) If such cases actually occurred, the cautionary tales of men like Parvin and Hughes ring true.

There is evidence that some doctors or scientists may have masturbated female patients, most likely while conducting experiments. In response to J. Milne Chapman's 1883 article in which he discounted the existence of female ejaculation corresponding to that of the male during orgasm, an anonymous reader wrote to the *American Journal of Obstetrics* that she or he had conducted experiments and gathered scientific evidence to the contrary. In a note following the brief letter, Paul F. Mundé, editor of publication responded:

> We ourselves have seen the gushing, almost in jets, of clear viscid mucus from the external os [cervix] during evidence sexual excitement produced by a rather prolonged digital and specular examination in an erotic woman (a 'femme entretenue,' a blonde Swede). The lips of the external os alternately opened and closed, with each gaping emitting clear mucus, until the excitement (which we confess to having intentionally prolonged by gently titillating the cervix with a sound through the Sims speculum) reached such a height as to cause the woman to sit up on the table, and thus end the experiment. It should be stated that a nurse was present, and in view of that fact it was thought allowable to use this exceptional opportunity to test the correctness of the observations . . . to the effect


that the external os alternately contracts and dilates during sexual excitement. A confirmation of [these] views was the result.  

Whether women were experiencing orgasm at the hand of doctors or not, some men, such as Dickinson, found the possibility disturbing and tried to thwart such behavior. When another of his patients from 1895, a “mentally defective” girl who he began to see when she was sixteen years old, “was erotic at examination,” Dickinson reported, “I hurt her promptly, in order to associate pain and not pleasure with treatment.”  

Many scientists and doctors believed that nymphomania first led women to engage in masturbation (or vice versa); promiscuous sex with both men and women, prostitution, and other perversions followed soon thereafter. Theophilus Parvin described three stages of nymphomania among women: in the first, a woman maintained control over her desire but often secluded herself to “dream over her passions”; in the second, she actively sought men, “and by lascivious looks and gestures,” and partially uncovered parts of her body, gave “evidence of her terrible infirmity”; in the third, the woman became “truly a maniac and gratifies her desires . . . by seeking connection with men and even with dogs.”  

Charles H. Hughes reported that among the erotopaths he knew some were attracted to the opposite sex and some to the same sex. Some had continuous nymphomaniacal feelings; others experienced it periodically, sometimes monthly in correlation with their menstrual cycle, sometimes in correlation with uterine disease or irritation of some kind. Some women loved the object of their choice in a singular and

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131 Parvin, “Nymphomania and Masturbation,” 50.
platonic way; in others it was “multifarious, promiscuous, lascivious, and passionate.” Still others, typically of the insane to mildly insane group according to Buffalo, New York, doctor Carlton C. Frederick, were “liable to resort to exposure of their persons or by lascivious movements in the presence of men, and thus invite coitus.” With such wide variety possible among women classed as nymphomaniacs one wonders that all women were not thus classified.

Nymphomania was often cited as the cause of women’s promiscuous relations with men. In an 1892 case, reported by J. Tabor Johnson to Washington, D.C. professor of nervous diseases Irving C. Rosse, a young nymphomaniac reported that “several persons, among them her clergyman, had cohabited with her.” So persistent was this young woman’s disease that when her doctor (whom she had also tried to seduce) tied her hands, she accomplished an orgasm with her heel. “To prevent this the feet were secured, but she succeeded in bringing about an orgasm by pressing the thighs together in such a way as to excite the clitoris.” The case progressed into full-blown erotomania and the woman died soon thereafter.

Some scientists portrayed women as sexual predators. In 1907, Charles H. Hughes, a St. Louis doctor, argued that courts and legislation ignored the role women played in seducing men into improper sexual relations, most notably adultery and prostitution. “The wiles of women,” he noted, “are quite equal in seductive power and quite as freely, frequently, and adroitly exercised for the betrayal of men, as the blandishments and promises of men are toward women. The sex is not sinless and

133 Frederick, “Nymphomania as a Cause of Excessive Venery,” 810.
psychological science can not so declare."\textsuperscript{136} Hughes believed that much sexual impropriety was the result of the pure animal passion of men and women. However, Hughes went on to blame the acts of both men and women on alcohol, which he saw as the "breeder and inciter" of not only violent erotic impulses that led to infidelity but also the jealousy and suspicion that led to domestic violence and abuse.\textsuperscript{137}

Not only might nymphomania lead women into promiscuous relations with men, but it also potentially affect their ability to see racial and ethnic differences in ways that society deemed proper. Charles H. Hughes reported that one of his erotopathic patients, housed in an insane asylum, "sought the embraces of any man who approached her, and through the bars of the corridor or of her room would importune the male employees without distinction even of color."\textsuperscript{138} Such behavior was only understandable in the context of hypersexuality, which led women who would otherwise know better to cross color and class lines.

Many sexologists believed that a strong link existed between masturbation and/or nymphomania in young women and homosexual behavior later in life. Such arguments were intimately related to those just noted, which emphasized female masturbation's negative effect on women's marital stability and stressed that masturbation produced an aversion to "normal coitus" among women. In cases that led to inversion, according to James G. Kiernan, women going through puberty sometimes developed what he called a "parasitic ego," which then altered the normal sex-mental relationship. A woman with a

\textsuperscript{135} Rosse, "Sexual Hypochondriasis," 798.
\textsuperscript{136} Charles H. Hughes, "Erotism (Normal and Morbid) and the Unwritten Law in Our Courts," \textit{Alienist and Neurologist} 28 (1907): 205-23, 378-99, quotation on 205.
\textsuperscript{137} Hughes, "Erotism (Normal and Morbid)," 399.
\textsuperscript{138} Hughes, "Erotopath in Society," 77.
parasitic ego then fantasized herself performing both parts of the sexual performance, and thereby acquired a type of sexual inversion.\(^{139}\) A Memphis doctor named Hoyt, whose findings were supported by Kiernan and Lydston, believed that "over-stimulation of the receptive sexual centers, due to masturbation" had been the cause of the sexual perversion of a young woman who eventually killed her female lover in 1892. The instigator in this case (probably Alice Mitchell), began to masturbate alone, then taught her friend (probably Freda Ward) the practice. Soon thereafter they began practicing mutual masturbation, "perverted sexual love was the result," and the two became engaged. Relatives soon suspected the illicit liaison and forbade the young women to see each other, whereupon the "sexual pervert" killed her lover.\(^{140}\)

Krafft-Ebing and others believed that hypersexuality caused homosexuality in women, especially when they were sex-segregated in certain situations such as in prison or closely watched daughters of the higher classes of society.\(^{141}\) The same logic applied to women who attended boarding schools, women in nunneries, and women in brothels.

Some scientists believed that prostitution might provide some kind of "cure" for nymphomania. In response to the case study reported by Storer, Dr. Field of Newton Corners stated that this case exemplified the conflict between "what is demanded by

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\(^{139}\) Kiernan, "A Medico-Legal Phase of Auto-Erotism in Women." He noted that these conclusions were based on years of work, which began as early as 1891 with articles published in *Alienist and Neurologist* and *American Journal of Dermatology* for which I do not have citations. See footnotes 2, 3 in ibid., 331.

\(^{140}\) It is unclear who is being quoted where in this passage. The article is by Kiernan, who apparently was relating a case study by the unidentified Hoyt. However, Kiernan also referred directly to Lydston in the telling of this story. See, Kiernan, "Responsibility in Sexual Perversion," 210. The facts given about the case make it seem likely that the Hoyt study was referring to the famous case of Alice Mitchell and Freda Ward. For more information on this case, see Lisa Duggan, *Sapphic Slashers: Sex, Violence, and American Modernity* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2000), and Lisa Duggan, "The Trials of Alice Mitchell: Sensationalism, Sexology, and the Lesbian Subject in Turn-of-the-Century America," *Signs* 18, no. 4 (1993): 791-814. See also Krafft-Ebing’s report on Mitchell and Ward in Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 581-85.

\(^{141}\) Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 397.
deference to public morality, and what seems required for a patient's health." His suggested cure seems radical for the time and was admittedly one that a doctor could not prescribe: "If this woman could go masked as she is at the present moment to a house of prostitution, and spend every night for a fortnight at sexual hard labor, it might prove her salvation." Likewise, he reckoned, a doctor could not recommend masturbation although it might provide the means by which to relieve a "local fret, whose influence upon the mind, if not thus relieved, might prove more disastrous." At least to this doctor, the mental ramifications of her disease were far more troublesome than the thought of her participation in illicit sexual activity.

Despite the recommendations of such rare doctors, most late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century physicians shied away from prescribing prostitution or masturbation for their female patients suffering from unrequited sexual desire, although they often noted that the one led to the other. Doctors did, however, recommend that women marry in order to satisfy their sexual needs. After trying several treatments for his patient's nymphomania, including a pessary and a "short course of the bromides" (an ingested sedative), William Chunn suggested that this twenty-three-year-old woman find a husband. In addition to keeping company with "pure, strong minds" in a "bracing climate" with "rigorous out-of-door exercise," Horatio Bigelow recommended that chronic masturbators should marry and experience "natural sexual gratification."

Some doctors—and their patients—rejected the idea of marrying one man to cure nymphomania. Chunn's patient rejected marriage, reminding him that she had "derived

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143 Chunn, "Case of Nymphomania," 121.
no permanent benefit" from the few illicit sexual encounters in which she engaged and thus did not believe that licit sex would work any better.\textsuperscript{145} In 1886, Theophilus Parvin, a Philadelphia doctor, related the case of a Parisian nymphomaniac who had been placed in an asylum. After overhearing a conversation between her “alienist” and her parents in which the former suggested marriage as a cure for her condition, she escaped. Shortly thereafter, the doctor saw her on the street, where she had become a prostitute. According to Parvin, the young woman “told [the doctor], with pleasure, that she had cured herself.” Parvin believed that while marriage might be a cure in some cases of nymphomania, it would not do in others. In instances where “excessive indulgence or onanism” had caused the disease marriage would not work, since the woman would now be able to indulge her excessive desire with impunity.\textsuperscript{146}

In the 1920s, Wilhelm Stekel argued that rather than nymphomania being the cause of same-sex behaviors or prostitution in women, the opposite actually held true. “Nymphomania,” he argued in his 1922 \textit{Bi-Sexual Love: The Homosexual Neurosis}, “shows the same homosexual basis as satyriasis” and “latent homosexuality is what drives many women to prostitution. They run away from woman and into the arms of man, into the arms of a great number of men. They expect quantity to replace what quality fails to supply them.”\textsuperscript{147} Although some prostitutes had male lovers with whom they experienced orgasm and to whom they were emotionally attached, Stekel believed such cases were far less prevalent than those of homosexual prostitutes. “In the presence

of an already avowed homosexual inclination, disgust brought about through a number of
possible circumstances may act as an effective barrier against heterosexuality."148
Clifford Allen, writing in 1940, echoed this idea. Allen believed that hypersexuality was
rare in women, despite legend, and suspected that images of such women should be
regarded as a “wish-fulfilling fantasy because in reality so many women have been frigid
and unresponsive.”149 However, in those cases where what he called “sexual
hyperversion” did occur, he believed the woman to be homosexual and thus acting in an
active rather than a passive way, reconciling her Oedipal conflict and seeking a father-
surrogate. This homosexual “psychogenic” basis inevitably led such women to
promiscuity, alcoholism, and sometimes prostitution.” Allen did not, however, think that
homoerosexuality which led to hypersexuality was the sole cause of prostitution. He also
believed that a strong element of prostitution was the “narcissistic-exhibitionistic one: the
love of finery and self-adornment; the wish to show oneself off, and be admired.”150

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined changing notions and persisting ideas of female
desire in sexological literature in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century United States. As
the supposed ideal of female passionless was increasingly challenged and disproved by
scientific evidence of public and private female behavior and as sexologists began to
recognize the existence of female sexual desire, society shifted back to the belief in the
presence and importance of women’s sexual desire and accepted masturbation and
marital sexual satisfaction of both men and women. Although the supposed nineteenth-

148 Stekel, Bi-Sexual Love, 281.
149 Clifford Allen, The Sexual Perversions and Abnormalities: A Study in the Psychology of Paraphilia, 2d

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century ideal of passionless had never really held as reality for most women, excessive and uncontrolled sexual desire and acts caused concern among doctors and women alike, despite their acceptance of female desire. This tension between recognition of female desire and fears of female sexual excess caused doctors, reformers, and sometimes women themselves to scrutinize more closely such deviant manifestations as nymphomania and excessive masturbation among women. Women who wished to be “normal” (or perceived as such) often resisted what they perceived as their excessive desire and asked doctors and scientists to “cure” outward manifestations of it. Sexologists often diagnosed women with excessive desire as psychologically or physically ill, prescribing everything from institutionalization and surgery to prostitution and marriage in their attempts to relieve symptoms of sexual excess.

The importance of this chapter to the next is in the connections made between excessive female sexuality and other, more threatening, kinds of female sexual deviance. Whereas nymphomania and masturbation could be found (but potentially cured) in “normal” women, they might lead to less curable and more stigmatized behaviors such as prostitution or they might be symptoms of innate homosexuality. In Chapter 2, I explore the links between nymphomania and masturbation and prostitution and lesbianism, ultimately linking these two sexual deviances to fears of female sexual, political, and economic independence at its most frightening—feminism.

150 Allen, Sexual Perversions and Abnormalities, 207.
151 For a discussion about the difference between “what ought to be and what was” in nineteenth-century women’s sexuality, see “What Ought To Be and What Was: Women’s Sexuality in the Nineteenth Century,” American Historical Review 79, no. 5 (December 1974): 1467-90, and Carl N. Degler, At Odds: Women and the Family in America from the Revolution to the Present (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), esp. chap. 11.
CHAPTER 2

UNDER THE GAZE: SEXOLOGISTS, PROSTITUTES AND LESBIANS, AND FEMINISTS

Although there was much debate and concern surrounding excessive female sexuality in the form of nymphomania and masturbation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as shown in the previous chapter, one of the most problematic forms of female sexual behavior was prostitution, which was seen to be an extension of female hypersexuality. As scientific studies of female sexuality proliferated over the nineteenth century, many scientists and social reformers scrutinized the profession, coming to numerous conclusions about the nature, causes, and extent of prostitution and what its existence revealed about female (and male) sexuality. Perhaps not surprisingly, prostitution was often linked to other forms of female sexual and gender deviance. However, what is surprising is that prostitution evoked not just such conditions of nymphomania, but also lesbianism, which at first glance seemed quite unlike commercial sex. As the links between prostitution and lesbianism became firmly forged in the minds of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century experts and social reformers, the two groups of women were conflated with feminists. Women’s increasing social, sexual, and economic independence among all classes and races—along with the growing public visibility of middle- and upper-class white women in urban settings—led to these connections in the minds of many American scientists and reformers.
As scientific studies of female sexual deviance proliferated and became increasingly explicit, scientific methods of the study of sex also changed. What originated as geographically specific social studies of the demographics and causes of prostitution split into two branches after the middle of the nineteenth century: reform tracts railing against sexualized bodies and acts, especially prostitutes and prostitution, and medical studies of those same bodies and acts. Moral reform literature had become common by the 1870s and continued to be so well into the twentieth century, relying on moral invectives to argue that prostitution was a social evil that needed to be eradicated. Medical literature also hit its stride around the 1870s, although its methods changed more during the years between 1870 and 1940 than did those employed in the moral reform genre. By the end of the nineteenth century, sexologists relied increasingly on women’s verbal and physical confessions regarding their sexual behaviors. Such inquiry led to ever-more detailed studies of women’s erotic histories and genitalia, which scientists felt compelled to justify for fear of being labeled as perverts or their work being dismissed as prurience.

This chapter traces the basic methods and outlines of social discourse surrounding prostitution and female sexual deviance as embodied in medical and reform literature in America between 1870 and the 1930s.¹ I then examine more closely how sexologists scrutinized women’s bodies and listened to women’s sexual confessions, turning the lens onto how scientists and reformers more specifically correlated prostitution and lesbianism

in these years. The chapter concludes by illustrating how female sexual deviance was intertwined with the ambivalence surrounding feminism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the United States. I argue that social fears about women’s potential economic and political independence from men and traditional patriarchal familial structures reflected contemporary fears about women’s sexual aggressiveness and deviance.

The French publication in 1836 of Alexandre-Jean-Baptiste Parent-Duchâtelet’s *De la Prostitution dans la Ville de Paris*, and subsequent English translation in 1845, signaled the first phase of scientific and social studies of prostitution and sexuality. Parent-Duchâtelet’s study was quickly followed in England by Michael Ryan’s 1839 *Prostitution in London* and William Acton’s 1857 *Prostitution: Considered in its Moral, Social, and Sanitary Aspects in London and Other Large Cities and Garrison Towns: With Proposals for the Control and Prevention of its Attendant Evils*, and, in America, by William Sanger’s 1857 *History of Prostitution*. Each attempted to quantify and describe the numbers and lives of prostitutes in major urban areas (Paris, London, and New York) as well as provide historical background on prostitution, which many have referred to as

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2 Alexandre-Jean-Baptiste Parent-Duchâtelet, *Prostitution in Paris, Considered Morally, Politically, and Medically: Prepared for Philanthropists and Legislators from Statistical Documents* (1838, trans. and reprint; Boston: C. H. Brainard, 1845). As with other scientific findings, Parent-Duchâtelet’s finding about the connections between lesbians and prostitutes were often repeated in later sexological work. For example, James G. Kiernan reported Parent-Duchâtelet’s findings over eighty years later in James G. Kiernan, "Homosexuality among Harlots," *Urologic and Cutaneous Review* 20, no. 2 (February 1916): 108.

“the oldest profession” and which many people in the nineteenth century believed to be a “necessary evil.”

On the heels of Parent-Duchâtele, Ryan, Acton, and Sanger, men and women interested in “social purity” began fighting to eliminate prostitution in the United States and abroad in the last half of the nineteenth century. The “social purity” movement in America focused on the so-called evil of prostitution and expressed growing concern over the realities of modern city life during the late nineteenth century. Growing numbers of immigrants from “undesirable” ethnic groups, transient single men, women working outside of the home, and the ever-present specter of the saloon were especially threatening. Fears of these modern problems led people to transfer their stigma directly onto commercial sex workers; they believed that most prostitutes were foreign born, worked in factories, drank too much, and associated with customers of the saloons.

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6 William Sanger noted that it “has been frequently remarked, and is generally believed . . . that a very large majority of the prostitutes in New York are of foreign birth,” however, he disputed this with his findings that of the two thousand prostitutes that he interviewed fewer than half were of foreign nativity. Sanger, *History of Prostitution*, 460. Since New York was the place of entry and settlement for many immigrants one might expect that a higher percentage of prostitutes in New York were of foreign nativity than in other communities. Based on the evidence from New York it seems likely that most prostitutes in the rest of the country were of American birth. Carroll D. Wright rejected the idea that most prostitutes had fallen as a
Prostitution was also seen as “a direct stab at home life” that “discourages home-making by seducing men and women to sensual indulgence which disqualifies the poor dupes for the holy estate of matrimony.” Some reformers believed the social evil even posed a threat to national security because of its effect on the family; according to one, “Men will fight and die for their homes; but not for the boarding house.”

A single standard of sexuality was a major goal of nineteenth-century purity reform, one directly related to the presence of feminist thinkers in the purity movement. Feminist women and men objected that the double standard was unfair to women and promoted prostitution by making it appear “necessary” to satiate men’s elevated sexual desires while supposedly protecting their passionless wives. Moral reformers wanted men and women to comply with their sexual norms, a value system entrenched in Christian morality. A strict single standard, by allowing respectable women a sexuality that compared with and complemented that of their husbands while elevating the morals of men, they claimed, would eliminate much of the supposed “need” for prostitutes.

During the purity crusades of the last half of the nineteenth century, sensationalist result of working in factories. Of almost four thousand “fallen women” he investigated, more than 60 percent had come from either domestic positions or straight out of their parents’ home. Carroll D. Wright, “Does the Factory Increase Immorality?” *Forum* 13 (May 1892): 348-49. Liquor was positively linked to prostitution by many people of the time. Goodchild, who emphasized the strong link between “wine and women,” said that girls were more easily seduced and men more lustful while under the influence. F. M. Goodchild, “Social Evil in Philadelphia,” *Arena* 15 (March 1896) 580. See also M. G. C. Edholm, “Traffic in White Girls,” *Californian Illustrated Magazine* 2 (November 1892): 831; and Pivar, *Purity Crusade*, 81.


Buxton, “Prostitution and Its Remedy,” 40. Boarding houses were often correlated with houses of prostitution both in the census and public imagination; they also represented the lifestyle of single, transient men who often worked in towns with large gender imbalances and thus fewer chances for marriage but more opportunities to visit prostitutes.

Pivar, *Purity Crusade*, 4-5. Many men also emphasized the need for a single standard of sexuality. J. Bellangee issued a scathing attack on the hypocrisy of applying one set of sexual morals to men and another to women in his article “Sexual Purity and the Double Standard,” *Arena* 11 (February 1895): 370-77, passim. Bellangee also attacked the double standard in capitalistic America which praised material success yet condemned prostitutes for the means by which they achieved it (ibid., 377). On the single standard see also Collier, *Social Evil*, 7; and Flower, “Wellsprings,” 57, 60-62.
tracts about prostitution and vice also began to appear. In many ways, these books resembled earlier studies of prostitution in that they also tried to quantify how many prostitutes existed in a certain area, describe where they lived and what their lives were like, and explain what led them into prostitution in the first place. The motivations for writing the books were the same: to explain and eradicate sexual vice. The only difference can be found in the language each author used and the detail into which they went.

As concern with social purity in the early twentieth century turned into full-blown hysteria over the so-called white slave traffic, which eventually led to the passage of such white-slavery legislation as the 1910 Mann Act, studies of prostitution proliferated. These usually took one of two forms. In one group were those that claimed to be more “scientific,” typically vice commission investigations that were funded and directed by municipal governments and progressive era white middle-class social reformers, both men and women. Beginning with the New York City Committee of Fifteen (later the Committee of Fourteen), which published its first findings in 1901, cities around the United States created vice commissions to investigate prostitution and the institutions and

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11 In 1910, the Mann Act made a federal crime the conveyance of women across state lines for prostitution. On white slavery, in general, see Connelly, Response to Prostitution, chap. 6, esp. 113-14; Rosen, Lost Sisterhood, 112-13. Rosen points out that although white slavery was most certainly blown completely out of proportion in the early twentieth century, it did exist. See also Kathleen Barry, Female Sexual Slavery (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1979). For an overview of the Mann Act and how it exemplified the federal push to regulate morality see David J. Langum, Crossing over the Line: Legislating Morality and the Mann Act (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). See also Thomas C. Mackey, Red Lights Out: A Legal History of Prostitution, Disorderly Houses, and Vice Districts, 1870-1917 (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1987).
social norms that upheld it. The findings of the most prominent of these vice committee reports from New York City and Chicago, and based on extensive research conducted in those cities, were published as books about the “social evil.” Although very little specific information about sex and sexuality was revealed in the published works of the vice commissions, the investigative documents that make up the archival collections of these committees, especially investigators’ field reports provide rich material about the sex practices of prostitutes and other sex deviants at the time.

In the second group were books that concentrated more on making strong moral statements about vice, vilifying both the men and women who participated in the sex business or those who engaged in any form of illicit sex. Such texts were also usually written by white, middle-class reformers, and typically contained religious overtones and no (or very veiled) discussion of sex and sexuality despite their titillating titles. White slavery tracts portrayed prostitutes as either helpless victims of unbridled male lust or

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13 These committee reports and supporting materials are voluminous and rich with information. The New York Committee of Fifteen and Fourteen Reports, for example, comprise over 150 boxes of archival materials that are held at the New York Public Library. See New York Committee of Fifteen, The Social Evil: With Special Reference to Conditions Existing in the City of New York (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1902); New York Committee of Fifteen, records, 1900-1901, microfilm (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources); “White Slave Traffic: Presentment of the Additional Grand Jury for the January Term of the Court of General Sessions in the County of New York, in the matter of the investigation as to the alleged existence in the County of New York of an organized traffic in women for immoral purposes,” Filed 29 June 1910 [need full cite]; Report of the [Illinois] Senate Vice Committee (Chicago: Allied Printing, 1916); The Social Evil in Chicago: A Study of Existing Conditions (Chicago: Gunthorp-Warren Printing Company, 1911); and Chicago’s Dark Places: Investigations by a Corps of Specially Appointed Commissioners, 5th ed. (Chicago: Craig Press and Women’s Temperance Publishing Association, 1891). For more information on these two prominent vice commissions, see Clifford W. Barnes, “The Story of the Chicago Committee
deranged, drug- and alcohol addicts who thankfully would soon be dead, much to their
own and society's betterment. In this category were such (in)famously titled works as
Reverend Frederick Martin Lehman's 1910 book *The White Slave Hell: or, With Christ at
Midnight in the Slums of Chicago. Startling Revelations, Thrilling Experiences, and Life
Stories Carefully Gathered from Red Light Districts, White Slave Markets, Segregated
Vice Sections, and Midnight Slum Work of Chicago* and John Regan's 1912 *Crimes of the
White Slavers: And the Results. A Vivid Expose of the Methods Used by This
Unscrupulous Band of Vampires in Their Nefarious Business. Portraying the Snares Laid
for the Unwary Girl to Force Her into a Disreputable Life, and Bring Dishonor into the
Family Circle.*

Increased concentration on venereal disease and its relationship to sexual vice
went hand in hand with the growing concern over so-called white slavery in the early
twentieth century. Debates about venereal disease and prostitution were especially

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prominent in scientific and civic-minded publications and studies. Concern with the eradication of venereal disease and so-called sexual vice (typically thought of as commercial prostitution but also referring to promiscuous sex) and the prevention of white "race suicide," the combination of which was euphemistically referred to as "social hygiene," was widespread in the early twentieth century.  

Many social hygienists worried that prostitution and venereal disease were the result of the lust—both men’s and women’s. In the premiere issue of the *Journal of Social Hygiene*, published in 1914, Charles W. Eliot, the first president of the American Social Hygiene Association (ASHA), expounded on this concern. “Among contagious diseases the most destructive to the white race are the diseases called venereal because they are fearfully poisonous and corrupting, and are caused and spread by vices and animal gratifications in which both men and women have part. . . . In short, these vice diseases, now known to be often communicated to the innocent, are without doubt the very worst foes of sound family life, and thence civilization.”

There was also much fear during the World War I years that having sex with prostitutes, especially the growing class of clandestine “prostitutes” (available young women willing to have sex with young men),...
men for free or for favors), would spread venereal disease throughout the ranks thereby decreasing American preparedness for war.17

Although many Progressive Era doctors, feminists, and social reformers agreed that sexual vice was a "social evil," they did not agree on how best to deal with the problem. Some critics, many of them doctors and educators, advocated the institution of no-nonsense sex education practices for both boys and girls at an early age, promoting the eradication of the silence surrounding sex and venereal disease that they believed led to ignorance and unsafe practices. Many Progressive Era reformers were turning away from the moralizing messages of earlier vice reform and relying heavily on the more

17 Charles E. Smith noted in 1912 that, at least in St. Paul, Minnesota, clandestine prostitutes hailed most often from native-born families than did those more obvious prostitutes. See Charles E. Smith, "Some Observations on Public Health and Morality," St. Paul Medical Journal 14 (1912): 194-202, esp. 195. As Mark Connelly, Kathy Peiss, Joanne Meyerowitz, Elizabeth Clement and others have noted, the technical difference to our modern minds between actual prostitution and promiscuity did not really apply to people living in the early twentieth century. To many these distinctions were vague—promiscuity was often referred to as prostitution and vice versa. See Connelly, Response to Prostitution, 19; Kathy Peiss, Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), esp. 54-55; Joanne Meyerowitz, Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1930 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); and Elizabeth A. Clement, "Trick or treat: Prostitution and Working-Class Women's Sexuality in New York City, 1900-1932," Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1998. Other historians have argued that early-twentieth-century loosening of sexual restrictions, especially those on women, allowed young men to have sex with their peers rather than prostitutes. Many young women during this time who had premarital or promiscuous sex—and even those who only kissed or petted—were deemed prostitutes or were believed to be on their way to becoming one. Some of these women found themselves labeled juvenile delinquents and were incarcerated by both city officials and their parents. See, for example, Ruth M. Alexander, The Girl Problem: Female Sexual Delinquency in New York, 1900-1930 (Ithaca, N.Y.; Cornell University Press, 1995); Mary E. Odem, Delinquent Daughters: Protecting and Policing Adolescent Sexuality in the United States, 1885-1920 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Regina Kunzel, Fallen Women, Problem Girls: Unmarried Mothers and the Professionalization of Social Work, 1890-1945 (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1993); and Clement, "Trick or Treat." During both world wars in the United States, armed forces and municipal officials expressed concern over young women who frequented areas around bases looking for soldiers with whom to drink and presumably have sex. They were also concerned with prostitution, but saw it as a more legitimate outlet for men, as long as the women were free from venereal disease, than non-prostitute women. See Barbara Meil Hobson, Uneasy Virtue: The Politics of Prostitution and the American Reform Tradition (New York: Basic Books, 1987), esp. pt. 3; Pippa Holloway, "Tending to Deviance: Sexuality and Public Policy in Urban Virginia, Richmond and Norfolk, 1920-1950" (PhD. diss., Ohio State University, 1999); Marilyn Hegarty, "Patriots, Prostitutes, and Patriotutes: The Mobilization and Control of Female Sexuality in the United States during World War II" (PhD. diss., Ohio State University, 1998); and Beth Bailey and David Farber, The First Strange Place: The Alchemy of Race and Sex in World War II Hawaii (New York: Free Press, 1992).
“rational” data and conclusions of scientists regarding sex and female deviant behavior, which they believed provided explanations and cures for the social evil.\textsuperscript{18} It is to those studies and their authors that I now turn.

**The Sexologists’ Gaze**

The perceived evil of female sexual deviance, whether in the form of prostitution, lesbianism, hypersexuality, or excessive masturbation, needed to be rooted out and controlled because of the threat it posed to the prevailing sex/gender system.\textsuperscript{19} Yet it must also have been titillating to those who were in the position both to hear sexually explicit stories and to gaze at bodies that performed “abnormal” sexual acts. “Respectable” sexologists repeatedly claimed that scientific objectivity and detachment made them impervious to the erotic component of the subject they studied. However, they also freely admitted that “the sexuality of the male has more to do with the primal cause of prostitution than has the degeneracy of the female” (as well as with the proliferation of pornography at the time),\textsuperscript{20} suggesting that scientists studying sex may have been titillated (or afraid that they might become so) by the sexualized bodies they examined and sexual stories they told.


Although it would be irresponsible to attribute a solely erotic or voyeuristic intent to the studies of sexologists, pornographic components could and did exist in their work to varying degrees. At a time when any public discussion of sex (in the print media, especially) was anathema to "respectable" folks and, in many cases, illegal, graphic written and visual depictions of sex or sexualized subjects even in scientific terms and through scientific media were potentially suspect. Such early authors as William Sanger recognized this problem. While describing prostitutes and their living conditions in 1859, he made it clear that "the endeavor will be to give such particulars as will enable the reader to form satisfactory conclusions without recording what would merely minister to prurient curiosity."\(^{21}\) Sanger did not, however, feel compelled to defend the overwhelming curiosity that led him to conduct his studies and write the book in the first place, presumably because he was a scientist and therefore above such voyeuristic intent.

Neither did his more sensationalistic counterpart George Ellington [pseud.] who declared in 1869, "no apology is needed for the appearance of several chapters in this book on the under-world." His argument was more pointed than that of Sanger, however, noting that studies like his were necessary to revealing the "undeniable fact" that an extensive financial network existed in the demi-monde, involving "the expenditure of millions of dollars annually, invested in dresses, horses, carriages, diamonds, furniture, etc." Not only were women and merchants getting rich in the underworld—"one popular belle alone is known to make and spend money at the rate of thirty thousand dollars per annum" (an amount well exceeding the salary of the President of the United States); but Ellington wished to reveal an equally extensive social network as well. "The number of

\(^{21}\) Sanger, *History of Prostitution*, 549.
fashionable bloods and old fogies, known rakes and presumably pious people, wealthy bachelors and respectable married men, fast sons and moral husbands—including fathers, millionaires, private gentlemen, politicians, lawyers, sporting men, and gamblers—who know of and are known to the under-world, is a statistical calculation which would convulse society and the world if revealed. Perhaps it is not exceeding the truth to state that at least two men in three . . . devote a certain portion of their time and wealth to some fair one, in regard to whose existence their female relatives are profoundly in the dark.”

As commercialized and visible sex increased over the course of the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth and as public obscenity laws tightened and cases against authors, publishers, and distributors increased, the need to justify and downplay possibly pornographic elements in sexological work escalated among those who wrote and published such studies. Despite fears of prosecution, both verbal and graphic depictions of women’s bodies and sexual acts proliferated. During the last half of the nineteenth century, medical men in the United States increasingly relied on new photographic technology and graphic representations of bodies in their discussions of sex and sexuality. The first of these were articles in scientific journals that depicted the genitals

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23 Such images were not unheard of prior to this time, but I have been unable to find examples prior to the last half of the nineteenth century in American medical journals. Sander Gilman reproduced a fascinating graphic image of the so-called Hottentot apron—a labial anomaly supposedly found on African women—dating to an 1837 German publication. See Sander L. Gilman, “Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an
of hermaphrodites. As interest in female gynecology increased in these publications, American scientists began to show images of women in their published studies, despite the potential that they might be classified “obscene” under such legislation as the Comstock law of 1873.

Some of the graphic representations of women and their genitalia revealed much more of the exterior female anatomy than had been usual in prior American medical publications, transforming visual representations of genitalia from disembodied dissected images to embodied sexualized ones. One 1892 article contained photographs of partially dressed women presenting themselves to doctors for examination in various positions—lying prone, on their sides, and on their knees—their genitalia clearly visible. Later that year, the American Journal of the Diseases of Women and Children published an article that discussed whether evolution was “trying to do away with the clitoris,” in which women’s clitorises were depicted close up and in great detail. Although an author is not given for this article and the creator of the drawn images is unknown, these photographs

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25 For a brief but informative historiographical overview of the development and impact of the Comstock Laws, see womhist.binghamton.edu/birth/intro.htm. See also note 57 below.


and drawn plates foreshadowed Robert Latou Dickinson’s extensive work in the early twentieth century depicting female genitalia.

Some sexologists relied on detailed narrative descriptions of the sex acts in which their patients participated, either alone or with others. James G. Kiernan described a female patient’s masturbatory technique.\(^{28}\) Although it is not clear if the woman actually performed this act in front of him—or, if she did, why—the detail with which Kiernan described the session (and his inability to stick to the past tense in his narration) leads one to think that he witnessed the event:

The patient knelt before a chair, let her elbows drop on its seat, grasping the arms with a firm grip, she commenced a swinging, writhing motion, seeming to fix her pelvis and moving her trunk and limbs for a moment. The muscles were rigid, her face took on a passionate expression; the features were contorted, the eyes rolled, the teeth set and the lips compressed, while the cheeks were purple. . . . The reveling took only a moment to commence, but lasted a long time. Swaying induced a pleasurable sensation, accompanied by a feeling of suction upon the clitoris. Almost immediately after, a sensation of bursting, caused by discharge from the vulvo-vaginal glands occurs, followed by a rapture prolonged for an indefinite time.\(^{29}\)

Robert Latou Dickinson reported similarly specific examples of masturbatory technique. Case 759, a white forty-two-year-old professional woman and college graduate, was more erotic immediately before and after her period, Dickinson revealed. “Three self-induced orgasms are needed to really relieve her, they increase in strength and with the third she has powerful feeling in the arch of the right foot. Method is strong pressure above clitoris, the second hand reinforcing the first.”\(^{30}\) Case 581, a thirty-six-year-old college graduate, “lies on her face, passing two fingers into the vagina, having the clitoris

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in the palm of her right hand; the to and fro excursion on the bone is important. Motion of the body is very active with violent pelvic excursion but no squeezing of the thighs; the duration of this active friction of the whole body on the hand is from ten to twenty minutes, sometimes longer.” In his description of this woman’s technique Dickinson, like Kiernan, also uses language and verb tense and reports details that seem unlikely for him to have known unless he watched this woman masturbate. According to Dickinson, “she grows red in the face and could not cry out. The finish is very complete with no after desire, limp but not exhausted, just peaceful.”

Along with the expanded discussion of sexual matters and increasing presence of detailed representations of genitalia came widespread verbal justification by scientists that such discussion was necessary to promote knowledge and sexual health. Living at a time when “respectable” middle- and upper-class people did not speak about sex to each other much less look at (or admit to looking at) “dirty” pictures, scientists were ambivalent about how their studies might reflect on their own and their colleagues’ motivations for studying such unseemly topics as sexuality or prostitution. They were equally concerned about the potential effect that reading detailed information might have on average citizens.

As early as the 1840s, publishers and editors felt compelled to explain how the authors of work about prostitution had been raised as moral men (or women) and remained untainted by their association with the people in the underworld. Published in 1845, the English translation of Parent-Duchâtelet’s study of Paris prostitutes featured a

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preface in which the editor proclaimed the virtue of his upbringing. Despite Parent-Duchâtelet’s eight years of close study of the women of Paris’s underworld, “his reputation was not tarnished [and] his strict morality and pure manners were well known.” To further reassure readers that this was a scientific study, not a work of titillation, the editor stated that the book was offered “with the full assurance that its tone is as chaste and pure as the nature of the subject will permit.” Michael Ryan’s 1839 study of London prostitution, which was similar to Parent-Duchâtelet’s in its content and method, was only released in Latin, presumably to keep laypeople away from its contents.

Editors, authors, and publishers of sexological studies assured readers that although much of what they would read in the books might offend their moral sensibilities, such information was invaluable and important to combating potential evils in society. A 1900 review of the English edition of French army surgeon Jacobus X’s *Abuses, Aberrations, and Crimes of the Genital Sense* asserted that the book contained “valuable information, intended only for those whom it would benefit.” It was not to be sold to the public and, therefore, could not “fall into the hands of those who might misconstrue the aims of the author or pervert the use of the lessons it contains.” The purpose of the book was to provide information to experts in nervous diseases, lawyers, psychiatrists, and anthropologists as “knowledge of the use and abuse of the genital organs among different races of the human family is an important part of a professional education and this knowledge cannot be gained from the literature on these special

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subjects in any public or private library accessible to mixed classes of readers.” The reviewer excused the “plain language” used as essential to relating the truth about sex and sexuality. Although the reviewer recognized that this method “may offend some overzealous purity crusaders,” he asserted that “all those who are animated by a desire to know the truth, however obnoxious it may be to their ideals of manhood” would see the necessity of such language, however coarse it might seem.35

These ideas were echoed throughout similar publications, which declared that physicians and scientists were morally responsible for protecting society from its sins through education and honest revelation of sexual evils. In 1906, Philadelphia doctor George B. H. Swayze demanded that doctors must be fearless in their quest to speak plainly about sexual matters, especially prostitution. Otherwise, “in the seamed face of erring and injured humanity, we are obsequious pretenders, cowardly skulkers in the great calling that has been appointed as professional adjuster of the physical and psychical conditions of society.”36

Scientists and publishers also responded in their prefatory remarks and justificatory statements to widespread fears that sex studies might influence the general public by giving them access to specific information about sexual acts. They reassured readers that the studies would not fall into the hands of impressionable laymen (or laywomen). The English translation of Wilhelm Stekel’s Bi-Sexual Love: The Homosexual Neurosis, published in Boston in 1922, warned that the book was “For sale

only to Members of the Medical Profession."37 The preface to the 1931 English edition of Richard von Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* (first published in 1886) made it clear that the book was only meant for "men engaged in serious study in the domains of natural philosophy and medical jurisprudence." For this reason, "a scientific title has been chosen, and technical terms are used throughout the book in order to exclude the lay reader." As with Ryan's volume on London prostitution published fifty years previously, the editor noted, "for the same reason certain portions are written in Latin."38 Sale of subsequent editions was "rigidly restricted to the members of the medical and legal professions" and the editors intentionally increased the use of technical and Latin terms in later editions to limit readership of the volume.39 Krafft-Ebing's biographer, Harry Oosterhuis, has recently noted, however, that these Latin translations were only inserted in response to some objections raised following the original German publication. Because of public concern in Germany about increased availability of pornography—and the supposed rise of sensuality among common people—between 1860 and the 1890s, supervision of so-called obscene materials was growing and culminated in the 1900 "Lex Heinze," which increased the definition of obscenity to include not only displaying and distributing works deemed to be obscene but also composing, manufacturing, storing, advertising, or making available any such works to persons under age sixteen. According to Oosterhuis, Krafft-Ebing himself never instructed the German publisher to restrict

38 It is very hard to determine the date of this preface, which is titled "Preface to the First Edition." What is unclear is whether the first edition to which the author of this preface refers is the first English edition (the front page lists 1906 as the earliest copyright) or the very first edition, which was published in German in 1886. Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1906, reprint; Chicago: Login Brothers, 1931), vii. Throughout, I refer to my personal copy of the 1931 English translation of Krafft-Ebing, which was first published in the United States in 1906.
sales to a professional audience. Despite the growing possibility of prosecution, Krafft-Ebing felt justified as a respected medical man in publishing the work and saw the book's popular success as ""the best proof that large numbers of unfortunate people look for and find in the book enlightenment and comfort with respect to enigmatic manifestations of their vita sexualis.""\(^{40}\)

It was these potentially large numbers of laypeople who might read such books, however, that spurred fears about their simple existence. An 1896 editorial published in the British medical journal *Lancet* expressed concern about the publication of Havelock Ellis's *Sexual Inversion*. Although the editor noted that sexual inversion was a "subject which cannot be ignored and . . . which is not made any less powerful for ill by the pretence that there is no such thing," the author wondered why it was not "published through a house able to take proper measures for introducing it as a scientific book to a scientific audience" and said that "we believed that the book would fall into the hands of readers totally unable to derive benefit from it as a work of science and very ready to draw evil lessons from its necessarily disgusting passages." Ellis failed, in the editor's estimation, "to convince medical men that homo-sexuality is anything else than an acquired and depraved manifestation of the sexual passion; but, be that as it may, it is especially important that such matters should not be discussed by the man in the street, not to mention the boy and girl in the street."\(^{41}\) Ellis's book had become the center of a censorship scandal in England, where his work was later banned, and subsequent

\(^{39}\) Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, x.


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volumes of *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* were published in the United States. A year after the first American printing of his work, an anonymous American reviewer came to Ellis’s defense, praising him for “speak[ing] plainly on every phase of the subject [of sexual inversion], but never introduc[ing] irrelevant matter for the gratification of morbid curiosity.”

Even fictional work could have redeeming value among sexologists if it appeared to have a valid argument or was written by a scientist or doctor. A review of William Lee Howard’s 1902 book *The Perverts* noted that even though the book was fiction, it was “chaste in style” and deserved attention. Howard appealed “to an enlightened public for a more considerate and charitable treatment of degenerates” and called for medical not criminal treatment of “this unfortunate class” even if they had committed a crime. The reviewer agreed: “Undoubtedly the author is right, and his views from a medico-legal standpoint are entitled to great weight.” Two years later, perhaps to justify Howard’s inclusion as one of their own (and thus legitimate the findings of the book), the journal published his article “Sexual Perversion in America,” which used the scientific case studies of two male “congenital perverts.”

Despite their concern about how the public might view their work, most doctors were adamant that their subject of study was not simply prurient. Chicago doctor and

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sexologist James G. Kiernan believed that prurience did not exist in medicine, since “science like fire, purifies everything.” Rather, sex or “the mightiest of human instincts,” was too intimately related to the physical basis for weal and woe for any physician prudishly to ignore any of its phases.” With such justifications firmly in place, sexologists turned their gaze onto women’s deviant sexuality.

Women’s Confessions

Although earlier sex researchers included some information from case studies in their research, mid- to late-nineteenth-century work consisted primarily of statistical and geographically specific surveys. As the century progressed, doctors and sexologists began to rely heavily on a combination of the “confessions” of so-called sex deviants and scientific examinations of supposedly physical (and therefore visible) manifestations of sexuality, such as brain size and mannerisms, to weave the stories they wanted to tell.

Unlike their predecessors, they also more closely examined populations not incarcerated in prisons or committed to mental institutions, a step that brought the sexual behavior of a greater number of seemingly “normal” women to light. This latter development would have important social ramifications, as it became increasingly harder to distinguish between “deviant” and “normal” members of society during the late nineteenth century.

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46 I use “confessions” here, as does Michel Foucault (History of Sexuality, vol. 1, An Introduction, trans. Robert Hurley [New York, Vintage Books, 1978]), to mean a situation in which a patient reveals his or her inner secrets to an expert, in these cases, the sexologist. Medical examinations and psychiatry elicit these confessions sometimes without the consent or mediation of the subject. Thus, a body may “reveal secrets” without its owner uttering any words. I thank Jennifer Terry for pointing out this connection to me in early comments on my research. See also Terry, “Anxious Slippages between ‘Us’ and ‘Them,’” 137.

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Many doctors and scientists believed that they could coerce, trick, or force women verbally to confess deviant sexual behaviors—most notably masturbation, prostitution, or lesbianism. Such men prided themselves on their ability to judge whether women were lying and to use their powers of coercion to elicit an explicit confession. Scottish doctor J. Milne Chapman reported in an American medical journal that his colleague Angus Macdonald had a tried and true method. He asked women directly if they masturbated. There were two possible responses: either they confessed outright or their guilt was confirmed by "a confused outpouring of apparently negative and evasive statements." Chapman concurred, but thought a more accusatory stance worked better, although he recommended that the doctor do so "firmly but kindly."

Renowned sexologist Robert Latou Dickinson was perhaps the master of convincing women to confess their secret sexual habits. In the 1890s, Dickinson concentrated heavily on women's masturbatory practices, which were at the time a great concern to doctors and society alike. Although Dickinson, unlike his peers, presumed autoerotic experience to be common among women, patients were still reluctant to reveal this information to him; only 35 percent of four hundred cases admitted that they

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49 Lura Beam, often referred to as Dickinson's "junior partner" reported many of his earlier case studies in Dickinson and Beam, *Single Woman*. They apparently did conduct some research together for the volume, but for the most part Beam paraphrases and quotes the 1,078 cases studies Dickson compiled between 1890 and 1923, when he turned over his materials to the National Committee on Maternal Health and became honorary secretary of the organization (ibid., v). Beam noted that when Dickinson was gathering the bulk of his data about masturbation in women, autoeroticism was an important "subject of polemics" and undergoing much debate in the medical community about its relationship to insanity and correlation with pelvic disturbance. Hence his intensive notes and concentration on the subject (ibid., 33). She indicated, however, that much of the concern about female masturbation had since dissipated and more concern was placed on women's increasing desire not to marry and to have sex outside marriage.
masturbated. Nonetheless, he managed to elicit confessions not only about women’s autoerotic behavior but about other sexual behaviors as well. Case 48, for example, a nineteen-year-old South American college girl, whom Dickinson thought might have some African blood, exhibited a reserved and respectable demeanor. However, given the appearance of her vagina, which Dickson thought looked “extraordinarily erotic,” he suspected masturbation. “She states autoerotism reluctantly but soon, and after a year is frank about it.” A thirty-six-year-old college graduate admitted to masturbation and a couple of adolescent homosexual encounters, but continually denied “ever having coitus, putting anything but fingers in the vagina and excitement at treatment.” Dickinson, still skeptical, noted: “This last I do not believe.” Patience usually proved to be on his side, however. In another case, a woman whom Dickinson had been seeing for almost a decade claimed that she had never had intercourse and was “surprised” that the doctor could not tell by looking at her genitals that she was a virgin. In his notes, Dickinson wrote: “I said, ‘The hymen is big enough.’ My thought is that she is not ignorant of coitus.” His skepticism was “proven” three years later when she revealed her lover’s identity. Dickinson, obviously insulted, remarked, “she deliberately misled me about her whole experience; ‘nothing relieves but the real relief’—‘such poor substitutes.’ (There may be two men in this.)” Later, he found out again that the woman had been lying and that she was indeed having regular intercourse with both men.

When scientists could not elicit verbal confessions from women, or when they mistrusted the information women gave them, they focused on the supposedly

unmediated narratives the human body might tell. One of the strongest justifications of scientists’ scrutiny of potentially erotic female subjects was the scientific axiom that “seeing is believing” and the belief that visual evidence was of the utmost importance to sexology, as to all branches of science. Thus, as women’s sexual desire and behavior became a site of anxiety for sexologists and society at large, and as women seemed to participate in greater numbers in such gender transgressive behaviors as feminism, professional work, prostitution, and same-sex sexuality, scientists began to “read” female bodies for “anatomical evidence” of sexual desire and behavior. By doing so, such scientists as Robert Latou Dickinson bypassed potentially untrustworthy female narrators and unearthed evidence for himself (or herself—some of Dickinson’s collaborators and a handful of sexologists in the twentieth century were women), independently of untrustworthy women who might very well lie about the behaviors in which they engaged. As Dickinson said, “anatomy records experience.”

This new methodology, however, was potentially suspect as it necessitated detailed examination of naked female bodies that resulted in graphic (almost pornographic) representations of women’s anatomy in medical journals and books. Dickinson and his contemporaries emphasized that such study was essential to curing society of the “evils” of prostitution and lesbianism, while facilitating “normal” heterosexual marital relations—the purported goal of early-twentieth-century sexology. The need to justify these graphic depictions of female anatomy persisted well into the

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53 Dickinson and Beam, Single Woman, 190-92.
55 Dickinson, Human Sex Anatomy, 41.
twentieth century. *Human Sex Anatomy*, which Dickinson published in 1933, invoked
the words of his peer Havelock Ellis to justify his methods: "'In every department of
medicine—and now at last in the most intimate of all—it is our business so to adjust the
conditions of life that, if possible, . . . evils may not arise.'"56 Although initially restricted
to medical men, preventing "evils"—at least among married heterosexual couples—
entailed rendering sexual knowledge transparent to the general public by the 1920s and
1930s when medical books and journals, as well as sex education materials, became more
readily available.57

Dickinson was so concerned with married heterosexual monogamy that his
illustrations of male and female genitalia were "turned in the *same direction for each sex*,
and male and female face each other for obvious reasons. . . . Because the usual posture
in coitus is the *recumbent dorsal*."58 Not only was sex to be between married men and
women, but also no sexual positioning was allowed other than one in which the female
took the submissive position. Lura Beam had noted in an earlier volume that Dickinson
major premise in conducting his sexological studies was that women's role was "chiefly
as marrying and child-bearing beings. This point of view hardly admitted alternative. He

57 This did not apply, however, to information about abortion or birth control, which were still hotly
debated (and criminalized) topics in the 1920s. For more information on early twentieth-century birth
control education and campaigns to make birth control information illegal and inaccessible to women, see
Linda Gordon, *Woman's Body, Woman's Right: A Social History of Birth Control in America* (New York:
Cornell University Press, 1994); Andrea Tone, *Devices and Desires: A History of Contraceptives in
America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001); and Nancy Whitelaw, *Margaret Sanger: "Every Child a
Wanted Child"* (New York: Dillon Press, 1994). For more on marriage manuals and sex education in the
early twentieth century, see Michael E. Melody and Linda M. Peterson. *Teaching America about Sex:
Marriage Guides and Sex Manuals from the late Victorians to Dr. Ruth* (New York: New York University
Press, 1999), esp. chap. 2; and Jessamyn Neuhaus, "The Importance of Being Orgasmic: Sexuality, Gender,
and Marital Sex Manuals in the United States, 1920-1963," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 9, no. 4
thought it better to have been unhappily married than to have remained single. This conclusion brought about the next, that for women love is the greatest thing in the world. He did not, in his early days before he was married, think this about men." 59

While Dickinson recognized the importance of female sexual expression and gratification to marital success, he effectively prescribed the parameters within which it might express itself. 60 The hypothetical women represented in Human Sex Anatomy and his other works on "normal" women were neither prostitutes or lesbians nor sexually aggressive or independent (women often portrayed in earlier sexology as masturbators or nymphomaniacs). Rather, they were monogamous married heterosexual women. Women who did not fit this typology were, in effect, "abnormal." And Dickinson believed, for example, that the existence of lesbians and the existence of prostitutes were signs of heterosexual marital trouble. Thus his gaze turned to these very women—prostitutes and lesbians.

As noted in the previous chapter, the first findings of physical evidence of sexual deviance were made public in the 1880s and 1890s. Physical anthropologists, most notably Cesare Lombroso and Pauline Tarnowsky, focused on the physical characteristics of criminals, among whom women were deemed most often to be prostitutes. 61 Chicago doctor Harriet C. B. Alexander, reiterating the findings of Tarnowsky in 1893, noted that

59 Dickinson and Beam, Single Woman, 62.
60 Dickinson was instrumental in teaching husbands how to stimulate their wives effectively as an aid to marital happiness. He was one of many who, in the early twentieth century, pointed to men's sexual selfishness and inadequacy as a main cause of escalating divorce and adultery rates and advocated female sexual pleasure within the confines of marriage. Julian Carter discussed Dickinson's interest in marital sexual satisfaction, especially his own highly sexual relationship with his wife (they allegedly had sex every day of their marriage up until and on the day she died), in Julian Carter, "Telling Sexy Stories: Professionalism and the Problem of Evidence in the History of Sexuality," paper presented at the American Historical Association annual meeting, 4-7 January 2001, Boston, Massachusetts. See also Neuhaus, "Importance of Being Orgasmic."
prostitutes exhibited “degeneracy stigmata,” including skull deformities, facial
deformities, and ear and teeth anomalies. Alexander, with the aid of E. S. Talbot (who
had also collaborated with G. Frank Lydston on a similar study of both men and
women), replicated Tarnowsky’s study among inmates of Chicago’s Bridewell
institution for wayward women. Their findings not only upheld Tarnowsky’s but also
determined that degeneracy stigmata were actually more common among Chicago
women than Tarnowsky had found among the women she studied. Based on this result,
Alexander asserted that the prostitute was an “atavistic survival of primitive state . . .
arising from degeneracy due to bad hygiene and its resultant moral and physical
effects.”

Just as physical anthropologists Lombroso, Tarnowsky, and Lydston and Talbot
before them thought that such physical features as skulls, facial features, and limb length
revealed such criminal traits as thievery in men and prostitution in women, later
sexologists asserted that the physiology of female sex organs also bore the mark of sexual
experience and revealed inherent degeneracy or behavioral characteristics. Beginning in
the late nineteenth century, and reaching its height of popularity during the first three
decades of the twentieth century, scientists of sex began to study and compare in minute
detail vaginas, labia, clitorises, nipples, and pubic hair. Any or all of these features could
reveal to the scientific gaze a woman’s sexual behavior. Whether she chose under

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62 Tarnowsky’s statistics revealed that from 42 to 54 percent of the women she studied manifested these
(1896): 232-34. This article was an abstract of a larger paper read before the Chicago Academy of
Medicine in April 1893.
63 G. Frank Lydston and E. S. Talbot, “Studies of Criminals: Degeneracy of Cranial and Maxillary
Development in the Criminal Class, with a Series of Illustrations of Criminal Skulls and Histories Typical
examination to reveal her “sins” verbally or not, a woman’s genitalia yielded her confession to her confessor the sexologist. Her practices alone or with others, with men or women, in a normal or abnormal manner, thus entered the realm of the scientifically knowable and quantifiable, spurring what Foucault has referred to as the development and explosion of “scientia sexualis.”

On the examining table, literally wide open under his scrutiny, the object of examination could not hide her sexual secrets from him.

Although Robert Latou Dickinson perfected the art of measuring and drawing female genitalia and making determinations about female sexuality from this data, his work built on that of earlier scientists, many of them interested in prostitution and masturbation. J. Milne Chapman, for example, believed that a “well-developed” masturbation habit brought about external changes to women’s genitalia, including enlargement of the labia or movement of the clitoris, discoloration and irritation of the vaginal membranes, excessive discharge, and a “relaxed and patulous” vaginal entrance. The labia minora, especially, should be examined, asserted Chapman; they often became “so pronounced” that they could measure from two to three inches in length, and “resemble the ears of a lap dog.”

Dismissing any who doubted the cause of such labial “hypertrophy,” Chapman noted that such skepticism was “hardly tenable” since in almost

64 Alexander, “Physical Abnormalities in Prostitutes,” 234.
65 Foucault, History of Sexuality, esp. 53-73.
every case the woman eventually admitted to masturbating after "careful and discreet inquiry."\textsuperscript{68}

E. S. Talbot found in 1902 that among one population of female juvenile delinquents approximately 25 percent of their vaginas or hymens were abnormal in some way, thus indicating the existence of sexual perversities.\textsuperscript{69} However, fully three-fourths of the women in the institution studied were "addicted to sexual perversities" among themselves, which indicated a greater prevalence of sexual perversion to Talbot and the reporting doctor. In at least some cases of genital abnormalities among these young women (all of whom Talbot claimed were "imported from Europe"), Talbot believed that adult females had caused the abnormalities: these women, "with designs to enlarge a child’s genital organs so as to fit her for coitus, introduce the finger, candles, round sticks or stones into the child’s vagina." Other European mothers, according to reports Talbot cited, "inflict[ed] these injuries" on their young daughters in order to prepare them for prostitution, "very young children being particularly desired for sexual intercourse, especially by old men."\textsuperscript{70} Such practices revealed themselves through physical examination of vaginas. Women’s confessions, then, whether verbal or bodily revealed sexual deviance of all kinds. But scientists were compelled to learn even more.

\textsuperscript{68} Chapman, "On Masturbation as an Etiological Factor in the Production of Gynic Diseases," 453.
\textsuperscript{69} Talbot reported that the genitals in eighty-three cases were normal. Eleven were "excessively developed," seven were "arrested in development," and one showed "markedly deformed labia." E. S. Talbot, "Juvenile Female Delinquents," \textit{Alienist and Neurologist} 23 (1902): 16-26, 22-23.
\textsuperscript{70} Talbot, "Juvenile Female Delinquents," 24. Dickinson also reported that American social workers had found foreign born women masturbating their children to quiet them and cases of twenty-one-year-old men having sex with nine-year-old girls. See Dickinson and Beam, \textit{Single Woman}, 153.
The Causes of Prostitution

Two pressing, although sometimes veiled, questions surrounding prostitution during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were whether women became prostitutes because they liked and desired sex and if they experienced sexual pleasure while performing their jobs. Scientists and reformers alike were ambivalent about the possible answers to and implications of these questions. Because most people at the time presumed prostitution to be an occupation women chose only under extreme economic or psychological duress and discounted the existence of female sexual desire or aggressiveness, the idea that sexual desire might spur some women to become prostitutes seemed impossible. However, scientists and others found evidence that sexual gratification existed alongside sexual disgust in prostitutes' commission of commercial sex acts, lending ambivalent credence to the idea that desire may have played a role in a woman's decision to sell her bodily services.

In 1836, Parent-Duchâtelet noted that some prostitutes possessed great sensuality. However, he made it clear that “It may be considered as an invariable rule, that although libertinism and the impetuosity of the passions is the first cause of prostitution with some females, yet having once entered on their career, they remain cold and indifferent to all those around them and sometimes even a feeling of disgust is concealed under those caresses received and bestowed by them from the love of gold, and frequently from hunger.” This indifference and repulsion to the men they served sexually led prostitutes to form strong attachments to one man—not a customer—as a means to “try to fill the immense blank caused in their heart[s] by the life they lead.”71 Not only did these women

71 Parent-Duchâtelet, Prostitution in Paris, 71.
make sacrifices for their lovers, but "a great many young men in Paris have no other means of support."  

According to Parent-Duchâtelet, the attachments prostitutes formed with their lovers were "furious" and no amount of blows, wounds, or life-threatening behaviors could alienate these women from their beaux. Despite the potential danger to their physical well-being, prostitutes gained benefits from their relationships with men. These "bullies," as Parent-Duchâtelet called them, acted as lookouts and spies when women worked on public streets, created diversions when prostitutes needed to get away from the police, and provided the women a certain amount of protection, if not love or affection.

Although many sexologists recognized the fact that poverty probably played the most important role in a woman's decision to sell her body, evidence suggested to them that at least some women became prostitutes because they were naturally predisposed to it. Acton wrote that "natural desire[,] natural sinfulness[,] the preferment of indolent ease to labour[,] vicious inclinations strengthened and ingrained by early neglect or evil training, bad associates, and an indecent mode of life" caused prostitution, in addition to seduction, so-called evil training, and poverty. This concentration on the "natural" presence of female desire, sin, indolence, and moral weakness, and Acton's subsequent discussions of the "unnaturalness" of certain kinds of sexual behavior, foreshadowed later arguments about "natural" versus "normal" sexual instinct and behavior that would predominate later in the nineteenth century. It was also a thinly veiled class and race discourse, which criticized both the presumed indolence of the upper classes as well as

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lower-class aspirations for upward mobility. The character traits Acton and his contemporaries found in prostitutes contradicted nineteenth-century, white, middle-class ideals of feminine passionlessness, piety, selflessness, and "knowing their proper place" in the social hierarchy, rendering these women decidedly unfeminine.

Although most American social purists cast prostitutes as the victims of excessive male lust (believing that women's lower economic status and male sexual demand combined to dictate supply), many scientists (especially as evidenced by discussions later in the century surrounding nymphomania) pointed to the possibility that some women may have chosen to prostitute themselves to satisfy sexual desire. Sanger, for example, found that when asked "What was the cause of your becoming a prostitute?" the second most prevalent answer prostitutes gave was "inclination," which Sanger understood to mean "a voluntary resort to prostitution in order to gratify the sexual passions."76

Perhaps not surprisingly, given the milieu in which these white, middle-class men were raised and lived, and despite some of the evidence at their disposal, Sanger and Acton discounted the existence of desire in women, much less its potential to lead women into prostitution. Although many women in his study had claimed otherwise, Sanger insisted that sexual desire could not lead women to prostitution because "inclination ... would imply an innate depravity, a want of true womanly feeling, which is actually incredible. The force of desire can neither be denied nor disputed, but still in the bosoms of most females that force exists in a slumbering state until aroused by some outside influence."77 Acton made a similar point. In prostitutes and other highly-sexed women,

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75 Acton, *Prostitution*, 118.
he noted, “it appears pretty generally admitted that uncontrollable sexual desires of her own play but a little part in inducing profligacy of the female.”

Given the dominant myth that “true” women did not experience unprovoked desire—only a man was capable of awakening and gratifying female passion—the idea that women turned to prostitution to satiate “natural” sexual desires with male patrons seemed highly unlikely. Sanger did not, however, find sexual desire hard to imagine in nonwhite women. He correlated prostitution with lust among Eskimo women, for example, arguing, “in no country is prostitution carried to greater extent, the departure of the men on an expedition being a signal to their wives to abandon all restraint.”

As the century progressed, and as medical and social examples of the existence of excessive female sexual desire proliferated in medical literature, other scientists voiced their doubts about earlier conclusions downplaying the impact female desire might have had on a woman’s choice to become a prostitute. Charles Fayette Taylor, for example, stated in 1882 that it was a “great and injurious misapprehension to assume a want of sexual passion in women, [just] because it is little obvious in civilization.” Instead, he argued, there were a number of reasons why women were slower to become aware of or more reluctant to admit to their sexuality. Young girls were less aware than boys of their genitalia because they were hidden; Christian moral prescriptions repressed young women’s sexuality; and white, middle-class social propriety insisted that women be kept ignorant of normal sexual functions up until the day they were married.

To prove his

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78 Acton, Prostitution, 127.
79 Sanger, History of Prostitution, 448.
point that women's sexual desire not only existed but persisted in spite of strict social proscriptions against its manifestation, Taylor stated the facts as he saw them among all women, married, single, or prostitute. "Of fallen women, there is not one in ten . . . who did not deliberately walk into temptation. Where there is one girl seduced by the promises of marriage, there are twenty who are impelled by an internal influence which she prefers not to resist." In other words, it was easier for women to succumb to their desire than to overcome it.

Similarly, in 1904, G. Frank Lydston classified prostitutes into three main types: clandestine, professional, and criminal, noting that some women were driven to prostitution because of economic necessity and many others "fell" because of their greedy desire for "excitement, entertainment, jewelry, elegancies of dress, and wine." Despite the strong economic push and pull factors, Lydston was convinced that many prostitutes suffered from "psycho-sexual degeneracy" or an innate sexual nature. The "natural 'born prostitute,'" he asserted, "who eagerly awaits the coming of the 'tempter,' is much in evidence all along the line of prostitution. She is seen at her best—or worst—in the better class of brothels."

Although normal levels of female desire were not considered enough to propel women into prostitution, increasing numbers of scientists and social critics alike came to believe that excessive levels of sexual desire might very well do so. Modern society, Taylor believed, had suppressed women's "natural" desire, leading them to unnatural behaviors or lives, whether it be through "diminution, excess, or perversion." The

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82 Lydston, Diseases of Society, 314.
consequence was that women, who were in an unrecognized state of constant erotic excitement, had redirected this energy into aesthetic concerns, "to the exclusion of almost everything of an intellectual or practical nature . . . music, the love of drama, attempts at painting, affectations in ceramics, and the fine arts generally, and especially the absorbing attention in the article of dress." In extreme cases, the effect of repressed sexual desire could be contrary to expected, resulting in excessive activity, persistent discrediting of men and the sexual act itself, a loss of tranquility, and constant physical erotic excitation without understanding the physical cause for it (sexual arousal). Hypersexuality thus could indeed drive women into prostitution, although Taylor argued the best outlet for female sexual desire was marriage to a man.

Although many sexologists argued that hypersexuality led women into prostitution, others argued that prostitutes were in fact women with no sexual feeling whatsoever—either naturally or resulting from the vicissitudes of brothel life. Kieman cited Krafft-Ebing’s findings that the reason why prostitutes were able to “indulge in coitus ad infinitum” was because their “ejaculatory center” had never gone into full activity. Thus they neither experienced pleasurable coition nor the detrimental effects of “nervous over-excitation,” which arose when women with normal sexual desire had sex without orgasm. Similarly, Iwan Bloch believed that prostitutes’ inability to enjoy sex was simply the result of boredom and disgust. It was “no wonder that she manifests ‘lack of pleasure,’ since she “must give herself to every man, old or young, good-looking or

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85 Short of marriage, Taylor believed that single women could remain healthy but they “must take pains for it” by which he meant vigorous daily exercise as a “relief to an overladen nervous system.” Taylor, “Effect on Women of Imperfect Hygiene of the Sexual Function,” esp. 175-77, quotations on 176.
ugly, ill or well, potent or impotent, [and] must often perform, or permit to be performed on herself, the most disgusting practises [sic], many times a day.”

Well into the twentieth century, sexologists continued to debate the effect of heterosexual desire (or lack thereof) on women’s choice to become prostitutes. Kieman asserted in 1915 that “Sexual appetite plays very little part in the production of harlotry unless when aided by gossip, scandal, mongering, police blackmail or legislation. The harlot is frequently anesthetic sexually.” In a later article, Kieman shored up this statement, citing a London study of 16,000 prostitutes among which “only a few . . . adopted prostitution because of intense sexual desires.”

Yet many sexologists noted the prevalence of masturbation among prostitutes, suggesting that at least some sexual desire existed among them. In 1898, Havelock Ellis reported a case about which his Italian colleague Moraglia knew, in which a prostitute, “a well developed brunette of somewhat nervous temperament,” practiced fourteen different methods of masturbation. In Sexual Inversion, originally the first volume of Studies of the Psychology of Sex (published in England in 1899 but then reprinted as the second volume of the series in America in 1901), Ellis again paraphrased Moraglia’s findings

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91 Although originally published in England, a censorship scandal surrounded Sexual Inversion and it was banned. Ellis’s subsequent volumes on sex were never published in Britain and became better known in America. See Jeffrey Weeks, “Havelock Ellis and the Politics of Sex Reform,” in Socialism and the New Life: The Personal and Sexual Politics of Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis, ed. Sheila Rowbotham and Jeffrey Weeks (London: Pluto Press, 1977), 154. Ellis’s findings in his 1895 article “Sexual Inversion in Women” were later reproduced in the book Sexual Inversion. See Havelock Ellis, “Sexual Inversion in Women,” Alienist and Neurologist 16 (1895): 141-58; and
about Italian prostitutes, whose practice of masturbation was "universal." "In one group of prostitutes everyone had practiced masturbation at some period; 28 began between the ages of 6 and 11; the average age of commencing masturbation, it may be added, was 11, while that of the first sexual intercourse was 15." Moraglia had obtained the same results among another group of prostitutes, which included "23 'elegant cocottes.'" Ellis reported, "everyone admitted masturbation and not less than 113 preferred masturbation, either solitary or mutual, to normal coitus."92 (Whether by "mutual masturbation" Ellis meant specifically lesbian sex or oral or manual sex with a man is unclear.) Kieman and others believed that the frequency of masturbation among prostitutes was due in part to their "disgust" with coitus.93 New York doctor J. L. Nascher reported the case of a Paris prostitute and her prostitute daughter, both of whom had exhibited strong masturbatory tendencies as young women (the daughter had even been caught playing with the genitals of her pets). Nascher attributed their chosen profession to this autoerotic tendency.94

In addition to questions about the existence of sexual desire in prostitutes, those who studied prostitution wondered about and described their mental states. Parent-Duchâtelet found it "difficult to conceive of the lightness and fickleness of the mind of the prostitute," stating that it was "extremely hard for them to pursue a train of reasoning; the slightest thing disturbs them." In addition to their lack of mental acuity, Parisian prostitutes were described as being "restless and uneasy," moving "from place to place,"

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92 "Cocotte" is a general French term for prostitute, but is likely used here to mean more specifically a courtesan, or upper-class prostitute. The version I use here is Havelock Ellis, Studies in the Psychology of Sex, Volume 2, Sexual Inversion, 3rd ed. (1915; reprint, Philadelphia: F.A. Davis Company, 1931), quotation on 238. See Kieman, "Psychopathology of Harlotry," 461-63, which also paraphrases Moraglia's findings.
and in need of “tattling and noise,” especially when imprisoned or hospitalized. “This love of excitement, liberty, and independence causes them to change their abode frequently,” and Parent-Duchâtelet claimed that many prostitutes would not remain longer than five days in the same house. According to Parent-Duchâtelet, prostitutes’ wanderlust stemmed from an internal “uneasiness” and resulted in their unending search for happiness, which continued to elude them. Other scientists believed that prostitutes were simply immoral. G. Frank Lydston, writing in 1889, noted that “a large proportion of the women who are leading lives of shame are indebted therfor to an innate tendency to immorality, due to a deficient appreciation of the moral law, which . . . becomes a permanent factor in the daily life of the individual.” E. S. Talbot claimed in 1902 that “laziness and absence of moral sense” were the chief characteristics of prostitutes; prostitutes were, in fact, less serious or stable than even thieves. In 1912, St. Paul, Minnesota, doctor Charles E. Smith listed the causes of prostitution as poverty, “refuge” (the meaning of which is unclear here), ignorance, mental deficiency, and the easy money supposedly to be found in the trade.

Prostitutes possessed other “defects.” Foremost among these, according to Parent-Duchâtelet and others, were gluttony and “the love of wine and strong liquors.” According to doctor Charles Eliot, speaking before the 1912 annual meeting of the American Social Hygiene Association, “In the white race the connection between

97 Talbot, “Juvenile Female Delinquents,” 19.
drinking alcohol and prostitution is intimate.” Furthermore, prostitutes commonly lied and had bad tempers—they often came to blows with each other but their anger also quickly dissipated.

Some scientists and social critics believed that prostitutes were incurable, making prevention the only means of one day eradicating the social evil from society. According to J. L. Nascher, “whatever may have been the causes which drove the woman to prostitution, once a confirmed prostitute, she does not want to be cured.” Although such women might feel remorse at some point, and even venture into a refuge home or seek help from reformers, these women would never choose “a boss, ten dollars a week, nine hours a day work, restraint, and fear of exposure,” over “no master, five or ten dollars a night, no work, no restraint, pleasure, and abandon.”

One of the most common female “weaknesses” leading to prostitution was their so-called “love of finery.” In 1869, Ellington [pseud.] claimed that “the love of dress leads too many women into this life of shame, and dress alone supports and helps them after they have fallen.” Within G. Frank Lydston’s 1889 tripartite classification of prostitutes (clandestine, professional, and criminal), a significant number of women chose to become prostitutes because of their greedy desire for “excitement, entertainment, jewelry, elegancies of dress, and wine.” As a 1915 poem claimed,

More women sin for gay attire  
Than sin through passion’s blinding fire  
More women sin for want of gold

Eliot, “President’s Address to the Annual Meeting of the American Social Hygiene Association,” 4.  
Nascher, “Prostitution,” 261.  
Prostitutes, however, saw nothing amiss with this. When asked by the Illinois Lieutenant Governor Barratt O'Hara during testimony to the Senate Vice Committee in 1913, whether “Most of the girls in that life like fine dresses, do they not?” Peoria, Illinois, brothel keeper Bertha Hartman retorted, “All women, everywhere, like fine dresses.”

In addition to their love of finery, Parent-Duchâtelet found that one of prostitutes’ “most distinctive” characteristics was their tendency to “sluttishness” or uncleanliness. He reported that “these women delight in dirt and filth,” caring more for their outside apparel than the cleanliness of their body or underclothing. Although some women possessed an almost obsessive tendency toward washing their bodies, Parent-Duchâtelet noted that this was rare. Most had head lice and what he referred to as “the itch,” but body vermin and genital lice or crabs supposedly were “only seen among the most infamous and degraded” Paris prostitutes.

Despite the supposed negative qualities prostitutes possessed, some critics also found that they had admirable ones. Most notable was their charitable behavior toward each other in times of need. According to Parent-Duchâtelet, “This peculiarity in the character of prostitutes is general and constant: it depends probably on the consciousness that they are abandoned by the rest of the world, and that they can expect no sympathy except from their associates.” Prostitutes were especially kind and generous to others who were pregnant, vying to be chosen to take care of the child and mother and

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105 Ella Wheeler Wilcox, quoted in Don Sullington [pseud. Frank Dalton O’Sullivan], *In the Orchard of Forbidden Fruit* (Chicago: National Publicity Bureau, 1915), 7.
becoming nurses of the highest order for children. Their generosity extended also to
donating food to aged and infirm people, and, occasionally, large families in their
neighborhoods.109

Later findings echoed those of Parent-Duchâtelet regarding the various mental
and moral characteristics of prostitutes. Kieman reported in 1917 that Grace Greenwich,
probation officer of the morals court of Chicago, thought that prostitutes were “‘clever
girls, many of them the most skillful prevaricators” who had no compunction about lying
in court and afterward admitting to it. She went on to comment about prostitutes’ work
attire, noting “‘You can fairly hear them coming down the corridor. That’s not when
they are brought on trial; then they are shrewd and dress as quietly as their wardrobes
permit. They wear their real clothes when they come in later to see about something.
They are clever, futile creatures; they do a lot of harm and make a serious problem.”110

Many sexologists believed that prostitutes were hysterical or disturbed by mental
instability. Kieman summarized the findings of others in 1917, noting “As the harlot has
much of the nerve makeup of the hysteric, sexual frigidity is to be expected.” Such
nineteenth-century sexologists as Riccardi, Lombroso, Moraglia, Parent-Duchâtelet, and
Masochka had observed among prostitutes sadism, masochism, fetishism, sodomy, and
“sexual excitement with masturbation following the drinking of urine or feces.”
Moreover, according to Kieman, homosexuality among prostitutes was common.111 I turn
now to that connection, because the association of prostitution and lesbianism reveals

109 Parent-Duchâtelet, Prostitution in Paris, esp. 70.
110 James G. Kieman, “Mental State of Harlots,” Urologic and Cutaneous Review 21, no. 7 (July 1917):
411.
striking information about scientists’ and social reformers’ assumptions and conclusions about female sexuality in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

**Lesbianism and Prostitution**

Along with hysteria and nymphomania, many scientists, beginning with Parent-Duchâtelet, reported on prostitutes’ participation in same-sex behavior.\(^{112}\) In the process of surveying prostitutes and examining Paris’s regulated brothel district, Parent-Duchâtelet came to an interesting and disturbing conclusion: a significant number of prostitutes were what he referred to as tribades or at least practicing some form of sexual acts with other women. Parent-Duchâtelet referred to this behavior as “unnatural” and said all prostitutes denied their participation in such acts by claiming, “I am made for the male and not for the female.”\(^ {113}\) According to his estimates, however, nearly 25 percent of Parisian prostitutes engaged in homoerotic acts or had homoerotic tendencies.\(^ {114}\) Almost without fail, subsequent sexologists who have mentioned the relationship between prostitution and lesbianism refer to Parent-Duchâtelet’s findings. Although later scientists did not always rely on Parent-Duchâtelet’s explanations for why it existed, they routinely cited his evidence of the prevalence of same-sex behavior among prostitutes albeit in their own terms. Fifty years after the publication of *Prostitution in Paris*, Richard von Krafft-Ebing quoted Parent-Duchâtelet’s explanation for same-sex behavior among prostitutes as the result of their profession: “repugnance for the most disgusting

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\(^{112}\) Carol Groneman has noted that this process of linking all sexualized women (prostitutes, lesbians, and nymphomaniacs) occurred in the late nineteenth century as a result of focusing on the person rather than the act. See, Carol Groneman, *Nymphomania: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2000), 29-31.

\(^{113}\) Parent-Duchâtelet, *Prostitution in Paris*, 74, 75.


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and perverse acts (coitus axilla, ore, inter mammas, etc.) which men perform on prostitutes is not infrequently responsible for driving these unfortunate creatures to lesbian love.”

For the most part, Parent-Duchâtelet claimed that tribades (women who had sex with other women) were despised and often shunned by other prostitutes. The prostitutes he encountered in prison refused to talk about the subject at all, unless jealous or seeking revenge on another inmate. One prostitute wished to “do violence to one of her house companions” when the object of her affection refused her advances. When a guard was called to calm the intoxicated woman, “all the girls in the house denounced her as guilty of a breach of morals.” However, among those he did know of, he noted, most formed deep, passionate attachments to each other and, when their intimacies were interrupted, “it is felt more than when a male lover is lost... Their attachment partakes more of phrensy than of love. They are jealous, watch the object of their affections, and

115 Literally, “in the armpit, oral, and between-the-breast” intercourse.
116 Parent-Duchâtelet quoted in Krafft-Ebing, Psychopathia Sexualis, 608. Note that Krafft-Ebing uses the term “lesbian” here instead of “tribade” as did Parent-Duchâtelet. I have not read the original French version of this, but the English translation, which uses the word tribade in italics, as if to indicate that this was the word Parent-Duchâtelet used himself.
117 “Tribade” and “tribadism” have had subtly different meanings in nineteenth- and twentieth-century writing. In 1938, S. Sorenson described a tribade as “a female guilty of overt homosexual practices. Such practices are restricted to mutual masturbation, cunnilingus, and, more rarely, the use of an artificial phallus which is strapped around the waist of one of the participating females. Kisch has pointed out the part played by clitoridal enlargement as a causative factor in tribadism” (S. Sorenson, Abnormal Sexuality in Love and Marriage [New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 1938], 119). G. Lombard Kelly defined “tribadism” as “bringing the parts together,” implying the rubbing of vaginas together (G. Lombard Kelly, Sexual Feeling in Woman. Augusta, Ga.: Elkay, 1930, 76). Some sexologists distinguished between “tribades,” who exclusively had sex with women by inserting their enlarged clitorises into the vaginas of their partner and those who only engaged in cunnilingus or mutual masturbation, sometimes called “Sapphists.” Others argued that there was no physical evidence to be found of this supposed enlargement of clitorises in sexually inverted women. Kelly quotes both Ellis and Parent-Duchâtelet as arguing that there was no correlation of clitoris size to masculinity in women (ibid., 149). See also Albert Moll, Perversions of the Sex Instinct: A Study in Sexual Inversion, trans. Maurice Popkin (Newark, N.J.: Julian Press, 1931), 225. Many sexologists have used the terms “tribadism,” “lesbianism,” “Sapphism” etc. interchangeably. See, for example, Bloch, Anthropological Studies in the Strange Sexual Practices of All Races in All Ages, chap. 17.

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follow them step by step; if one is arrested, the other is so likewise, and they always
contrive to leave the prison together.”

In subsequent studies, Parent-Duchâtelet’s contemporaries also began looking for
the existence of same-sex behavior among prostitutes. Michael Ryan in his 1839
Prostitution in London, which was published in Latin, noted that although Parent-
Duchâtelet may have found same-sex sex acts and strong emotional relationships among
Paris prostitutes, there was no evidence to show that such existed among London
prostitutes. “Nevertheless,” Ryan noted, “by whatever means, our shameless prostitutes
come together in the secret depraved pleasures of lust.” The phrase “our shameless
prostitutes come together” suggests that these women were either participating in same-
sex behavior as part of their job servicing men; it might also imply that they found an
outlet for their “lust” with each other, not just the men whom they serviced.

Perhaps relying on Ryan’s findings for Britain and attributing such perversions to
the French, Acton and Sanger did not mention homoerotic behavior per se in either the
prostitutes they studied or in their references to Parent-Duchâtelet’s study. Acton’s and
Sanger’s reticence may have stemmed from a desire to downplay or hide Parent-
Duchâtelet’s (or their own) evidence of female same-sex behavior; or they may have
come simply to believe along with many of their contemporaries that such aggressive and
perverted female sexual behavior was unnecessary to relate or impossible to believe, even
among prostitutes.

118 Parent-Duchâtelet, Prostitution in Paris, 75.
119 Parent-Duchâtelet, Prostitution in Paris, 75.
120 Ryan, Prostitution in London, quoted in Lesbian History Sourcebook, 97.
Despite the pervasive idea that "true" sex between women could not actually take place because a phallus was not present, sexologists and reformers may also have feared that putting forth such ideas in the first place would plant thoughts in the minds of readers, and that such "impossible" behavior might become widespread among prostitutes (or, worse yet, "normal" women) in their own countries. This ironic disavowal in the face of evidence of same-sex behavior among prostitutes perhaps resulted from fears that discussing the possibility and mechanics of same-sex pleasure for women would be especially dangerous in a highly sex-segregated society (among certain classes) in which female romantic friendships, while outwardly accepted, were also sexually suspect.¹²¹

For the most part, despite Parent-Duchâtelet's findings of what appear to be what we would call lesbians in modern parlance in Parisian brothels, these first sexologists concentrated little on the potential homosexuality of prostitutes. Although they documented the existence of female sexual desire, they were also unable to being themselves to admit that women possessed such feelings, much less desires powerful enough to compel them to sell sex to or seek sex with men or women. Furthermore, for sexologists (as for most people throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries), prostitutes by common definition were women who had sex only with men. Rather than

investigate prostitutes' presumably impossible sexual actions with women, Acton, Sanger, and many of their successors well into the twentieth century concentrated instead on the reasons why women became prostitutes. Their concern lay with the aspects of prostitution that affected or reflected society as a whole: poverty, disease, sexual immorality, intemperance, etc. In the results of these early investigations are key rhetorical loci at which the categories “prostitute,” “lesbian,” “nymphomaniac,” and “feminist” would meet in later sexological works. Indeed, much of the language Acton and Sanger used to describe heterosexual prostitution was soon thereafter applied to same-sex sexual behavior among women. Similarly, as seen in Chapter 1, much of the language used to describe nymphomaniacs and masturbators was soon applied to prostitutes and lesbians. Acton’s and Sanger’s interpretations of prostitutes’ sexuality—as well as their contemporaries’ ideas about hypersexual women—opened new ways of thinking about supposedly deviant female sexuality, which were then applied to lesbians, linking the two groups of women in sexologists’ minds in ways that would persist throughout the twentieth century. As we will see, prostitutes were linked to nymphomaniacs, masturbators, and female sexual aggressors, for example, categories that were also correlated with female inversion. Furthermore, scientists drew connections between such sexual aggression, desire, independence, and perversion with such forms of gender transgression as feminism.

Drawing on the previous studies of Parent-Duchâtelet, Acton, and Sanger, among others, such late-nineteenth-century sexologists as Briton Havelock Ellis, German Richard von Krafft-Ebing, and American G. Frank Lydston conducted human sexuality relationships among these women. There has been hot debate among historians about whether these loving
research, often concentrating on prostitution, lesbianism, and the connections between the two. However, these later scientists and reformers were much more concerned with conceptions of and explanations for prostitutes’ innate “sexuality” than were Parent-Duchâtelet, Acton, or Sanger, who had concentrated more narrowly on the history, demographics, and causes of prostitution.

Increasingly troubled by “deviant” sexuality, late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century sexologists theorized at great length on how prostitution correlated with lesbianism, or “female inversion,” as it was then commonly known. In *Psychopathia Sexualis* (first published in Germany in 1886 and translated into English twenty years later, although American medical journals continually referred to its findings from the time of its initial publication), Krafft-Ebing compiled a number of case histories of sexually deviant people, both male and female. He attributed most of his ideas concerning “Lesbian love” among prostitutes to Parent-Duchâtelet. Krafft-Ebing agreed with Parent-Duchâtelet that continued exposure and subjectivity to men’s demands for perverted sex acts was the main cause of lesbianism among prostitutes, asserting “prostitutes of gross sensuality, ... disgusted with the intercourse with pervasive [sic] and impotent men ... seek compensation in the sympathetic embrace of persons of their own sex.” Such cases, he believed, were of “frequent occurrence.”

Although Krafft-Ebing’s ideas incorporated those of Parent-Duchâtelet, the subsequent ideas of such men as Karl Heinrich Ulrichs and Karl Westphal, which described sexuality as an innate biological or essential quality, further delineated his

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and often passionate relationships between women were genitally sexual or not.

explanations for connections between prostitution and lesbianism. Krafft-Ebing argued that both prostitutes and lesbians exhibited pronounced hypersexuality and were often nymphomaniacs and/or avid masturbators. For putatively heterosexual women, excessive sexual desire would lead them “eventually . . . to prostitution in which to find satisfaction and relief with one man after another.”

Hypersexuality in prostitutes and lesbians, many sexologists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries believed, was a trait linked to brain size or glandular imbalance. According to G. Frank Lydston, a professor of genito-urinary surgery and criminal anthropology in Illinois who had previously worked as the resident surgeon on Blackwell’s Island in New York City (a notorious prison with a large prostitute population), the cerebellum normally was more developed in men than in women. Lydston believed that larger brain size caused men’s increased sex drive when compared to women. Thus, he argued, “women with large cerebellar development approximate the male in sexual desire [and] from such defectives ‘born prostitutes’ are recruited.”

Similar theories surfaced simultaneously about the lesbian brain, which sexologists argued approximated the male brain in size and function. Ultimately, however, the idea that prostitutes or lesbians had larger brains proved to have potentially dangerous applications.

If hypersexual women and lesbians (or any woman, for that matter) had brains similar to men’s, contemporaries asked, then how could society continue to keep them from higher education, politics, and full access to equally-paid employment? Historian Margaret Gibson has posited that the unacceptability of such an argument when applied

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to lesbians led sexologists quickly to redefine their position on the meanings and applications of brain size differentials. Their inability to reconcile a biological “fact” (brain size) with what they believed to be appropriate gender and sexual behavior points to continuing uncertainty about both women’s sexuality and their position in society.126

Biologically hypersexual women—unlike the passionless women and victimized prostitutes in which Acton and Sanger believed—were perceived as dangerous to society because they could lead men and women astray. According to Krafft-Ebing such women were a menace to public morals and sex/gender roles: “Chronic conditions of nymphomania are apt to weaken public morality and lead to offences against decency. Woe unto the man who falls into the meshes of such an insatiable Messalina, whose sexual appetite is never appeased. Heavy neurasthenia and impotence are the inevitable consequences. These unfortunate women disseminate the spirit of lewdness, demoralize their surroundings, become a danger to boys, and are liable to corrupt girls also, for there are homosexual nymphomaniacs as well.”127

Sexologists exhibited persistent ambivalence about the nature of female sexuality throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Alongside his belief that lesbians were innately abnormal, Krafft-Ebing ironically asserted that homosexual behavior among women was mostly situational and that practitioners would revert without fail to heterosexual behavior “as soon as obstacles to it are removed.”128 How he reconciled the logical flaws inherent in his conflicting theories of innate hypersexuality

125 Lydston, Diseases of Society, 179.
127 Krafft-Ebing, Psychopathia Sexualis, 486.
128 Krafft-Ebing, Psychopathia Sexualis, 286.
and those of situational ethics is unclear. Krafft-Ebing further confounded his analysis with the statement that "congressus intersexualis feminarum took place at all times, the same as it is practised now-a-days in the harem, in female prisons, in brothels, and young ladies' seminaries." Moreover, his reasoning does not explain the distinction between the female prison and seminary, which were almost exclusively sex-segregated, and the brothel, which was supposedly by its very nature a place for men. This contradiction begged the question: With no obstacles to heterosexual sex in brothels, why did so many prostitutes continue to have sex with women?

Prominent British sexologist Havelock Ellis first published his studies of female inversion and prostitution as part of a larger series on the psychology of sex in 1899, which went through several revisions and reprints over the next forty years. Similar to Krafft-Ebing and other contemporaries, he argued that female homosexuality was most often a situational manifestation of women's unrequited heterosexual desire. Ellis also believed that female same-sex behavior only seemed less common than that between men because women did not recognize that their strong attractions to other women were sexual, and would not admit it if they did. In reality, he argued, female inversion was just as prevalent, if not more so, than male inversion.

Ellis devoted much attention to the relationship between prostitutes and lesbians. "Regarding the fact there can be no question," he claimed, quoting a number of studies in which sexologists estimated the percentage of lesbians among brothel populations at as

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low as 10 percent and as high as 75 percent.\textsuperscript{133} Despite these numbers, however, he quoted an informant who told him ""I do not personally know of a single prostitute who is exclusively a lesbian; [although] I have heard vaguely that there are one or two such anomalies.""\textsuperscript{134} Apparently, because prostitutes were necessarily presumed to be having sex with men they could not restrict their sexual desire to women.

The question of whether prostitutes chose their work to satisfy sexual desires (heteroerotic or homoerotic) or only participated in same-sex behavior because of their situational circumstances continued to perplex sexologists throughout the early twentieth century.\textsuperscript{135} And, for men such as Ellis, whose wife had revealed to him the depth of her erotic desire for a female friend, the question took on even larger implications.\textsuperscript{136} The fact that many of the subjects of these new studies of lesbianism were no longer incarcerated in insane asylums or prisons added a new dimension to what had been a seemingly clear distinction between lesbian/prostitutes and ""virtuous"" women. If both prostitutes and lesbians were hypersexual, but hypersexual women who were not prostitutes or lesbians also existed, then any woman—even the wife of a well-respected, heterosexual scientist of sex—was potentially a sex deviant. As historian Carol Groneman has argued with regard to nymphomania, excessive female sexual behavior confused and threatened existing white, middle-class ideals of female sexuality and virtue.\textsuperscript{137} Lesbianism and prostitution posed the same threats. Prostitutes and lesbians were no longer the Other, a

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\textsuperscript{133} Ellis, \textit{Studies in the Psychology of Sex}, 2:210. Later works seem to reproduce the statistics quoted by Ellis but rarely mention from where they took their estimates. G. Lombard Kelly, for example, reported in 1930 that ""Homosexuality among prostitutes is very common, the percentage of women following this calling that practice inversion varying from 25 to 75"" (Kelly, \textit{Sexual Feeling}, 149).
\textsuperscript{134} Ellis, \textit{Studies in the Psychology of Sex}, 2:211.
\textsuperscript{135} Krafft-Ebing, \textit{Psychopathia Sexualis}, 286.
\textsuperscript{136} Havelock Ellis, \textit{My Life} (Boston, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1939).
\end{quote}
foil against which the middle-class could pose their own virtue (be it economic or sexual). Any woman—wife, mother, sister, or daughter—might seek out either the brothel (literally or figuratively) or another woman, or both, to gratify her desire, potentially rendering her husband sexually impotent or (if she made money doing it) economically irrelevant.

Echoing the findings of many of his predecessors, Wilhelm Stekel attributed homosexuality among prostitutes to their dislike of men, but he also implicated the strong influence of lesbians. Quoting Iwan Bloch, Stekel related in his 1922 *Bi-Sexual Love* the main reasons why “naturally heterosexual prostitutes” chose homosexuality. Prostitutes first became increasingly disgusted with intercourse with men whom they only saw in their most “brutal and raw aspect.” This “continual compulsion” to satisfy “the animal sensuousness of oversophisticated men[,] often by means of disgusting procedures,” then caused women to dislike men generally, leading them to “devote to their own sex the nobler feelings of which they may be capable. The homosexual relationship appears to them as something ‘higher, something nobler and more innocent,’ something pertaining to a purer realm than sexual contact with men.” Putatively heterosexual women thus could become homosexual “through the contact with and the influence of their truly Lesbian comrades, which strengthens the inner feeling of solidarity common among all prostitutes.” In a later study, Bloch again noted prostitutes’ inclination toward homosexuality because of their disgust with men, but insisted that it was not a congenital

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138 Terry makes a similar argument about these “anxious slippages between ‘us’ and ‘them’” in Kinsey’s twentieth-century reformulations of homosexuality. Terry, “Anxious Slippages between ‘Us’ and ‘Them,’” 162-63.
urge but rather one directed only at other prostitutes and stemming from “the deep solidarity [that] makes all prostitutes natural friends.” Indeed, he argued, if prostitutes were congenitally inverted or even had a predisposition from childhood, they “would certainly feel genuine passion also for feminine non-prostitutes”; however, such was “almost never the case.”

Sexologists believed that although homosexuality was not as common among prostitutes as masturbation, it nonetheless occurred frequently. In the same breath with which he discounted heterosexual desire as a cause for prostitution, Kieman noted, “tribadism is exceedingly common among harlots everywhere.” This he later explained as “a desire to realize an ideal... In Narcissism or autolagny (sex excitement by one’s own person) there is often indifference to coitus or even distaste for the opposite sex.”

In fact, “the lack of injury from excess as shown in the cards punched to secure the girl her percentage of Madame’s receipts,” Kieman notified his readers, indicated “the frequency of hetero-sexual anesthesia” among prostitutes in Chicago. Prostitutes had excessive amounts of sex with men, but felt nothing for them. In some cases, homosexual behavior among prostitutes was promoted by brothel keepers. Indeed, Kieman noted, French madams encouraged homosexuality, “since the money is thus spent in the brothel which would be spent on a man elsewhere.”

Of interest here is how sexologists often noted prostitutes’ lack of heterosexual appetite in the same breath as their willing participation in same-sex sex acts, which

139 Iwan Bloch, quoted in Stekel, Bi-Sexual Love, 280-81. Although his footnote refers to “Bloch, l.c., p. 603,” it is unclear from which Bloch publication Stekel is quoting. I have been unable to find the original quotation.
141 Kieman, “Masturbation among Harlots,” 186.
142 Kieman, “Prostitution and Defectives,” 587.
suggest the existence of homosexual desire. Although the aforementioned cases cast
prostitutes' engagement in same-sex sex acts in economic terms, they imply that
supposedly (hetero)sexually anesthetic women willingly had sex with women (and
presumably experienced orgasms or some form of sexual or emotional satisfaction as a
result). As with Ellis's understanding that very few prostitutes were "exclusively"
lesbian, this suggests that when sexologists referred to female sexual desire in the late
nineteenth and early twentieth centuries they might have been able to conceive only of a
woman's desire for a man (or phallus), not for another woman. What is not clear is
whether this meant that female sexual desire could never be satisfied by orgasm with a
woman. If such were the case, it would explain why sexologists believed that women
with "normal" (i.e., heterosexual) appetites could never be exclusively lesbian.

Some sexologists believed that prostitutes became more masculine in their
appearance after years of practicing their trade. Recounting evidence gathered by his
predecessors Parent-Duchatelet, Kurella, and Lippert, Berlin sexologist Iwan Bloch,
whose work was reprinted and widely circulated in English, noted that prostitutes often
assumed a "masculine mode of life" and developed "unmistakable" male characteristics,
including atrophied breasts, a rough voice, and a bald head.143 Bloch discounted some of
this evidence, arguing that youthful prostitutes were actually quite feminine. However,
he asserted that age, disease, and dissipation often gradually produced a "special type of
humanity": the unfeminine, corpulent, expressionless prostitute.144

143 Bloch, Sexual Life of Our Time, 326-27. He repeats these statements in Bloch, Anthropological Studies
in the Strange Sexual Practices of All Races in All Ages, 226.

138
Some sexologists and social critics considered prostitution to be a vice of either the lower or the upper classes, probably neither of which they considered themselves a part. They also often described these vices as "foreign." Sanger attributed much of the so-called problem of prostitution among upper-class American women, for example, to their weakness for the dancing, finery, art, and culture that they had been exposed to while on European continental tours. The result of such frivolous female desires, according to Sanger, was that New York was becoming more like the "depraved capitals of continental Europe" with formerly respectable women turning to prostitution to fulfill their selfish and petty whims. Yet despite his claims that prostitution prevailed among the upper-class, his statistical data on prostitution in the United States offered no evidence of prostitutes hailing from rich American families.

Sanger's vilification of both extremes of society reflected the middle-class, mid-nineteenth-century American ideal of rural, yeoman society and foreshadowed widespread fears in the later part of the century that America's innocence, as represented by its rural character, was disintegrating in the face of industrialization, urbanization, and immigration, which bred extremes of both wealth and poverty. The pseudonymous George Ellington echoed Sanger's findings with similarly anecdotal evidence. Writing about New York prostitutes in 1869, he noted, "it may not be generally known that recruits for the army of prostitution are obtained from their higher classes; and not

145 Sanger, History of Prostitution, 575.
146 Of the 2,000 prostitutes Sanger surveyed only 5 claimed that their fathers were "men of property," 37 merchants, 19 physicians or surgeons, and 2 bankers (categories that might imply a middle-class background). The four largest occupations prostitutes gave for their fathers were farmer (440), laborer (259), carpenter (139), and masons (82). (There was no occupation ascertained for 106.) Interestingly, however, 1,880 of the prostitutes' mothers did not work (had "no independent business"), which might indicate middle-class status (or the desire to be perceived as such). However, prior to 1890, the majority of

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unfrequently [sic] the daughters of the wealthy—women who were once belles in society—may be found within the glittering palaces of crime in New York.”

Scientists of sex made similar arguments about homosexuality in women, arguing that it existed more among aristocrats in Europe and wealthy women in the United States, as well as among poor women everywhere. In *Psychopathia Sexualis*, Krafft-Ebing reported French sexologist Ali Coffignon’s findings that lesbianism was quite fashionable among seamstresses and servants as well as among ladies of the aristocracy and prostitutes, seemingly disparate groups of women on either end of the class spectrum. Freud noted, “the frequency of inversion among the present-day aristocracy is made somewhat more intelligible by their employment of menservants, as well as by the fact that their mothers give less personal care to their children.” Although Freud was apparently referring to male homosexuality here, he reiterated the stereotype that inversion (a term he still frequently used in the early twentieth century) was common among the upper classes.

American sexological works similarly attributed lesbianism and other forms of sexual perversion to foreign countries, most often France, which symbolized for many Americans and English loose sexual morals and oral sex practices—usually portrayed as the chosen vice of lesbians. However, their own evidence showed that female sexual

married women did not work outside the home, many of them engaging in “outwork” instead. Sanger, *History of Prostitution*, 537, 538. See also Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, esp. chaps. 3, 5.


150 J. L. Nascher (“Prostitution,” 260), for example, attributed this to French people’s ingestion of wine beginning at birth, easy accessibility to pornography, and government licensing of prostitution. An American article about masturbation noted that masturbation in French women was in part due to French
deviance in all forms were as prevalent in England and the United States as in France and other supposedly immoral countries. Kieman cited numerous European scientists to claim that homosexual behaviors among women were also prevalent in England (although he noted that Ellis disagreed with this finding) and flourished in many European nations and institutions, especially those in Germanic countries. German sexologists Anna Ruling and Moll found 20 and 25 percent of Berlin prostitutes were lesbians, respectively.

Another sexologist (Hammer) "found that twenty-three out of twenty-five prostitutes in reformatories practised [sic] homosexuality." Renowned scientist Magnus Hirschfeld "states that the Berlin prostitute frequently accosts better class women on the street, and accepts very small or no remuneration for sexual relations with their own sex" while Sigmund Freud "maintains that the polymorphous pervert can be demonstrated in a large number of prostitutes. 'The same polymorphous or infantile disposition fits the prostitute for her professional activity, and in the enormous number of prostitutes and of women to whom we must attribute an adaptation for prostitution, even if they do not follow this calling.'"

Philadelphia doctor George B. H. Swayze also associated prostitutes and lesbians, although he denounced lesbians as far more corrupt than prostitutes, whom he believed participated in an "ordinary natural form" of sex rather than the "orgies [which] appal [sic] civil comprehension" in which both male and female perverts participated. Female perverts, according to Swayze, were dangerous to the entire sexual and moral fabric of

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sowing machines, which were worked by double treadle that thus caused the women to rub their legs together, presumably causing orgasm. The single-treadle American machines did not cause such problems. See "Case of Excessive Masturbation," American Journal of Obstetrics 6, no. 2 (August 1873): 294-95. In Chapter 4, I discuss further the relationship of "Frenching" to oral sex.


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society, especially if they had access to bath houses. Such a woman "could readily
insinuate her passion[ sic] indulgences into many acceptances among other women and
even surprised girls, and, because of the absence of all liability to pregnancy, the purlieus
of moral corruption be spread endlessly." Ultimately, Swayze argued, both vices were
inextricably related, however, to sexual aberration and excess, and exacerbated by
changing gender roles in modern society. On the one hand, men were shirking familial
responsibilities and women were increasingly forced to fend for themselves. On the other
hand, both sexes were paying more attention to pleasure and leisure than they ever had
before. The combination had created an environment that bred sexual vice and
perversion.152

Lesbians and prostitutes also, according to Robert Latou Dickinson's studies of
female genitalia, revealed physical differences among prostitutes and lesbians when
compared to their "normal" counterparts. Among one group of prostitutes Dickinson
examined (from a sample of two hundred European registered prostitutes), "there were
only four women with small external genitals showing no external hypertrophies"
although there were no cases of "gaping vulvas" (which, it might be inferred, he had
hypothesized would be the case). Dickinson's findings, however, did not scientifically
prove that significant genital anomalies existed among prostitutes. Rather, they seemed
to show more what Dickinson thought he should find among women whom he believed
to be sexually overactive: gaping vulvas, "pronounced enlargement of the labia minora
with characteristic cockscomb corrugation," "the 'worn vulva,'" and "generous elastic
distensibility produced by vigorous or frequent entry." Statistically, however, these

152 Swayze, "Social Evil," 197.
findings were not significant enough to make broad generalizations about the genitals of prostitutes no matter how hard or often Dickinson looked at them. He reconciled the lack of solid evidence of difference with a conflicted explanation: "The answer to our question [whether there is any diagnostic anatomical hallmark of the professional prostitute, or whether she has a special type of vulva] therefore seems to be that while there is no appearance of the vulva which can justly be termed peculiar to the prostitutes, these women are prone to show more than the normal amount of changes associated with active sexual experience, whether autosexual or heterosexual, especially: hypertrophy, distensibility, freedom from injury in labor, areolar excitability, and particularly the worn hymen."  

In a later study, Dickinson examined lesbians' genitals, again looking for markers of innate deviance and deviant sexual experiences. Working with the Committee for the Study of Sex Variants between 1935 and 1941, Dickinson and his assistant, Dr. L. Mary Moench, examined the pelvises of forty women (as well as forty men), precisely measured and drew their genitals, and drew composite sketches of "normal" and "abnormal" female genitalia. Dickinson's findings sound remarkably similar to those that he had earlier described in prostitutes: The female sex variants had larger than average vulvas, longer labia majora, protruding labia minora, a large and wrinkled prepuce, a erectile clitorises and nipples, elastic and insensitive hymens, distensible vaginas, and small uteruses. These features also bore a striking resemblance to those that Havelock Ellis had assembled several decades earlier among lesbians.  

Dickinson, like his predecessors, drew both explicit and

implicit distinctions between “normal” female sexuality and deviant female sexuality, which resulted in the drawing of parallels between prostitutes and lesbians. In many ways, these parallels were extensions of earlier arguments about female hypersexuality. Dickinson’s genital “evidence” was directly linked, supposedly, to excessive amounts of sexual activity, which were seen as the realm of “deviant” manifestations of female sexuality.

Perhaps ironically, Dickinson’s studies of prostitutes’ and lesbians’ genitalia did not reveal what he assumed they would—evidence of excessive sexual behavior. Although his method appeared to be more advanced, Parent-Duchâtelet more than a half-century before him had actually argued that prostitutes’ sexual behavior did not alter the appearance of their genitalia. In one case Parent-Duchâtelet reported, a fifty-one-year-old woman who had been a prostitute for thirty-six years showed no evidence of her trade; in fact, her “genital parts might have been mistaken for those of a virgin just arrived at puberty.” Parent-Duchâtelet did note, however, that prostitutes’ genitalia often changed appearance through exposure to venereal disease, often manifesting in tumors or abscesses (probably a form of genital herpes) and a thickening of the labia because of their continual reappearance once contracted. Parent-Duchâtelet did note, however, that prostitutes’ genitalia often changed appearance through exposure to venereal disease, often manifesting in tumors or abscesses (probably a form of genital herpes) and a thickening of the labia because of their continual reappearance once contracted.  

Thus although sexually transmitted diseases could provide physical evidence of sexual activity, female genitalia themselves were not a reliable indicator of sexual activity. Excessive sexual behavior could not thus be read in female genitalia in ways that were scientifically measurable, as

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155 Parent-Duchâtelet quoted in Sander L Gilman, “Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature,” in “Race,” Writing, and Difference, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 242. I have been unable to find the original wording of this in my English translation of Parent-Duchâtelet, Prostitution in
such scientists as Dickinson believed. Women's bodily confessions, even when interpreted by scientific experts, did not necessarily reveal the truth of women's experiences. What doctors' interpretations of this evidence reveal, however, is their persistent ambivalence about women's perceived sexual deviance, which was directly related to their fears of women's sexual aggressiveness and independence.

The Threat of Independent Women

The ambivalence of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century men (and, for that matter, many women) about female sexuality in all its "deviant" forms was inextricably intertwined with larger social issues: urbanization, industrialization, and, especially in the United States, immigration. As Jennifer Terry has recently argued, the "American obsession" with homosexuality (both female and male) was tied to larger questions about "democracy, individualism, and assimilation, principles that were often in tension with one another," as well as the need to define what exactly an "American" was. Concern with different sexualities was also the result of a complex dialectic—"a tradition of Puritanism that valorized hard work, self-improvement, and sexual restraint on the one hand, and an expanding consumerism that promoted pleasure-seeking and self-fulfillment through hedonism on the other."156 At the same time, women's calls for sexual, economic, and political equality with men and their increased visibility in higher education and employment, which many people saw as turning the traditional gender

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Paris. Gilman says that he is quoting from the the 1840 English translation published in London and gives the page numbers for these quotations as 42-50.

order (the very foundation of society, in the minds of many) on its head, made Americans
and Europeans alike nervous and defensive. Especially dangerous were women who
flouted sexual norms: prostitutes, nymphomaniacs, masturbators, divorcees, single
women, lesbians, and feminists. As one sexologist summed it up “cross-dressing
females”—a potent symbol of the woman who wished to take on a more masculine role
in society—"are often sexually anesthetic prostitutes, prurient prudes, hysteric reformers,
or gossip-mongers."  

Historian Erin Carlston has pointed out that explanations for female inversion in
the work of sexologists became inextricably linked to feminism and fears of female
gender transgression after 1920.  

Other evidence suggests, however, that this
phenomenon was actually rooted at least in the last three decades of the nineteenth
century, and possibly earlier, and emerged in debates surrounding masturbation,
nymphomania, prostitution, and lesbianism, which were directly tied to fears of female
sexual and economic independence from men and traditional familial models of
dependence. In a seemingly increasingly disorderly and chaotic society it often becomes
crucial to categorize and understand any behavior—in this case, female sexual and
gender deviance—that appears to contribute to that perceived disarray.

Over the course of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, women perhaps
more than any other group of dissidents (socialists, religious separatists, and even early
civil rights advocates) criticized the status quo and pushed for a radical new social order

in both explicit, and often public, feminist critiques and more implicitly threatening (but more private) sexual behaviors. They directed their verbal and behavioral criticisms not only at male domination in politics and economics, but also at male sexual domination of women (the keystone of patriarchy) and the sexual double standard. Many sexologists openly recognized parallels between feminism and forms of female sexual deviance. James G. Kiernan, for example, summed up these arguments in 1910 when he insisted "much of the so-called social purity movement is marred by the presence of auto-erotists of various forms ranging from masturbators and exhibitionists to inverters and perverts among its leaders."160

The "Woman Question" concerned sexologists as much as it did feminists and antifeminists. Indeed, some historians have argued that sexology arose as part of an antifeminist backlash.161 Scientists and reformers often linked feminism to women's desires to become men or their hatred of men, sentiments that many in society also attributed to hypersexual women, prostitutes, and lesbians. Some believed, on the contrary, that excessive sexual attraction to men was the cause of militant feminism.

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159 Others have also noted this connection from different points of view. Groneman points to the connection between sexologists' increased concentration on sexualized women such as nymphomaniacs, lesbians, and prostitutes, and feminists and other gender deviants in the early twentieth century (Groneman, Nymphomania, 29-31), while Lunbeck notes the class issues involved (Lunbeck, "A New Generation of Women"). Julian Carter ("Normality, Whiteness, and Authorship: Evolutionary Sexology and the Primitive Pervert," in Science and Homosexualities, ed. Vernon A. Rosario [New York: Routledge, 1997], 155-76, esp. 168) has noted "promiscuous girls, prostitutes, and lesbians were frequently discussed together... Women who pursued sexual desire outside of marriage shared in a sexological literature, an atavistic tendency to masculinity. At the turn of the century that masculinity was cranial—prostitutes and other female criminals had male skull formation." See also Chauncey, "From Sexual Inversion to Homosexuality," 140; and Faderman, "Morbidification of Love between Women."


147
Kieman reported in 1922 the opinion of antifeminist Florence Kiper Frank, which had originally been published in the *Chicago Evening Post Literary Review*. Frank argued that militant feminists were so attracted to men that they needed “to set up a defense mechanism against [them]. In other words, if one isn’t what one is, one is more apt emphatically not to be what one is, for the express purpose of concealing one’s isness.” Kieman noted that this was not Freudian psychoanalysis, but “the constitutional inferiority doctrine of Adler. It is Adler’s ‘masculine goal’ doctrine to the full.”

According to such theories, women were trying to become men, albeit in a backhanded manner.

Scientists and social critics connected masturbation and/or hypersexuality to feminism beginning in the late nineteenth century. E. C. Spitzka, for example, determined that although female masturbators had dull emotions, they often affected an aggressive high moral tone and denounced the sexual behaviors and suspected the sexual purity of others. James G. Kieman, who paraphrased Spitzka’s findings over twenty years later, agreed, noting that “these characteristics crop up so frequently in leaders of social purity movements and the spinster denouncers of ‘that horrid man’ that it is not surprising to find the case . . . of a social purity leader who at the acme of her propaganda found she had been addicted to masturbation.” He later termed this problem “androphobia,” noting that it was often “an expression of masturbatory excess or at times of inchoate

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164 It is not clear how this woman “found” that she was addicted to masturbation—as if it caught her somehow by surprise. See Kieman, “A Medico-Legal Phase of Auto-Erotism in Women,” 335. These examples were republished verbatim four years later in Kieman, “‘Purity’ Brides and Masturbation,” 40-43.
homosexuality, of which the *horror masculinae* is as yet the only symptom."\(^{165}\) Bloch had noted similar attitudes among feminists in Germany, quoting German bank director Nasti Tabera's alleged maxim: "'Man is something that must be got around.'"\(^{166}\) Kiernan and others believed such androphobes to be a "social danger," not only causing incompatibility in their own marriages but also wrecking others' homes through their "ostentatious suspicion of their neighbors' social purity" and conscious efforts "to seek erotic excitation and gratification from woman, not man."\(^{167}\)

Even worse than the possibility of divorce, some scientists and social critics pointed out that ardent female social purity advocates, feminists, or man-haters might turn to molestation of young boys as an outlet for their desire. Kiernan described the case of an unnamed woman who refused to have sex with her husband because she thought it a "dirty trick" and who, through "accusations and sandal mongering," caused numerous quarrels at her church and in her neighborhood by casting aspersion on the purity of other women in her community.\(^{168}\) After her husband instituted divorce proceedings against her (Kiernan sympathetically noted that the husband had been "refused coitus and [was] nagged beyond endurance for his 'coarse brutal instincts'"\(^{169}\)), suspicion and an investigation soon arose regarding her intimacy with a young neighborhood boy. The woman's "boy fetishism *[sic]*" was soon revealed by the young man himself, who admitted that at age twelve the lady in question had "'invited me into her bedroom, laid

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down upon the bed, raised her clothes, put me in between her legs, took my penis in her hand, put it in her person, and taught me to have sexual intercourse with her." Although he did not have an orgasm at the time, the young man remembered that he soon began to enjoy physically his ongoing relationship with the woman at her house in Chicago and her summer home in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, although after some years his conscience began to bother him to the point where he contemplated suicide. Kiernan reported that the woman confessed to the liaison, explaining to the court that since the boy was "a virgin and innocent, coitus with him did not have coarse sinful aspects; he was not the leavings of other women." The judge granted a divorce.\(^{170}\)

Sexologists believed that feminists were often to blame for both sexually and intellectually seducing young girls and other women, and that lesbians similarly exerted influence on young women to become feminists. Havelock Ellis noted, "Kurella, Bloch, and others believe that the woman movement has helped to develop homosexuality ... [and] Anna Ruling claims that many leaders of the movement, from the outset until today, have been inverted."\(^{171}\) Ellis and others also determined that homosexuality occurred in large numbers among intelligent women, who then influenced other, presumably less smart, women to become feminists and lesbians. Kiernan reported the case of a leader in the social purity movement who consulted him not because of her lesbianism, "which she regarded as normal and beautiful," but for her occasional episodes of "psychic hermaphroditism," which she found disgusting and abnormal since they "awakened desire for the normal relations between the sexes." Although obviously

\(^{169}\) Kiernan, "A Medico-Legal Phase of Auto-Erotism in Women," 336. This case was republished verbatim four years later in Kiernan, "Purity' Brides and Masturbation," 40-43.

disturbed by her unrepentant homosexuality, Kiernan appeared most appalled by this woman’s refusal to see that “her seduction of girls was as bad by her or even worse that it would have been by men.”\textsuperscript{172}

In 1909, Bloch wrote “there is no doubt that in the ‘Woman’s Movement’—that is, in the movement directed towards the acquirement by women of all the attainments of masculine culture—homosexual women have played a notable part. Indeed, according to [Arduin], the ‘Woman’s Question’ is mainly the question regarding the destiny of virile homosexual women.”\textsuperscript{173} In his admittedly “anti-feminine” treatise \textit{Sex and Character}, Austrian philosopher and occasional sexologist Otto Weininger pondered the “woman question,” concluding that “A woman’s demand for emancipation and her qualification for it are in direct proportion to the amount of maleness in her.”\textsuperscript{174}

Emancipation, as I mean to discuss it, is not the wish for an outward equality with man, but what is of real importance in the woman question, the deep-seated craving to acquire man’s character, to attain his mental and moral freedom, to reach his real interests and his creative power. . . . Those so-called ‘women’ who have been held up to admiration in the past and present, by the advocates of women’s rights, as examples of what women can do, have almost invariably been what I have described as sexually intermediate forms. . . . the woman who attracts and is attracted by other women is herself half male.\textsuperscript{175}

Ultimately, and ironically, Weininger concluded that homosexual women were more highly developed intellectually than heterosexual women—it was the very masculinity of their character that made them so.

\textsuperscript{173} Bloch, \textit{The Sexual Life of Our Time}, 529.
\textsuperscript{175} Otto Weininger, \textit{Sex and Character} (1903; reprint, New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1906), 64.
Discourse surrounding degeneracy began in the late nineteenth century and often centered on the growing fears of white, upper- and middle-class native born Americans that immigrants and urbanization—and their attendant vices—would lead to biological degeneration of the so-called white race. Scientists, eugenicists, and white men and women often concentrated on the role that feminism might play in this possibility. They based much of their theorizing on fuzzy science—most notably evolutionary theories of the time, which stated that vicious behaviors could alter the genetics of future generations, creating families of “degenerates.” \(^\text{176}\) In 1917, Kiernan, in his regular “Sexology” column in the *Urologic and Cutaneous Review*, summarized such arguments. He quoted antifeminist Bertha Van Hoosen, for example, who argued that feminism would lead to the creation of a “neutral sex,” which “‘would necessarily cause sex to revert to degeneracy.’” This tendency would then “‘reverse the normal altruistic trend of woman.’” \(^\text{177}\) Although Kiernan exhibited ambivalence if not outright hostility toward feminism throughout his long publishing career, he did note in this article that he doubted degeneration of this kind would occur. \(^\text{178}\)

Many examples exist to shed some light on what most people feared in the existence of lesbians, prostitutes, and feminists: brazen and unrepentant sexual and


economic independence. An “admirable description by Prof. Zucarelli of Naples,” quoted in Ellis, depicts the presumably unnatural characteristics and unsavory behavior of an unmarried, middle-class invert living in nineteenth-century Italy:

While retaining feminine garments, her bearing is nearly as possible a man’s. She wears her thin hair thrown carelessly back . . . fastened in a simple knot at the back of her head. The breasts are little developed, and compressed beneath a high corset; her gown is narrow without the expansion demanded by fashion. Her straw hat with broad plaits is perhaps adorned by a feather, or she wears a small hat like a boy’s. She does not carry an umbrella or sunshade, and walks out alone, refusing the company of men; or she is accompanied by a woman, as she prefers, offering her arm and carrying the other hand at her waist, with the air of a fine gentleman. In a carriage her bearing is peculiar and unlike that habitual with women . . . her knees being crossed or else the legs well separated, with a virile air and careless easy movements she turns her head in every direction, finding an acquaintance here and there with her eye, saluting men and women with a large gesture of the hand as a business man would. . . . With men she is on terms of careless equality.179

Point by point this woman contradicted everything that a “true” woman should be in both manner and body, instead reflecting the brazen “New Woman.” From her small breasts and surprising mental acuity to her lack of fashion sense and feminine daintiness, she was physically, mentally, and behaviorally aberrant. Most disturbing, however, was her “careless” disregard of her proper place in relationship to men.

Lydston similarly offered a description of the type of prostitute that he deemed “clandestine,” which expressed similar male fears of “careless” or shameless women (although in less detail than the story of the Italian invert). “Women who are promiscuous as a result of abnormally developed sexuality,—psycho-sexual degeneracy,—and with no other object than its gratification [sic]. Such women are the counterparts of the roué, and are more frequent even in high-toned society than most

179 Ellis, Studies in the Psychology of Sex, 2:251.
people suppose. These women are prostitutes both by birth and education. They have the ‘whore’s forehead, which refuses to be ashamed.’” 180 The refusal of such women to feel shame or to repent their putative sexual sins was a potentially contagious defect. In a later article, Lydston noted, “one of the chief causes of prostitution is woman’s natural assumption of the right to do as she will with her own.” Echoing complaints made about feminists, he went on to assert that this natural assumption of equality, “mingled with the subtle poison to which Eve succumbed, is a quality in psychology that will not down [sic]. What wonder that it crops out in woman, and that she sometimes rebels against ‘social checks?’” 181

Reformers often crowed about their ability to transform fallen women into respectable women; yet disturbing examples of more recalcitrant women abounded to counter these claims. Ellington reported the case of Mary H---, a farmer’s daughter who had been tricked into moving to New York City, believing that she was to be trained as a milliner, and soon thereafter became a prostitute. The narrative of the story first made Mary out to be a victim—she had been tricked and seduced by a man—however, she quickly took up the life of a prostitute on her own, choosing to have sex with more men than just the one who had originally seduced her. Enticed by the excitement to be found, Mary “was soon at race-tracks, and even at public balls (for so debauched has our society become of late that this class of women frequent our public assemblages without question, and jostle our wives, mothers, and sisters in the throng), bedizened with jewels,

180 Lydston, Diseases of Society, 314.
laces, and rich clothing, and apparently the gayest of the gay.

Women may have scorned Mary, but men of all ilk sought her company and she had no desire to go back to her old, presumably less exciting life. Although she did not claim to be a feminist, Mary definitely felt entitled to be in public on an equal footing with men and express her sexuality as well.

Prostitutes, lesbians, and feminists in different and yet very similar ways were the women who perhaps most threatened social order in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the United States. They lived outside the boundaries of “normal” female sexual and gender behavior and, despite censure and some social sanctions, managed to find some independence (however tenuous) on the margins. Prostitutes, although they depended primarily on men who purchased sex to make a living, had some control over the sale of their services. Although many prostitutes were drug addicted, poor, or forced into prostitution by their families or lovers, many also managed to find love, sexual pleasure, and some economic independence through their occupation and outside the traditional boundaries of patriarchal familial or marital relationships. Furthermore, if sexologists were correct (and current data seems to prove this to be true as well), many prostitutes also made it clear that they engaged in same-sex relationships and preferred

\[\text{182 Ellington [pseud.], Women of New York, 190-91.}\]

\[\text{183 Current studies of sex work have pointed to the large proportions of sex workers who were either lesbian prior to entering the profession or who became lesbian during or after their career as prostitutes, strippers, or phone-sex operators. See, for example, Working Girl, directed by Lizzie Borden, USA 1986; Peggy Morgan, “Living on the Edge,” 21-28; Donna Marie Niles, “Confessions of a Priestesttute,” 148-49; and Debi Sundahl, “Stripper,” 175-80 (to list only a few examples), all in Frédérique Delacoste and Priscilla Alexander, eds., Sex Work: Writings by Women in the Sex Industry (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 1987); Wendy Chapkis, Live Sex Acts: Women Performing Erotic Labor (New York: Routledge, 1997); and Eva Pendleton, “Love for Sale: Queering Heterosexuality,” in Whores and Other Feminists, ed. Jill Nagle (New York: Routledge, 1997), 74-82.}\]
sex and the emotional attachments they shared with women to the sex they had with male patrons.

As the second half of this dissertation will show, sexologists' concerns were not just idle fears based in a presumably white, middle-class need to control female (and male) sexual behavior. Evidence abounded that real possibilities for female sexual and social independence, and even aggression, existed. Prostitutes might become so aggressive as to even consume (in a sexual sense) the men who were supposed to be consuming (in a commercial sense) them. Lesbians existed outside all patriarchal, heterosexual norms, although taking on many of the trappings of masculine roles through cross-dressing and taking what was seen as the active sexual role with women. Feminists could manifest any combination of sexual, economic, and social independence. The Teeming Brothel exemplified these possibilities.
CHAPTER 3


"Knowing of the interest some people on the outside have for things of this type, I am going to tell my story and let you be amused with me. I had fun in my work and it has been full of thrills and I enjoyed it very much."

Lola Ardley, "Memoirs of a Pleasure Girl"

"There is no reason or even plausible excuse whatsoever not to discuss sex in exactly the same detail, without shame or inhibition, that one discusses anything else human: war, murder, politics, business, cookery, carpentry, or what have you."

Wilbur Burton, "Erotic Autobiography"

"I wish to record the experiences of my sense while their tinglings are yet echoing through my veins, and if any uncertainty of detail arises in the course of my analyses, I can still re-experience and re-examine those subjective states."

Madame Madeleine, Memoirs of Madame Madeleine

Introduction

As shown in Chapters 1 and 2, sexologists studied sexual acts and desires (and to a lesser extent identities) with scientific seriousness throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, these subjects can also be examined from an entirely different angle. The purpose of this chapter is to examine three so-called erotic autobiographies—"Memoirs of a Pleasure Girl," Wilbur Burton's "Erotic Autobiography," and Memoirs of Madame Madeleine—to flesh out the picture of commercial sexual behavior in America during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and
to explore the sexual identities of those people who performed and purchased commercial sex. All these texts, and scores of others like them, fall somewhere between fact and fiction as does any kind of memoir. Polly Adler’s 1953 *A House is Not a Home*, for example, noted that “some of the names of persons and places, the dates of events and other descriptive details have been altered, and in some cases the persons are composites. But the basic events which make up the story of my life are as they happened.”¹ Thus while autobiographical writings make sketching more than a rudimentary biography of their authors tricky because of the questionable nature or lack of “facts,” one may nonetheless glean from the narratives of events potentially accurate depictions of what it was like to be a prostitute or customer in certain times and places in the past.

As noted historian and scholar of autobiography Philippe Lejeune has noted, a certain pact is made between the author and reader of autobiography (nonfictional or fictional) that necessitates the author’s well-meaning commitment to come to terms with or understand his or her own life in as honest a manner as possible. It is thus understood between the author and reader that historical exactitude may not always be possible, but that the intention is always to relay facts and feelings truthfully. Important to Lejeune was the definition of autobiography (whether in “real” autobiographies or autobiographical novels) was that the author, narrator, and protagonist of the story be one and the same and that the sign of authorial intention be present in the text. In other words, the author must not only possess the same name as the narrator and protagonist of the story, but must also state that the intention is to relate a “true” story about himself or

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herself.\(^2\) Ultimately, Lejeune—and many others—believed that ""autobiography is above all a narrative, which follows in time the story of an individual.""\(^3\) Nonetheless, such narratives could and did reveal facts about the author and his or her personal life.

Whether the texts used here are actual or fictional autobiographical narratives can be debated. However, their "realness" is ultimately irrelevant. As products of authors who were writing from within their own historical context as subjective and sexual beings, these narratives must necessarily reflect at least some behavioral or perceptual reality. As a result, they reveal important information about people's commercial sexual behavior and the multiplicities of their sex acts and sexualities. At the very least, Lola, Madeleine, Wilbur, and others reveal through their autobiographies what people desired, fantasized, or believed happened in the world of sex work.

In a postmodern world, it may be superfluous to point out that historians searching for information about the past rely on written documents and that this fact alone makes the writing of history as fallible as the sources upon which it relies. Writing the history of such "deviant" sexual behavior as prostitution or homosexuality is even more problematic, as most sources that pertain to or discuss these behaviors decry them using terms and images that demonize that which is believed to be "abnormal" for the sake of constructing a fictive "normal" sexuality. As most historians of prostitution today agree "no clear boundary separates such 'facts' from their production."\(^4\) Perhaps even


\(^3\) Philippe Lejeune quoted in Eakins foreword to On Autobiography, xi, emphasis in original.

more can be learned about potential sex practices and perceptions in history when historians examine who produced the document and why.

Most historians deny ascribing motivations to unknown authors of historical documents, yet the writing of history necessarily relies on the assumptions of such motivations. We assume that legal documents were written by lawyers, judges, or probation officers and read them to determine the mindset or goals of lawmakers and enforcers. We ask of diaries' authors whether or not they wrote their innermost thoughts and feelings for someone else to read or only for themselves. Similarly, the motivations of historians in choosing and writing about particular historical subjects from particular points of view cannot be ignored. Thus, I argue that historians must examine works of erotica, whether they are fictionalized or "true" representations of desires and acts for clues about sex and sexuality in the past. Erotic autobiographies, because of the unspoken pact between author and reader are an ideal source.

Many questions must be asked of these texts. If they are "real" autobiographies penned by their narrators/protagonists, why were they written? Was it to vindicate and justify men's and women's sexual exploits? To titillate readers looking for graphic descriptions of a variety of sexual acts and actors? For whom were they written? Similarly, who actually read the autobiographies? What do they reveal to historians about the age, race, geographical location, and personal lives of prostitutes and their customers? The same questions apply if "Pleasure Girl," Memoirs of Madame Madeleine, and Burton’s "erotic autobiography" are autobiographical fiction or simply

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pornography written in autobiographical style. What may we learn from these texts no matter what their provenance about prostitution and women's sexuality in the twentieth century?

Erotic autobiographies reveal that commercial sex workers and their customers in the first half of the twentieth century engaged in a range of sexual behaviors that defy modern linkages of sexual identities with sex acts. The sexual actors in the texts I examine here were aware of the dichotomous sexual labels that modern historians of sexuality have argued developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century—homosexual and heterosexual—and thereafter defined the sexualities of modern Americans. Lola, Madeleine, and Wilbur, however, played fast and loose with these labels, never portraying themselves consistently as one or the other. Similarly, the autobiographies reveal how people involved in commercial sex acts desired and dreaded, enjoyed and detested those acts. Although one must read these texts both against the grain and with a grain of salt, erotic autobiographies provide a wealth of sexual information that almost all historians have heretofore ignored.

The Problem of Prostitutes' Autobiographies and Memoirs

Historians of prostitution have long been suspicious of autobiographies of prostitutes because their authors may or may not have been "real" sex workers. Even when autobiographies are judged authentic, historians' judgments about the distasteful and coerced nature of prostitutes' work have often led many to dismiss such texts as unrepresentative of sex acts or sexuality, especially if the autobiographical author renders the experience of a sex worker in a positive light or discusses in detail the sex acts in

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which s/he engaged. While it is true that historians have been more wont to use autobiographies, diaries, and memoirs than pornography (which I discuss next) as historical sources, the problem of authenticity of prostitutes' autobiographies, and other purportedly personal writings about sex, has perplexed historians of prostitution and sexuality.

Ruth Rosen, an eminent scholar of sex work, discussed the issue in her historical introduction to *The Maimie Papers*, a collection of letters written between 1910 and 1922 by Maimie Finzer, a prostitute, and her benefactor, middle-class reformer Fanny Quincy Howe. The letters “constitute an unquestionably authentic handwritten document,” one of the first of its kind to be published. The majority of prostitutes’ so-called “memoirs,” however, cannot be deemed “unquestionably authentic,” and, according to Rosen, three major problems plague such sources. First, many of these sources are typescripts with no parent manuscript. Margaret von Staden’s memoir, for example, is considered to be a true story (possibly written by a reformer who may have nursed Margaret back to health during a bout of venereal disease, or possibly an actual autobiography), but only a typescript remains so actual authorship is unknown. Second, “like abolitionist narratives of slaves,” reformers sometimes wrote “memoirs” of prostitutes to deter young women from turning to prostitution. They warned that any extramarital sexual activity or promiscuity would lead to prostitution—the so-called first step to an early grave.

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7 Ruth Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood, Prostitution in America, 1900-1918* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 194 n. 37. Historian Mark Thomas Connelly has also explored the problem of the authenticity of supposed white-slave narratives from the early twentieth century. See Mark Thomas 162
An example of the first two problems can be found in Auto-biography of a Magdalen, published in 1911 by a minister identified in the preface by only the title “Minister.” “L.C.W.,” the author of this text who also remains otherwise unnamed, claimed in the foreword, “this book is founded on fact. Those who read it will be benefited by its teachings. It is meant as a “BEACON LIGHT” to save others from the rock upon which one life was wrecked.” The narrative—which was written in the first person supposedly by a young Southern woman—was clearly intended as a deterrent to other young women who might be tempted to turn to prostitution. However, L.C.W. also claimed that the work was not fiction although only “a few [real] names of the dead are used.” The story, however stylized and altered from the actual history, was meant to (or at least portrayed to) represent the truth of one woman’s story. Yet because it lacks a parent document and offers a moral tale, the authenticity of this autobiography according to Rosen’s criteria is doubtable. Similarly Rosen noted that Lydia Taylor’s From under the Lid: An Appeal to True Womanhood was probably written by a “zealous reformer.” While the account may or may not be true, it also lacks an original manuscript, making it suspect.

The third problem with prostitutes’ autobiographies and memoirs is that certain details, even if written by the prostitute herself, may have been plagiarized or greatly

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9 Lydia Taylor, From under the Lid: An Appeal to True Womanhood (n.p.: n.p., 1913), Oregon Historical Society, Portland.
exaggerated. The well-known autobiography of madam Nell Kimball, Rosen believed, falls into this latter category because it plagiarized earlier descriptions of brothels and prostitutes. Yet because Kimball penned the text and because its imagery reflects that of contemporary perceptions of middle-class brothels, the text fits Lejeune’s definition of an autobiography with the truth of intention that attends to it. I believe the same holds true for the three autobiographies discussed in this chapter.

Historians have taken as authentic some prostitutes’ autobiographies and memoirs: for example, The Maimie Papers; Madeleine: An Autobiography; Memoirs of the Madam on Clay Street; and The Lady of the House: The Autobiography of Sally Stanford. In her introduction to the second edition of Madeleine, which judge and sex-reform advocate Ben Lindsey originally edited and published in 1919, historian of prostitution Marcia Carlisle explained why she believed the book to be authentic.

Although many prostitutes were illiterate, she argued, some were educated during their girlhood and continued their intellectual pursuits as adults, often writing about their experiences. Carlisle noted that many had tried to discredit Madeleine’s story when it was first published. However, the book’s publisher Harper and Brothers insisted that it was an authentic autobiography, going so far as to protect the author’s identity during the lawsuit that followed its publication, even though it would surely have limited their own

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12 Maimie Papers; Madeleine: An Autobiography, 2d ed. (1919; reprint, New York: Persea Books, 1986); Pauline Tabor, Memoirs of the Madam on Clay Street (Louisville, Ky.: Touchstone, 1972); and Sally
liability to reveal who Madeleine really was. Also in defense of the text’s authenticity, Carlisle asserted that the “flat, even quality of the narrative is consistent with the wealth of household and ‘female’ details that are included along with the matter-of-fact descriptions of dealings with the other brothel inmates and the police.” Furthermore, “there is little sensationalism to arouse the reader, but there is sentimentalism aimed at a female audience.” Ultimately, Carlisle was convinced of the genuineness of Madeleine’s authorship by the fact that Madeleine, whoever she was, wrote the narrative out of self-interest, not concern for society or reform. If anything, the book was a critique of reformers’ self-righteous judgment of prostitutes and “fallen women” and their hypocrisy in dealing with them. After telling her story, Madeleine vehemently denounced “club-women . . . [for] decrying a sin and yet condemning a fellow-woman to follow it for the term of her natural life.”

The three texts I examine more closely in this chapter provide a wealth of potential information about two sex workers’ and one typical male patron’s sex life and perceptions of their sexual identity. They fit my definition of erotic autobiography because the narrators concentrate primarily on telling their life stories through explicitly sexual activities, desire, and pleasure rather than through more traditional means as describing childhood, education, professional accomplishments, and philosophies (although all the texts I examine these facets of life also in relationship to the narrator’s


13 This could, of course, also be read as support for the argument that the text was indeed a fake. 14 Madeleine: An Autobiography, vi. 15 Madeleine: An Autobiography, vi. 16 Madeleine: An Autobiography, 328.
sexuality). Despite the admittedly problematic nature of erotic autobiographical narratives, they may reveal much to historians of prostitution and sexuality when used in conjunction with a wide variety of other sources. Much like Carlisle’s Madeleine, Lola, Wilbur, and Madeleine claimed to have written their narratives out of self-interest and a desire to “tell my story.” Their lack of an overarching antiprostitution moral tale suggests that these texts were not written by reformers, although one might argue that they are more pornographic than factual.

Pornography as a Historical Source: Problems and Possibilities

Despite the inherent problems of autobiography as source, most scholars of history would argue that it is a more accurate historical source than pornography—providing that the historian knows, with a fair amount of certainty, who wrote the work. Because the three texts I examine in this chapter cannot be proven to be authentic via the criteria Rosen and others have laid out—although the authorship of Burton’s autobiography at least appears to be verifiable—they fall somewhere between autobiography and pornography, thus rendering them suspect as historical sources. But what if they are indeed pornographic texts? Should we dismiss them entirely?

17 The only critical work of similar narratives that I have been able to find is Ruth Ann Hendrickson, “Narrative Strategies of Erotic Fictional Autobiography,” Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 1988. Although we examine one text in common (Memoirs of Madame Madeleine) Hendrickson assumed that none of the works she looked at were authentic accounts, calling them pornography instead, whereas I believe that at least some of these autobiographies are factual historical accounts, including Memoirs of Madame Madeleine. Hendrickson noted that “The distinguishing feature of erotic fictional autobiography is that the character tells this life-story from the perspective of sexual activity; that is, the autobiography emphasizes not the journey of an artist toward the discover of purpose or the trials of a pilgrim on the way to spiritual awakening, but the adventures of a sexually aware individual on the way through a world of pleasure” (6). I apply this as well to the accounts I believe to be real (nonfiction).
Short of specific knowledge about authorship, scholars must be able to show that a source or its author is at least representative of his or her times. Of course, we expect historians to exercise caution with any written document; but scholars still view autobiography, especially that which stays away from discussing sex, as a valid source of historical “facts” while pornography is seen simply as “fiction.” Often deriding the usefulness of interpretations of fictional accounts to the creation of historical narratives, historians of the past few centuries have left such analysis to scholars of literary and cultural studies. Yet, many historians of more modern eras forget that their counterparts who study medieval and ancient periods continue to rely heavily on paleography and the techniques of literary and art critics when analyzing the meager written texts to which they have access. Historians of ancient Greece or medieval England, for example, are often forced to turn to analysis of fiction or art as the means by which to explain history in their chosen time and place.18

Few historians, of any time period, have considered pornography a valid source of historical information about sexuality. Perhaps this is because historians have chosen to leave the analysis of such writings to literary critics and the reading to those presumably salacious individuals (none historians, of course!) titillated by erotic stories. Most recent studies of pornography have stemmed from work in sociology or on popular culture and queer theory. Instead of ignoring pornography, however, historians should recognize the wealth of information it may provide about desires, fantasies, and possible practices in

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18 Examples of such analysis are widespread. For the use of fiction and other genres in the history of sexuality, see, for example, Bernadette Brooten, *Love between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); and Amy Richlin, ed., *Pornography and Representation in Greece and Rome* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).
the past. As scholar of erotic literature Murray S. Davis has written: “Pornographers must achieve some verisimilitude in their work or they would lose their audiences. Occasionally, of course, they use fictive conventions for display purposes. . . . But on the whole pornographers portray sex in a way that their readers find at least conceivable, if not common.” As literary scholar Ruth Ann Hendrickson has noted, it takes more than a “writer-created formulaic nymphomaniac to make the text pornographic.” Rather the writer “must create a world that will seduce the reader.” To stimulate passion, pornography must at the very least represent the fantasies and desires of its readers. And, although many fantasies never leave that realm, pornography plausibly represents the desires and possible sex experiences of some people.

Historian Dorolies Kraakman noted that in late-eighteenth-century France, erotic fiction was “directed toward generating pleasure through tales of sexual fantasy. The stories therefore should not be read only as metaphors for something else from the cultural context; they are also sexual stories that this culture produced.” She is adamant that because these stories represent cultural interpretations of sexuality and fantasy, pornography is a viable source of material for historians of sexuality. Furthermore, pornography may shape what is desirable to its readers.

Scholars who have examined pornography prior to the nineteenth century have concentrated on how pornographic representations constituted a significant and

inextricable part of revolutionary writing in eighteenth-century England and France. According to philosopher-historian Michel Foucault, the “discursive explosion” surrounding sexual behavior and sexuality in the late eighteenth century led to the creation of pornography—writing specifically intended to titillate its readers sexually.

Pornography as a discrete literary genre evolved sometime in the nineteenth century, and writers in the United States first began to produce erotic writing in the mid-1800s, when Irish-born William Haynes published the first American pornographic book in New York City in 1846. Others quickly followed Haynes’s lead and annual sales of pornographic literature were booming by the 1870s, when Anthony Comstock and other purity crusaders launched their zealous reform campaigns against obscenity, prostitution, and abortion.
Considering pornography as a genre, scholars are divided about the meanings and differences of "pornography" versus "erotica." Many see a divide between the two, arguing that pornography (or "hard-core") usually describes actual sexual behavior, while erotica (or "soft-core") contains more detail about the subjective sexual experience and emotional feelings. Davis explains that soft-core "often depict[s] the subtle phenomenological effects that result when a character's sexual behavior clashes with his or her personal or sexual characteristics."\(^{26}\) Such divisions tend implicitly or explicitly to divide the genres along gender lines. Scholars have portrayed erotica as appealing more to women and embodying a more feminine (i.e., emotional or romantic) form of sexual writing, while pornography is seen as more masculine in both its direct writing style and perceived audience.

Scholars of sexual writing have also pointed to the polarization of "high-brow" and "low-brow" sexual language and the resultant lack of a middle ground in sexual terms. Davis has shown how "vulgar terms imply that sex is a lower-class activity (prick, fuck, suck) and Latin terms imply that sexual activity is confined to the educated upper class (penis, intercourse, fellatio). The lack of an everyday nomenclature for sexual organs and behaviors suggest that the middle class would rather pretend that they do not exist in the respectable world. Yet it is interesting that only the lower-class words have been censored as obscene."\(^{27}\) Some historians of sexuality have attributed the polarization of high-brow and low-brow terminology to the desire of the middle classes to censor and

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\(^{26}\) Davis, *Smut*, xx.

\(^{27}\) Davis, *Smut*, xxiii.

control lower-class sexual behavior. Others have noted the tendency to view such words as “fuck” as somehow more dirty or pornographic than “copulate,” “cock” worse than “penis,” and “cunt” more distasteful than “vagina,” noting “the absurdity of regarding as obscene an Anglo-Saxon monosyllable while accepting a Latin polysyllable having the same meaning.” And, the line separating the two has become more blurred in the past few decades with the vast proliferation of pornographic literature and film, along with graphic depictions of sex in mainstream films and television, and advertising in all media.

Historians and literary scholars of pornography generally agree that men have historically, and almost exclusively, authored pornography. Literary analyst Michael Perkins claims that “up until the fifties erotic literature was written solely by men.” Readership and sales of porn have also been attributed predominantly to men. Ralph Ginzburg, a mid-twentieth-century scholar of pornography, informed his readers in the late 1950s that “no woman has ever been known to own an important collection of erotica, despite Dr. [Alfred] Kinsey’s statistics which indicate that women are just as easily titillated by erotica’s charms as men.”

And, while such studies as the 1986 Meese Commission report found that “the proportion of women reporting use of pornographic

28 Noted historians of sexual behavior Vern Bullough and Bonnie Bullough have argued this. They are quoted in Davis, Smut, xxiv.
29 R. de Ropp quoted in Davis, Smut, xxiv.
31 Ginzburg, An Unhurried View of Erotica, 105-6. Of course, this androcentric interpretation neglects the possibility that women very well may have collected erotica for their own pleasure, and perhaps been too embarrassed to claim ownership, or they may have pursued the collection of such materials with their husbands as “marital aids.” Ruth Hendrickson has pointed out assumptions that women’s lack of access to pornography was the result of unwelcoming bookstores where porn is sold to men, and the belief that much porn has concentrated on male fetishes that many women may find abhorrent such as rape fantasies and bondage. In her own work, however, she found many examples of erotic fictional autobiography that emphasize female agency, desire, and fulfillment in sexual encounters. See Hendrickson, “Narrative Strategies of Erotic Fictional Autobiography,” 18.

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material had increased dramatically (to about two thirds of the level of male use, according to one 1985 Gallup poll),” the assumption has been that prior to the very recent past pornography had played little or no role in women’s sex lives.\(^{32}\) Lesbian erotica, too, has been deemed a “relatively recent phenomenon,” which evolved as a result of 1960s and 1970s feminism and the purported sexual revolution.\(^{33}\) The almost ubiquitous historical and modern assumption that only men have written or used pornography sheds light on larger social presumptions about male and female sexuality. It takes for granted that men have more desire and need for sexual outlet than women, a stereotype that has plagued women of all races and ethnicities in a variety of ways since the late eighteenth century.\(^{34}\) This assumption about male sexuality is also reflected in histories of prostitution, which similarly emphasize that men purchase sex and women sell it. Although this is often the case, stereotypes such as these have skewed the historical picture of male and female sexuality in the commercial sex context, rendering women victims or objects of male sexuality and men actors and subjects.

At least one scholar has seen an important change occurring in contemporary pornography—one in which women predominate. This new “sexual story,” according to

\(^{32}\) Brian McNair, Mediated Sex: Pornography and Postmodern Culture (London: Arnold, 1996), 95. McNair also noted that the Johnson Commission, which undertook research on pornography use in the 1960s, determined that men created and used almost all sexually explicit materials.

\(^{33}\) McNair, Mediated Sex, 130.

\(^{34}\) Historians have shown that the nineteenth-century ideal of white women’s passionlessness did not exist in the preceding centuries. See, for example, Thomas Laqueur, Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990). Conversely, even though many nineteenth- and twentieth-century whites believed that African and African-American women were more sexual than their white counterparts, these women’s supposed sexuality simply provided a justification for white men to use them sexually. See Deborah Gray White, A’rn’ t I a Woman: Female Slaves in the Plantation South (New York: W. W. Norton, 1985). Society has not interpreted black women’s supposedly active desire or demanding sexuality in the ways that it did white men’s; stereotypes about black women’s sensuality did not lead to widespread beliefs that they created or consumed pornography or justify their patronization of prostitutes.
Ken Plummer, “is a tale told of women who have decided to make their own porn, consume their own porn, delight in their own porn. There may be a new story—of women liking porn—in the making.” Plummer’s narrative concerns only late twentieth and early twenty-first century women. Not until very recently (and rarely) has any historian mentioned the possibility that women may have produced and consumed pornography prior to the late twentieth century. Kraakman concluded that in France, as late as the first decade of the nineteenth century, women authored and read erotic fiction, and that “a ‘feminist discourse’ was present in this genre, which subsequently was marked as ‘male.’” (While the implication here may be that women had written pornography in the decades preceding the early nineteenth century, Kraakman never asserted this possibility directly.) Historians should pay close attention to this revelation when examining presumably “male” pornographic writing, Kraakman argued, and feminists should also look to these writings when looking for nascent feminist thought in the late eighteenth century.

However, while Kraakman’s central concern was the existence of early feminism in woman-authored erotica, an understated aside to her analysis of the potential readership of such work is more germane to my discussion of erotic autobiographies. In a footnote, Kraakman questioned assumptions about pornography’s all-male readership, arguing, “if women wrote these books, then they also must have read them.” While it is impossible to know with certainty who wrote or read “Memoirs of a Pleasure Girl.”

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36 Kraakman, “Reading Pornography Anew,” 548.
37 Kraakman, “Reading Pornography Anew,” 532 n. 43.
Burton’s “Erotic Autobiography,” and *Memoirs of Madame Madeleine* it is plausible that a woman authored at least the first two and more than probable that women would have read all three of them had they all been published.

**Lola Ardley—The Pleasure Girl**

“Lola Ardley” was the brothel name of the woman who supposedly penned the autobiographical “Memoirs of a Pleasure Girl” most likely sometime after World War II.³⁸ “Pleasure Girl” is a fascinating historical source. Lola graphically described her commercial and noncommercial sexual behavior with both men and women, as well as that of her colleagues and their male and female clients. For historians of prostitution and sexuality, such sources as this are unusual. Institutional, legal, and prescriptive literature on prostitution and women’s sexuality abounded in the first half of the twentieth century, yet sex workers left behind few written documents. Even fewer of these, which purport to be written by prostitutes themselves, describe in detail their personal lives, sexual experiences, daily work, or feelings about their lives as sex workers. Thus, it should come as no surprise that I thought I had hit the jackpot when I found “Memoirs of a Pleasure Girl” while at the Kinsey Institute for Sex Research looking for clues about prostitutes’ sexuality in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century United States. Here was the proverbial jewel in the archive that purported to tell it like it was. The frontispiece of the book claimed, “A girl who worked in a house of pleasure describes her own experiences” and would answer the same questions about which I had been wondering:
"Why do girls enter the profession that is known as the oldest profession in the world? What do they do to entertain men and women? How do they get paid? And do they enjoy their work with other people?" Furthermore, Lola would tell "of the whims and inhibitions of her clientel [sic] and describe her own thrills and sensations while entertaining them." 39

As I turned the hand-numbered pages of the bound, typewritten manuscript, however, I was both increasingly enthusiastic about "Pleasure Girl"'s potential as a historical source and worried about its authenticity. The memoir was never published by a press and is not dated. First among the problems with the document was the fact that Kinsey Institute's bibliographic record deemed it to be "fiction." The origin of this attribution, however, was unclear. For example, Kinsey also listed as fiction "Call House Madam": The Story of the Career of Beverly Davis, a semi-autobiographical account of the live of Beverly Davis, according to ghostwriter Serge Wolsey. Although parts were certainly embellished, Wolsey claimed that Davis was "the notorious madam who operated the glittering and palatial houses of prostitution in Hollywood's night life for over a quarter of a century" and also "the first madam to talk of her profession for publication in defiance of the underworld, the half-world, and the world of glamour of which she was a part." 40 Wolsey, however, did stretch and obscure the truth in many

38 Lola introduces herself in the beginning of the memoir as Lora (no last name). On her first day working in a brothel, however, she names herself "Lola Ardley" and tells the madam and her patrons that she is English. See "Memoirs of a Pleasure Girl," 8.
40 Serge G. Wolsey, "Call House Madam": The Story of the Career of Beverly Davis, as Told by Serge G. Wolsey (San Francisco: Lavater-Dorette, 1944), 6. Interestingly, the Kinsey record also notes that the publisher was fined $500 for sending copies of the book through the mail, presumably under the Comstock Laws of 1873, which regulated the production and distribution of "obscene" materials. See note 26 above
instances and invoked the typical disclaimer of works of fiction: "The name[s] of any living person or persons mentioned in this book are purely coincidental. No real names are intended." However, whether this book is "fiction" is debatable as many of the facts given surrounding Davis's life are undoubtedly true.

Second, Kinsey's bibliographic record attributed to "Pleasure Girl" a date of both "1900" and "19--" but provided no further information. The only clue to when it may have been penned came from Lola herself. Calling the era in which she lived the "modern machine age," Lola also noted, "when the last world war got under way, the gov't agencies cracked down on the illegal houses of prostitution in every town in city." Although the U.S. government attempted to curb prostitution during both World War I (1914-1918) and World War II (1941-1945), Lola's referral to the "last world war" implies the existence of more than one world war and thus likely indicates World War II, dating "Pleasure Girl" to the Cold War era (although it may date to the interwar years).

Third, Lola never mentioned specifically where she was located geographically. She said that she was born in a small midwestern town and that her family members were

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for information about Comstock and the antiobscenity campaigns of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

farmers. Although she related that she moved to “the city” prior to becoming a prostitute, she never made clear to which city she had moved. The fact that the madam for whom Lola worked lived “across the river” provides a clue, but the simple fact that many large urban areas are divided by rivers prohibits a definite conclusion. However, while there is no hard evidence of where Lola lived, it is possible to determine where she did not. On a summer vacation, Lola and her roommate, Irma, passed through Chicago on their way to Los Angeles, indicating that the two women lived east of Illinois and, most likely, north of the Ohio River. They may have lived in New Jersey or Connecticut and worked in New York City, which had always sported a large prostitute population; but Philadelphia, Boston, Pittsburgh, Washington, D.C., and even Columbus or Indianapolis, are possibilities. While knowing her location would not necessarily prove or disprove the authenticity of the document, it might shed light on the political, economic, and social context in which she lived or provide hints as to where to look for such other historical documentation as arrest records and newspaper accounts.

As I read “Memoirs of a Pleasure Girl” I began noticing a number of ways in which the text resonated with pornographic conventions. The lack of geographical specificity is a common device in pornography, whereas most prostitutes’ autobiographies detail experiences in specific times and places. Furthermore, the language and content of many passages are consistent with pornographic narratives, which typically cast women as enthusiastic performers of sex acts for men. The story is also told in the present tense, another common method of drawing the reader into the

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story in a more personal manner. After performing oral sex on a man, for example, the narrator exclaimed, “It is wonderful. I really had a good time when I sucked him off. I like to do that to men and boys and from this time on I am going to do it every chance I get.” After that night, she called herself a “vampire” incessantly searching for sexual pleasure, or what she referred to as “thrills.” I was suspicious of “Pleasure Girl” because Lola’s slang and enthusiasm for oral sex reminded me of Penthouse “Forum”—pornography written predominantly by men for men. It was also highly reminiscent of the 1970s porn film Deep Throat, which is based on a male fantasy of a woman who derives orgasmic pleasure from fellating men. And yet “Pleasure Girl” also brought to mind contemporary sex-positive feminist writings, such as that by ex-porn star Annie Sprinkle, which argue that sex workers are not victims but instead exercise agency and experience some pleasure while performing their jobs—we cannot discount the possibility that female sex workers enjoy giving blow jobs to men.

Thus I began to ask a number of questions of “Pleasure Girl.” Was it written simply as titillation, perhaps by a man with no direct experience of working as a prostitute? Was it politically motivated, an early sex-positive argument about women’s capacity for adventurous eroticism? If it was truly a whore’s autobiography, why had Lola taken the unusual step of writing in the argot of the brothel and the street? These questions were more pressing because “Pleasure Girl” challenges many of the assumptions historians make about the experience of prostitution in the past.

“Memoirs of a Pleasure Girl,” when fit into traditional interpretations of pornography, challenges dichotomies between erotica and pornography, as well as between low-brow and high brow pornography. While her prose was colloquial, and Lola often used such terms as “cunt,” “prick,” and “gism [sic],” she also interspersed more technical terms in her “dirty” story such as “fellatio” and “cunninglis [sic].” In addition to the graphic descriptions of sex acts that would delineate her memoir as pornography, she also discussed her feelings about the sex she had, and narrated more personal aspects of her life. Lola told of her childhood and about the feelings that she and her roommate, Irma, had for one another. Lola noted that Irma, whom she believed was a lesbian, had strong feelings for her and “was wishing that no man would tear us apart.”

Wilbur Burton

The Kinsey Institute archives also houses Wilbur Burton’s “Erotic Autobiography.” Although Wilbur was a man and thus might seem an unlikely addition to this study about female sexuality, he frequented prostitutes and discussed his experiences with them in detail. Because he wrote from the position of one purchasing sex from women, his words must be taken with a grain of salt and his descriptions of sexual encounters and fantasies must be weighed against the reality that he wrote his memoirs years after his exploits with the intention to relive his “glory days.” Thus, an element of fantasy surely exists in his retelling of his sexual encounters. Nonetheless,

Wilbur is at all times frank and self-reflective, rendering his narrative believable and rich in material.

Like Lola, Wilbur claimed that the autobiography was an authentic memoir of his sexual life. However, as does “Pleasure Girl,” “Erotic Autobiography” revolves around sex and often reads more like pornography than the kind of life story one usually reads. As Wilbur proclaimed, “I write fully, freely and frankly, without evasion or euphemism, about sex as I have experienced it in fifty years on four continents and a few islands—autoerotically, bestially, homosexually and heterosexually.”49 It appears that the only kind of sexual behavior in which Burton refused to engage was necrophilia.50

Wilbur Burton was born in August 1901 and raised with his twin brother Wallace on a farm near Winchester, Indiana. After two years at the Ohio State University, Wilbur left Columbus in 1922 to work as a journalist, although he also moonlighted as a merchant marine, press agent, Communist propagandist in China (he claimed in 1951 that he was never a member of the Communist party), and part-time teacher in a Chinese middle school.51 In 1933, he published an article on Yunnan (Hunan) province in the China Weekly Review.52 In a biographical sketch accompanying his 1938 London Fortnightly article about the increasingly equal status of women in Chinese society and their expanded social role, Wilbur was described as a “roving American journalist with a positive genius for extracting the essence of social characteristics in out-of-the-way parts

51 Burton, “Erotic Autobiography,” 4-5. Note that I have not been able to corroborate all of the facts of Burton’s life, although I have indeed located his published articles.
of the world."53 Genius aside, Wilbur's journalistic career ended in 1942 when, after a year at the cable desk of the New York Times, he refused to go to war and was incarcerated in the federal prison at Ashland, Kentucky.54 In 1946, Wilbur returned home to Indiana with his second wife where he wrote his autobiography.

By the 1950s, Wilbur had already completed a number of autobiographical and semi-autobiographical writings about his life, including "Flesh Made Word: The Way and the World of a Lusty Individualist in Peace, War, Prison—and O'er the Vineyards of Bacchus and the Gardens of Venus," in which he presented a complete rendering of his life that included his professional, intellectual, and sexual pursuits.55 In May 1951, however, Wilbur set out to write an autobiography that dealt "solely and in more detail with sex life, save for such passing mention of other items of living as are necessary for clarity and continuity—and to indicate the integration of eroticism with the rest of my pattern with life."56 Wilbur had begun keeping written notes on his sex life in his early thirties, believing even then that "sex cannot be dissociated from the rest of life—or the rest of life from sex."57 Twenty years later, while writing his erotic autobiography, Wilbur mused that it was "now a matter of vain regret that I never kept a detailed erotic diary!"58

54 Burton noted that he "spent 22 months as Convict No. 2173" and "In late 1944, I was paroled to be an attendant in a swank hospital for the insane in Maryland and subsequently as the storekeeper in a Baltimore hospital." Burton, "Erotic Autobiography," 5.
55 Burton, "Erotic Autobiography," 1. I have been unable to find these texts.
Historians often dismiss sexual (and other) autobiographies as not being reflective of actual behavior because authors have faulty memories or may have embellished their stories. Even when recounted from notes taken at the time, sexy stories are suspect; men's sexy stories, to the early twenty-first century mind, are dismissed as simply pornography, or readers assume that they are embellished as part of a man's need to brag about his sexual prowess. As such, tales of sexual experiences are often dismissed and dissociated from other aspects of a person's political, philosophical, social, or economic life. Scholars seem to believe that sufficiently complete biographies may be written which omit sex acts or desires. Sexuality is not recognized as an important aspect of a person's total subjectivity in the same manner as other physical, emotional, or spiritual experiences. Although plenty of historians have written at length about such incidents in their subjects' lives as death, accidents, mistreatment, or illnesses; love affairs, friendships, and enmities; and even religious conversion experiences, few have given sexual experiences the same weight as these similarly subjective aspects of a person's life.

Wilbur, recognizing that his sexual autobiography would not perhaps be taken seriously by readers and wishing to ward off such skepticism, was outspoken about his conviction that there was "no reason or even plausible excuse whatsoever not to discuss sex in exactly the same detail, without shame or inhibition, that one discusses anything else human: war, murder, politics, business, cookery, carpentry, or what have you." "The sexual part of life," he wrote, "is not more 'private' than friendship, religious feeling, gastronomic preferences, the emotions of grief or joy that arise non-erotically, or one's bodily ills. Unless one rigorously adheres to a convention that one should tell only of
one's public life, a sexual autobiography is as much in order as a political or medical one; and in any event, a sexual autobiography is as 'proper' as a confession of religious experience or any other personal furor.' Wilbur admitted that erotic daydreaming certainly did not make up a majority of his waking thoughts, most of which revolved around philosophical or political contemplation. However, he emphasized that the connections among his erotic and nonerotic thoughts were fundamental to his psyche as a whole and thus could not be disentangled; nor could one strain of thought be valued more highly than the other. He felt compelled to reveal the erotic aspects of his life, and expected his audience to take them seriously.

Wilbur claimed to be an unabashed egoist who believed that all autobiography was "[e]rrant exhibitionism, and hence its own excuse for being," and he insisted that "any pretense of non-egoistic purpose is simply rationalization." He hoped that people would find his story interesting, and that his honesty would perhaps help others resolve sexual difficulties in their own lives. However, Wilbur also insisted that it was simply "fun, often even ecstasy, to put my erotic memoirs on paper." Writing at age fifty, Burton was reliving his sexual "glory days." His egoism, Burton explained, was what compelled him to tell his story truthfully: "I believe I am consciously so thoroughgoing an egoist that there is nothing in my life that I wish in the least to conceal and so much that I have no incentive to assert more."

Like Lola’s story, Wilbur’s “erotic autobiography” often reads like pornography in its graphic descriptions of sexual acts and suggestions of different ways in which to obtain orgasms. For example, Wilbur, during the periods of time when he refrained from visiting prostitutes while living in Columbus, “deliberately” masturbated twice a week. He concluded that he found this amount moderate, basing his estimation on Martin Luther’s recommendation that all people engage in biweekly marital coition. At the same time, he began imagining, practicing, and expanding his masturbatory technique. “I found that sheathing my penis in a wet handkerchief of silk—I had only one, a High School graduation gift!—was superior to simply using my dry hand for manipulation; another variation was masturbating in my bath with both hand and penis well soaped; and still another variation better than simple manual manipulation was to lie on my back, and elevate my thighs so I could press then around my penis, then with my hands outside my thighs manipulate their flesh against the penis to coming. . . . Most of my later prison masturbation was in this fashion, with often by then also manipulation of the anus and the area between it and the scrotum as a preliminary.”63 In similarly graphic detail, Wilbur described throughout the text the anal, oral, and “69” sex that he had with Herbert (a young man with whom both he and his brother had had sex while teenagers), his brother (Wilbur and Wallace engaged in sexual relations as young men), and numerous other men and women.64

Madame Madeleine

Madeleine, who supposedly had changed her name from Louise, claimed to have been born in 1889 to a family in Plattsburg, New York. In her twenties, Madeleine moved to France and became a well-known courtesan. In the early 1920s, she resided on the Boulevard Hausmann in Paris. The exact origin of her memoirs can only be gleaned from what Madeleine chose to reveal to her readers and from a “bibliographical note” written by the editor of the work, which stated that “the following typescript is one of two faithful copies of the completed text . . . published at Paris in 1928.” Of the 125 copies of an original private edition that were supposedly issued, “100 copies were seized and destroyed by the customs authorities at Folkestone, England, in January 1929.” The actual identity and gender of the editor are impossible to determine. Although most known collectors of erotic writings have been men, they may have only appeared to be the majority of collectors because it was considered more acceptable for them to write, read, and purchase pornography. Women may very well have collected erotica, either alone or with husbands or male or female lovers, and madams, especially, were often known for their large collections of pornography, which they provided as titillation for customers. Whatever the editor’s gender, the person was most likely of American or British descent. Possessed of a “collector’s passion that had brought me across oceans,”

65 Memoirs of Madame Madeleine, 2 vols. (1928; reprint, New York: Miller Bros., 1930-1946), 1:14, 28. Louise never gives her given last name. As with Burton, facts about Madeleine’s life have not been corroborated.
66 Memoirs of Madame Madeleine, 1:47.
67 Memoirs of Madame Madeleine, volume 1, handwritten notes on the inside of the front cover owned by the Kinsey Institute of Sex Research.
the editor noted in clear English that she or he had found Madeleine's memoirs written in her own hand and bound into the second volume of "Venus in India."\(^6\)

Madeleine echoed Lola and Burton in the pornographic writing conventions she used and acknowledged that she was walking a fine line between sexual autobiography and pornographic fiction in her memoir. As if to emphasize this combination of pornographic titillation and autobiographic self-revelation—and entice her reader in the process—Madeleine described the ongoing sexual relationship she had with her maid and friend Fleurette. In the introduction to *Memoirs*, Madeleine related how all it took was "a slight gesture from me, and my cherry-lipped little Fleurette yonder slips hither between my thighs, even as I sit, pen in hand. Worshipfully she slips her pretty head beneath my light silk peignoir, and brushing aside the riband of my chemise, with her soft coral tongue stimulates in me such warm delicious tremors as again assure me of the worthiness of this, my project."\(^6\)

Madeleine was also quite frank about the downside of prostitution and men's obliviousness to it. According to Madeleine, much erotica written by men for men ignored the realities of pregnancy or venereal disease and the unrealistic nature (not to mention the illegality and inhumanity) of describing a ten-inch penis penetrating a

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\(^6\) *Memoirs of Madame Madeleine*, 1:10. The book could have been translated from French but I believe that it was written in English. The "Venus of India" reference most likely referred to Charles Devereux [pseudonym], *Venus in India, or, Love Adventures in Hindustan* (Paris; n.p., 1898; reprint, New York: Warner Books, 1983), for which I have found reference on WorldCat. An additional note—most likely taken from the book’s frontispiece—in the database makes it clear that this was pornographic: "Printed at Carnopolis for the delectation of the amorous and the instruction of the amateur in the year of the excitement of the sexes." One of the entries in WorldCat lists "pedophilia" and "soldiers" as subject descriptors for this two-volume work.

fourteen-year-old virgin.\textsuperscript{70} Such pornography did not portray commercial sex
realistically, as she hoped to do. Madeleine wanted to describe the sex she had as a
prostitute in its realities, emphasizing the erotic nature of commercial sex while
downplaying those parts of commercial sexual encounters that were rare (although
fetishized), such as sex with virgins.

Like Wilbur, Madeleine also acknowledged that she wrote her memoirs to relive
sexual glory days. She declared that she was not writing her story to warn women away
from prostitution as a profession as had so many other prostitutes who had written their
memoirs. “Scarcely that” she asserted. “Rather it is that I wish to record the experiences
of my sense while their tinglings are yet echoing through my veins, and if any uncertainty
of detail arises in the course of my analyses, I can still re-experience and re-examine
those subjective states.”\textsuperscript{71} In her early thirties, Madeleine had been warned by her doctor
that if she kept up her sexual excesses she would develop her slight heart aneurysm into
serious endocarditis. Although she asserted that she had not begun writing because she
intended on dying any time soon, the knowledge that her days were limited may have
provoked her to write her memoirs. Madeleine admitted that her purpose was “to some
day publish these memoirs for distribution to my friends and patrons.”\textsuperscript{72} She died three
years after beginning her memoirs, in 1922, at age thirty-three.\textsuperscript{73} Six years later, and
perhaps at her willed bequest, \textit{Memoirs of Madame Madeleine} was published in Paris.

\textsuperscript{70} \textit{Memoirs of Madame Madeleine}, 1:21-22.
\textsuperscript{71} \textit{Memoirs of Madame Madeleine}, 1:17.
\textsuperscript{72} \textit{Memoirs of Madame Madeleine}, 1:19.
\textsuperscript{73} \textit{Memoirs of Madame Madeleine}, 1:12, 19.
Sex Acts and Sexualities

In their erotic autobiographies, Lola, Madeleine, and Wilbur played fast and loose with labels of sexuality and sex acts. For example, despite the sex she had with women, Lola continually reassured her readers—and, it seems, herself—that she was not a lesbian. When Irma expressed jealousy at not being able to "give [Lola] that first thrill" as a male customer, Lola derided her as being "a bit on the lesbian side." Yet Lola continually had sex with her, suggesting that she was able to disconnect the object of her desire and ministrations from a self-imposed sexual category or identity. After a particularly hot night of oral sex with Irma, Lola seemed uncertain what to make of the experience. First she gushed, "sex is a wonderful thing. It is what I love best of all and I did enjoy that session of perversion and thrills with Irma. It is nice to know that one has such power to make another person feel so good and I was proud of my ability in such things." Yet, her pat assertion that "I didn't feel in any way sickened when I licked . . . kissed . . . and sucked her sweet little cunt. I enjoyed it," seems as conflicted as it was excited. Lola alternately insisted that she had nothing in common with a prostitute whom she referred to as a "queer . . . cunt-lapper who loved to entertain members of the female sex," then later boasted of her own prowess in pleasuring women. Obviously uneasy with the lesbian label when it applied to herself, Lola's memoir nonetheless reveals that homosexual women (or at least same-sex sex acts) existed in the world of

prostitution in which she lived. And she willingly participated in multiple sexual activities with various women.

Wilbur also engaged in numerous and varied sex acts with men, women, and animals over the course of his life. All his early sexual encounters were with men or animals, yet as he aged he increasingly engaged in heterosexual sex with both prostitute and nonprostitute women, although he engaged in occasional sexual liaisons with men. He may have seen this as a Freudian progression toward “normal” sexuality. During a summer 1920 sojourn in Indiana, Wilbur introduced his boyhood lover Herbert into “mature homosexual relations.” The encounter involved anal and mutual oral sex, although Wilbur failed in his attempt to convince the reluctant Herbert that “semen was a really excellent tonic” and that he should swallow the fluid from Wilbur’s orgasm. Afterward, Wilbur commented that he thought that Herbert resented the encounter; Herbert eventually married a woman. 77

Although Wilbur’s varied sex acts seemed to mesh with his fluid sense of sexual identity, he, too, tried to assign labels to people based on their sex acts or character traits. In the early 1920s, Wilbur arrived in Atlanta, Georgia, with Monroe, a man whom he had met on the train. Having determined to room with Monroe, Wilbur reported that on their first night sharing a double bed Monroe “wanted anal copulation with me; suggesting fellating me in return; and while he did not unduly press his suit, I acquiesced without any enthusiasm: I was now too much interested in women to want any adventures in homosexuality.” Despite his supposedly heterosexual leanings at this time, Wilbur enjoyed masturbating Monroe—“for his glowing joy from my manual ministration was
something to behold”—and had sex with many of the “local fairies” to whom Monroe had introduced him. Most of these men only wanted to fellate Wilbur, and he admitted that he allowed himself to be seduced by several and had “quite joyous memories of interludes with them.” But Wilbur asserted that he “never achieved any high elation in the episodes, nothing comparable to that of relations with [his brother] Wallace.”

Although he first referred to Monroe as a homosexual and called the men with whom he had sex “fairies,” Wilbur intermittently referred to Monroe as “bisexual” and noted that most people would have never suspected his predilection unless he made it known. He also drew an ambivalent comparison between Monroe the homosexual and those “fairies” who “deliberately cultivated and exaggerated feminine mannerisms” and flaunted their “queerness.” He identified more with “well integrated homosexuals” who never made passes at him or those who “neither denied or sought to suppress their compulsions nor were caricatures of women.” Such men, he believed, “were simply what they were with dignity: homosexual men.”

Although he made such strong assertions, Wilbur’s ideas about, perceptions of, and sense of self in relation to homosexuals and homosexual sex acts reflect similar statements that Lola made which were fraught with inconsistencies, ambivalence, and remembrances of sexual pleasure.

In all three of these texts there is no negative evaluation of prostitution or of their own forms of sexual desire and behavior. If anything, Lola, Madeleine, and Wilbur all refer both to commercial sex and the many varieties of sex acts in which they participated.

rather nonchalantly, if not in positive terms. Wilbur described encounters with prostitutes in the same breath as petting young women he met at the park or pool, heterosexual sex with his own wife and those of other men, and sex acts with men. He apparently felt no compunction about visiting prostitutes and made no judgmental remarks anywhere in his autobiography about prostitution as a profession. In describing his encounter with Hazel, a Columbus, Ohio, prostitute whom he patronized on New Year’s Eve in 1919, Wilbur could find no objection to the episode other than Hazel’s “constant use of the sub-
lowbrow American colloquialism *dearie.*”\(^1\) Neither Lola nor Madeleine justified their chosen profession; both said that they enjoyed it or that it paid well. Although it might be argued that Lola, Madeleine, or Wilbur were attempting to cover up their situation with false cheerfulness—and certainly not all prostitutes or their customers enjoyed commercial sex or sex work—the common thread in these texts is one of acceptance, not censure, and pleasure, not revulsion.

Lola, Madeleine, and Wilbur portrayed prostitutes as human beings making choices in their lives. Madeleine continually asserted that prostitutes were neither dumb nor insensitive, and she reiterated often that there were concrete financial opportunities for shrewd women who chose to enter the business.\(^2\) Like Lola, Madeleine insisted that she had not been coerced by a man or forced by economic circumstance into prostitution: “I can’t just dive into my tale until I have made my position clear. I chose the life of a prostitute.”\(^3\)

\(^1\) Burton, “Erotic Autobiography,” 70.
\(^2\) *Memoirs of Madame Madeleine*, 1:26-27
\(^3\) *Memoirs of Madame Madeleine*, 1:23.
In addition to the idea that not all prostitutes were exploited women forced by desperation or addiction into the trade, there arises in these erotic autobiographies the idea that prostitutes might have occasionally enjoyed the sexual aspects of their work. Some did so more than others. One type, which Wilbur called the "avocational whore," included women who chose to become prostitutes because they sought sexual gratification with their customers. According to Wilbur, who claimed to have encountered four such women in his global sexual exploits, this "rare species" was one "who deliberately seeks sex pleasure from every patron: willing, to be sure, to make her living without it, but ever trying to find fun as well as money in her job." Although Wilbur pointed out that "only the exceedingly exceptional avocational whore consciously endeavors to enjoy it: and is consciously disappointed if a patron is so louzy [sic] a lover that he fails to carry her to her besought crisis," he believed that most prostitutes experienced some sexual pleasure while working. Lola claimed that "I had fun in my work and it has been full of thrills and I enjoyed it very much." After a satisfying round of oral sex with her first male customer Lola exclaimed "'Gee whiz! What nice thrills it made me enjoy! Never in my life had I known that my pussy would be treated like this. If I had known it, I probably would have been in the business long before this night!' Madeleine, too, found much pleasure in her commercial sex life.

Conclusion

86 "Memoirs of a Pleasure Girl."
“Memoirs of a Pleasure Girl,” Memoirs of Madame Madeleine, and “Erotic Autobiography” confound traditional narratives and stereotypes about prostitutes. If historians look more closely at these texts and others like them as historical sources, as I have begun to do here and continue in the next chapter, it becomes clear that prostitutes participated in multiple and varied sex acts with men and women and that their sexual identities and desires were much more fluid than the typical dichotomy between heterosexual and homosexual allows. Furthermore, they at least sometimes enjoyed their job. This is not to say that prostitutes were never sexually exploited or that prostitution was a choice that women gladly made in order to have sex; only that we need to look deeper, using new and more traditional sources in innovative ways, in order to round out our one-dimensional picture of prostitutes in the past. Historians of sexuality should realize that the line between autobiography and pornography is always blurry, recognizing the rich evidence that may be found in both genres even when those genres are blended together in erotic autobiographies.
CHAPTER 4

THE TEEMING BROTHEL

As the erotic autobiographies of Lola, Wilbur, and Madeleine suggest, the world of commercial sex was a veritable "teeming brothel." Historical evidence illustrates a complex world of prostitution, suggesting that, for at least some prostitutes and their customers, commercial sex entailed much more than a heterosexual, missionary-style, meaningless (or distasteful) experience, although such experiences no doubt existed. Prostitutes had many kinds of sex with people of different genders and races. They also had sex with dildos and machines. Some sex they had for money and some for free; in both cases, at least some of it was enjoyable. Conversely, men and women often paid to have something other than "normal" heterosexual sex with prostitutes, indicating that men and women who were not sex workers also participated in a wide variety of sex acts. This sexual variety available to paying customers may seem obvious to our late twentieth-century sensibilities. However, as the mid-twentieth-century controversy surrounding the publication of the Kinsey Reports on male and female sexuality (which revealed that seemingly "regular" American folks were having sex early, often, and with a wide variety of people) attests, "respectable" people in the nineteenth and first half of
the twentieth century either did not know such behavior existed or, perhaps more likely, refused to speak about it.¹

Few scholars have examined autobiographies, journals, or memoirs of “normal” people for evidence about their sex practices, be they commercial or noncommercial.² In part, this is because of a lack of personal narratives in which people described in detail their sexual experiences, which has led historians to concentrate on institutional records—which typically record deviant behaviors instead of everyday sexual experiences and desire of “normal” people. No historians of prostitution, or even historians of sexuality, however, have examined sex workers’ sexual practices or their sexual identity and/or orientation. And yet prostitution is explicitly about sex acts. Again, the omission where sex workers is concerned is due both to a lack of sources and to the problematic nature of those sources that are available, many of which are considered “pornographic” and thus dismissed by more traditional historians. Most prostitutes who wrote their memoirs avoided mention of sex altogether, concentrating instead on amusing stories about life as a prostitute or madam, politics, and the police, or criticizing moral

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reformers for their hypocrisy and unfair judgment. Autobiographies are suspect in and of themselves; prostitutes' autobiographies seem to be even more problematic because their authors may not have been "real" sex workers or because historians believe that sex workers (and other groups of historical "deviants") have motivations for altering their stories. Even when such writings are considered authentic, historians who have written about sex work seem to find the nature of prostitutes' work distasteful or historically irrelevant. Other historical sources about prostitution, such as institutional documents and vice commission reports, either neglect to mention prostitutes' sexual behavior or euphemistically allude to it, assuming, it seems, that everyone knew exactly what prostitutes did—or that respectable people did not (or should not) want to know.

And yet prostitution—or the purchasing of sex in some form or another—has been a central theme in the sexual lives of both men and women throughout the history of the United States. Historians have argued that, at least in nineteenth-century urban areas, large numbers of heterosexual—i.e., "normal"—men visited prostitutes, participating often in the commercial sex world. Not quite as prolific as it had been in the nineteenth century, studies have shown that this "sporting" culture nonetheless persisted throughout the twentieth century, although many men had visited a prostitute just once and only a few did so on a regular basis. Walt Whitman observed in the mid-nineteenth century

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4 Tim Gilfoyle has argued that men, at least in New York City, visited prostitutes in increasing numbers during the nineteenth century because of delayed marriages, gender imbalances, and marital dissatisfaction. By the end of the century, a well-developed culture of "sporting men" existed in America that was not limited to whites. The general consensus among many Americans, even as late as World War I, was, according to Samuel Gompers, that "'real men will be real men'" and visit prostitutes. Timothy Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790-1920* (New York: W. 196

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that, at least among young single New York men, ""the plain truth is that nineteen out of twenty of the mass of American young men, who live in or visit the great cities, are more or less familiar with houses of prostitution and are customers to them.—A large proportion of the young men become acquainted with all the best known ones in the city."" Married men also frequented prostitutes in the nineteenth century. Historian Timothy J. Gilfoyle has noted that not only did numerous related articles appear in the sporting press but also that at least one police court justice visited brothels to gather evidence in divorce cases.6

The line between commercial and noncommercial sex was often blurred. At the beginning of the twentieth century, a growing number of heterosexual women who did not consider themselves sex workers participated in promiscuous sexual behavior that social commentators deemed "prostitution." Historians have described the prevalence of "treating" among young, single women and men in turn-of-the-century New York, noting that the line was hazy between treating and prostitution, especially for those concerned with young women's sexual behavior at the time.7 One contemporary reformer feared that the many young women who were no longer virgins or who had been engaged in some form of sexual behavior (typically petting) were "but a step from immorality from

W. Norton, 1992), chap. 5, 236-69, quotation on 239. Although definitive studies about exact numbers of men do not exist—reformers were more concerned with the number of prostitutes, it seems—some estimations were made. Most historians have agreed that heterosexual men's visits to prostitutes declined over the course of the twentieth century as homosocial cultures that revolved around drinking, gambling, and visiting brothels waned and ideas of companionate marriage and more widespread concern about women's sexual fulfillment inside and outside of marriage proliferated. Alfred C. Kinsey et al., for example, found, in the mid-twentieth century, that 69 percent of all white American men had had sex with a prostitute at least once, but downplayed prostitution's relative importance as a sexual outlet for white men, ranking nocturnal emissions as more important and only petting to climax and animal intercourse as less important. Alfred C. Kinsey, Wardell B. Pomeroy, and Clyde E. Martin, Sexual Behavior in the Human Male (Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders, 1948), 597, 603.
5 Walt Whitman, quoted in Gilfoyle, City of Eros, 103.
6 Gilfoyle, City of Eros, 103.
choice to immorality for profit.”8 Potentially dangerous places for sexual immorality and so-called prostitution were taxi dance halls, movies, and other such public amusements.

A 1926 report on a Chicago dance hall noted that it was “without doubt the worst in the city. One boy said that after coming to this hall you didn’t need to go to a prostitute. He said that this was the best of all the dancing schools that he knew about, because you could shimmy all you wanted to with any of the girls. The girls in most cases are entirely accustomed to the type of dancing desired by the men and it is very common to see men having orgasms on the floor.”9

Prostitutes’ writings reveal direct information about both male and female sexual behavior and reflect common conceptions about nineteenth- and twentieth-century womanhood. The historical stereotype has held that scores of white, middle-class, nineteenth-century American women refused their husbands sexual intercourse, justifying such behavior with the idea of women’s passionlessness.10 Those who considered prostitution a “necessary evil” argued that it allowed wives uninterested in or disgusted by husbands’ unwanted sexual advances to deny men sex. By providing a sexual outlet for men, who were believed to have a stronger sex drive than women, prostitution also supposedly protected young, innocent girls and women.11 Such arguments allowed tacit

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7 See Chapter 2, n. 17.
8 Charles Byron Chrysler, White Slavery (Chicago: s.n., 1909, 1911), 50.
9 “New Majestic,” 3 April 1926, Box 129, folder 6 Ernest W. Burgess Papers, University of Chicago, Special Collections, Chicago, Illinois (UCSC). Material in this folder outlines Paul G. Cressey’s work with the Juvenile Protective Association in 1925 as well as his research on the taxi dance halls of Chicago at the same time.
11 Even as late as 1939, one commentator noted that prostitution was necessary to keep incidences of rape to a minimum. “In connection with rape [Dr. Harry] Benjamin cites the case of Butte, Montana, with its population of vigorous young males. After reform waves had closed down the ‘tolerated district,’ attacks on women and children rape, abortions, etc., increased so alarmingly that the district was quickly reopened.” Harold H. U. Cross, The Lust Market (New York: Citadel Press, 1964), 83. Ironically,
acceptance of prostitution as a profession. And yet prostitutes also were portrayed as victims of unbridled male lust, or as highly sexualized, “fallen” women. By 1920, however, most historians have noted that prostitutes were no longer seen as much as victims of male lust or nymphomaniac disease but rather had become sexual predators in their own right. Rather, prostitutes represented a threatening extension of the already problematic, sexually liberated New Woman—voluntarily entering prostitution with little compunction or, worse, to satisfy sexual desire.12

Fears of the complications that often accompanied abortion, pregnancy, childbirth, and child rearing and resentment of husbands’ “excessive” sexual demands or absences undoubtedly played a part in some women’s decisions to turn a blind eye—or even to promote—to their husband’s, father’s, and brother’s visits to prostitutes. Other women accepted prostitution as a necessary evil that would protect young women from male lust. But, in reality, women’s responses to men’s use of prostitutes varied. Many women marshaled moral and medical arguments—invoking marital vows and religious duty or the threat of acquiring gonorrhea or syphilis—to dissuade men from such visits. Some simply pled with husbands and lovers not to frequent prostitutes. Others demanded that men desist from philandering, often spurring violent domestic disputes and initiating divorces. And a few women visited brothels with their husbands and lovers, participating in sex acts alongside men and women alike.

“protection” arguments later shifted as prostitutes’ venereal diseases were seen as something that “respectable” women need to be protected from.

12 Kevin J. Mumford notes that the major cause of this shift was World War I, during which time prostitutes—and the venereal diseases they supposedly carried—on the American home front were portrayed as a significant enemy to national security. See Kenneth J. Mumford, Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 110. See also Barbara Meil Hobson, Uneasy Virtue: The Politics of Prostitution and the American Reform Tradition (New York: Basic Books, 1987), chaps. 6, 7.
By emphasizing vice-reform literature and other traditional sources about prostitution, which concentrate on women as sex workers and men as sex consumers, historians of prostitution have ignored evidence that a wide variety of sexual acts occurred among male and female sex workers and male and female customers. Perhaps the most understandable reason for this omission is that these scholars have been more interested in the legal and social implications of urban vice than in what commercial sex practices reveal about sexual behavior of men and women in the past. When historians have considered sex in their analyses of prostitution they have primarily focused on the nineteenth-century "sporting culture" of men who frequented prostitutes; feminists’ and reformers’ ideas about the sexual double standard, age of consent, rape, and seduction; the geography of commercialized vice districts; or such medical issues as venereal disease, abortion, and birth control.¹³ Sex practices, for the most part, have been considered unworthy of historical study (along with such other aspects of "personal" life as eating, sleeping, or waste elimination) even though prostitution is necessarily about sex acts.

Female prostitutes' sex practices and sexuality—their actions and subjective identities—have been considered irrelevant to historical narratives about larger social trends in sexual morality and practices, which, for the most part, have revolved around married heterosexual sex, sex education, and homosexuality. Historians' assumptions seem to have been that prostitutes had brief rounds of missionary-position sex with one man at a time that resulted in male orgasm, which signaled the end of the exchange. Variations on this model are few and far between; and there has been no consideration of prostitutes' orgasmic potential with customers, or whether or not these women found pleasure in providing sexual services. This may be because prostitution has always been portrayed as a profession no woman would actively choose unless she were desperately poor, drug addicted, or coerced by a man. While many women undoubtedly turned to prostitution for these reasons, scholars' unwillingness to examine the sex practices of prostitutes alongside their presumed economic motivations is most certainly related to the common assumption that sex for money could not or should not fulfill sexual desire or that commercial sex acts in and of themselves are less important than the transaction itself. There seems to be something about the financial transaction between prostitute and customer that renders their sex acts deviant in and of themselves. Or perhaps such acts, because they are bought and paid for, were and are seen as somehow more "kinky," or titillating.

Prostitutes in nineteenth- and twentieth-century America, as have those around the world and across historical periods, had heterosexual sex with men for money. On her

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14 Gilfoyle has noted, "Gilded Age brothels [in New York City] frequently promoted sexual practices rarely
first night in the brothel, Lola had sex with eight men and, according to her story, experienced orgasm. Peggy, a twenty-two-year-old Chicago prostitute who in 1931 had been practicing the profession for three years, revealed to a University of Chicago graduate student in sociology that when she first entered the business she had serviced from sixty to seventy men a night. "I didn’t have time for a smoke in-between," she claimed. At the time of the interview, however, she averaged five to six customers a night.15

Women also sometimes bought sex from men. Some sources mention the existence of gigolos for women, most of whom were upper-class society wives looking for a good time.16 New Orleans madam Norma Wallace made it clear that not only did "good men"—wealthy, "respectable," and powerful men from "respectable" New Orleans families—visit her establishment, but that "good women" did so as well. These women went to Norma's to have sex with Pershing Gervais, a supposedly well-endowed man who had charged one wealthy woman fifteen hundred dollars for his services, or with a cabdriver whom the girls called "Frankenstein" because of his similarly large penis.17

Late-twentieth-century female and male sex workers commonly provide oral sex to male customers and occasionally to women. This was true in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as well. Until the middle of the twentieth century, however, purportedly respectable Americans believed that oral sex was "perverted," associating the

found elsewhere." Gilfoyle, City of Eros, 176.
15 "Case III, Peggy," Cynthia Cohen, untitled cases studies of prostitutes with venereal disease, 1 May 1931, Box 129, folder, 2, Ernest W. Burgess Papers, UCSC.
16 See, for example, Cross, The Lust Market, chap. 15.
practice with prostitution and homosexuality. Americans also linked oral sex to France or things “French,” a term that also represented unabashed sexuality in both men and women, along with looser social morals and the absence of legal consequences for adultery and prostitution.\(^\text{18}\) Lola and many of her contemporaries recognized Paris as the place in which the most famous “thrill mansions” were located. Prostitutes also commonly played on the erotic fantasy surrounding things French, often taking French names or highlighting their supposedly Gallic ancestry to increase their sexual marketability.\(^\text{19}\) The Chicago establishment “French Lottie” ran was a place where “one can enjoy oneself in every way, and to the fullest extent.”\(^\text{20}\) Lola noted that although she had been born in a small midwestern town into a family of farmers her mother was part French. Lola used this presumably passionate heritage to explain why her mother enjoyed sex with her father, believing that it was also from her mother that she had inherited her “hot, sensual nature and instincts for love.”\(^\text{21}\) Americans writing about prostitution in the

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\(^{18}\) Mumford notes that “French” also sometimes referred to light-skinned black women. See Mumford, *Interzones*, 105. See also Robert O. Harland, *The Vice Bondage of a Great City: or, the Wickedest City in the World* (Chicago: Young People’s Civic League, 1912). Harland exclaimed that within Chicago’s red-light district “250 houses of ill fame house the unfortunate women, live men of all conditions of life, grow rich on sin and on the practice of every form of bestial degeneracy” (87). Harland continued there were two thousand “enslaved, scarlet women in these infectious prisons” and that, in Chicago, “there are holes of infamy where white and colored persons mix and sin together. There are places where the sins that wiped Sodom and Gomorrah out of existence are practiced nightly. There are places where prostitutes outrival in the forms of obscene acting anything to be found in the Monmartre and other deadly places within the confines of Paris” (89). This sentiment persisted well into the last half of the twentieth century. R. Leighton Hasselrodt noted that Montreal, a supposed mecca for lesbians, reflected the “strong French influence that prevails.” Montreal lesbians were “virtually unanimous in considering cunnilingus as the most gratifying act of all.” R. Leighton Hasselrodt, *Twilight Women around the World* (London: Luxor Press, 1972), chap. 8, quotation on 57; see also chap. 15.


\(^{20}\) *Sporting Club House Directory: Containing a Full and Complete List of All Strictly First-Class Club and Sporting Houses* (Chicago: Ross and St. Clair, 1889), 10.


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nineteenth and twentieth centuries repeatedly used the term “French” as a euphemism for “perverted” behavior, usually oral sex.  

Reformers and other “respectable” people investigating sex in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries often referred to female and male prostitutes who performed such services as “unnatural” or “perverted.” Historian of prostitution Elizabeth A. Clement has recently argued that oral sex was not commonly practiced among prostitutes until the 1920s, when it quickly spread as a common practice to “normal” married couples. Yet evidence shows that such services were common among sex workers and readily available for a price well before the prohibition era. An 1889 guide to Chicago “sporting and club houses” noted that “French Houses” cost from one dollar up. Listing six places, all within two blocks of each other, the authors remarked, “everybody knows what a ‘French’ house is just as well as everybody knows ‘where the shamrock grows’ and we need offer no further explanation.” While the whereabouts of the shamrock may have been less clear to some, just about “everybody,” according to the investigator, knew where to find oral sex. When Georgia Sneed asked “Investigator 222” “Honey do you want a jazz?” he asked her if she “frenched” instead. Sneed affirmed that she did and named her price: $3. A vice investigator in Chicago, for example, noted that two black

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22 See also Gilfoyle, City of Eros, 176.
24 Sporting Club House Directory, 20-21. See also, for example, W. C. Steele, Jr., untitled report, 7 March 1901, New York Committee of Fifteen Records, 1900-1901, Reel 3, 861, which mentions a Greenwich Village resort at 133 West 10th Street, a “French prostitution house,” to which the investigator was taken by a woman he met in a saloon.
25 [Investigator 222], untitled report, 10 January [1927], 5:252, Chicago Committee of Fifteen Papers, UCSC. Mumford (Interzones, 85) has noted that among some African American, prostitutes, and homosexuals “jazz” commonly denoted sexual intercourse. There are numerous examples of this term in the Chicago Committee of Fifteen Papers, UCSC, as well as other early-twentieth-century American vice reports. See also Courtney Ryley Cooper, Designs in Scarlet (Boston: Little, Brown, 1939), 294.
prostitutes had solicited him and his partner “in a most filthy manner to indulge in perversion with them for a price of $1.00 [approximately $9 in 1999 dollars]”\textsuperscript{26}

In New Orleans, as in other cities around the country, prostitutes commonly peddled what they called “frenching” to customers. In one case, a “colored” woman called out to a vice investigator passing by her crib at 9:30 a.m. on the morning of 25 April 1927, “Come in and have the first shot today. I just got up.” The investigator asked the woman if this included “French too?” to which the prostitute replied, “Yes, anything you want; three ways in this house.” The investigator noted in his report that this meant “intercourse, sodomy, and perversion.”\textsuperscript{27} Throughout the day, numerous other prostitutes offered to sell the investigator oral sex, usually for the same price or a little more than straight intercourse.\textsuperscript{28} At an apparently more upscale parlor house later that afternoon, a French-speaking madam explained to the investigator that French equaled perversion and that “Everyone here does French.”\textsuperscript{29} Similarly, in New York, when an investigator told a prostitute that he did not want to “take any chances” by having unprotected intercourse with her, she asked him if he “was ever in Paris (France),” saying that she would “do it in the car and nobody will see.” After he feigned ignorance as to what she was implying, the prostitute explained to the investigator “what she [was] going

\textsuperscript{26} For one of many examples, see J.G.D., untitled report, 14 June [1922], 1:122, Chicago Committee of Fifteen Papers, UCSC. The Committee of Fifteen collection contains twenty-six bound volumes of such reports. See also the vice commission reports for New York. Among numerous such reports, see W. C. Steele, Jr., untitled report, 1 March 1901, New York Committee of Fifteen Records, 1900-1901, Reel 3, 880; or H.K., Investigation, 3 August 1921, Committee of Fourteen Papers, Box 38, folder Investigators’ Field Reports on Prostitution, 1st Inspection District, Special Collections, Manuscript Division, New York Public Library, New York (NYPL). I have used the inflation calculator at http://www.westegg.com/inflation/inf.cgi to determine the approximate relative amount for 1999.

\textsuperscript{27} “Storyville,” 25 April 1927, HP [house of prostitution]-3, MSS film 148, Tulane University Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana (TUSC).

\textsuperscript{28} See, for example, entries HP-6-8, 10-12, 14-24, in “Storyville” dated 25 April 1927, MSS film 148, TUSC.

\textsuperscript{29} “Storyville,” 25 April 1927, PH [parlor house]-2, MSS film 148, TUSC.
to do and how and also tried to convince me that French way is better and more pleasant." One of Norma Wallace's most sought after girls was a woman named Terry, whose nickname—"Yum-Yum"—proclaimed to the sporting men of New Orleans her specialty, fellatio. Terry was supposedly of French extract. When called on to train a new prostitute in the house, Terry explained her technique in musical terms. "'Imagine you are playing a flute. You've got to close certain holes to get one sound and stretch your lips to get another.'" When Rose Mary remained skeptical, Terry said, "'They don't call it a blow job for nothin, honey.'"31

Female prostitutes sometimes fellated homosexual men. "J.W.," a Chicago man whom social science researcher Ernest W. Burgess interviewed in 1932, admitted that he had been "'frenched' 3 times by prostitute. Got kick out of watching prostitute go [illegible] on me. 'Jo-Jo' I often wondered what thrill they got. I thought it was very dirty. I first heard of 'frenching' in a whore house. The prostitute asked me whether I wanted to be 'frenched' I didn't know what she meant, and said nothing and gave her my money and she said she would do Jo-Jo. 'I just like to see them suck my prick they were beautiful girls.'"32 Another gay Chicago man proclaimed, "'I like '69' when I get frenched."33 During a 1925 Chicago investigation, a "small man" invited the investigators either "to indulge in prostitution with a woman who was pleasent [sic] or perversion with himself for a price."34 In June 1912, a New York investigator "entered #8 Mott St at 11:45 p.m. [and] found [the] place packed with women and men, also 3 male fruiters and

30 Wiltz, _Last Madam_, 106.
31 Wiltz, _Last Madam_, 134.
32 J.W., interview by [Ernest W. Burgess], Jackson Park Golf Course, 30 September 1932, Box 98, folder 4, p. 20, Ernest W. Burgess Papers, UCSC.
33 [Burgess], untitled report about a homosexual man, n.d., Box 98, folder 4, p. 9, Ernest W. Burgess Papers, UCSC.

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1 woman with them, one [sang] the old fruiter song whoops my dear, also when he came back to table with others he took out a pow[d]er rag & looking glass & pow[d]ered his face. Place was D—Rotten, talked with girl called “Alice” who said the women sucked, same as men. Not only was it easy and relatively cheap to buy oral sex, but one also could purchase it from a variety of people: men or women, white or black.

Oral sex, while undoubtedly pleasurable for both male and female customers, may have been preferred by some prostitutes because it entailed less work for more money. The $25 price one New York prostitute asked for fellatio was the same that she charged for intercourse (about $200 in today’s dollars). As Terry explained to Rosemary, “A lot of girls prefer it. It’s easy and it’s not as messy. A lot quicker too.” Fellatio could easily be performed in a dark alley or doorway, in the back seat of a taxicab, under a flight of stairs, or in a bathroom stall. A large percentage of street solicitations Chicago investigators noted in 1934 were for “gross perversion,” explaining this phenomenon by “the rapidity with which the entire transaction can be completed.” Historian Kevin Mumford has pointed out that for many Harlem women performing fellatio was “aggressive, quick, groping, highly impersonal sex, stripped of any pretense of Victorian romance”; it allowed prostitutes to sell a service without selling their bodies or sense of themselves. Oral sex precluded vaginal or anal penetration of a woman’s body and allowed her much more control over the sex act in which she was participating.

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34 Wm.P., untitled report, 28 January [1925], 3:408, Chicago Committee of Fifteen Papers, UCSC.
35 [Name Illegible, Stockdale?], untitled report, 29 June 1912, New York Committee of Fourteen Papers, Box 28, 1912, Special Collections, Manuscript Division, NYPL.
36 H.K., investigation, 3 August 1921, Box 38, Investigators’ Field Reports on Prostitution, 1st Inspection District, Committee of Fourteen Papers, NYPL.
37 Wiltz, Last Madam, 134.
38 Quoted in Mumford, Interzones, 104.
39 Mumford, Interzones, 104.
Furthermore, oral sex, although not completely devoid of the potential of spreading venereal disease, did not cause pregnancy, which prostitutes (and, to a lesser extent, male customers) feared. A New York investigator followed some suspicious characters who had been "dancing, shimmying and performing a Chicago shimmy on street" to a chop suey restaurant on Grand Street, where he listened to their conversation while pretending to read a morning paper. "One of them said, that he was sick (venereal) and wanted to have intercourse with one of the girls, but as a rule the girls in this neighborhood (majority of them) are perverts in order not to get pregnant they do it the other way. He didnt [sic] like it and she s[ucked] him off. Another said, that he is going with a girl to her house tonight and she is going give him a 'tongue bath,' supposed to charge him for all night fifteen dollars." 41

Prostitutes gave the "French treatment" to male customers but also received it from them. 42 Lola noted that a "Frencher" not only performed oral sex on men, but also insisted that they return the favor. 43 Paying customers sometimes insisted on giving rather than receiving oral stimulation. Lola's first john surprised her by insisting that she allow him to perform cunnilingus on her. 44 New Orleans madam Norma Wallace joked that movie-star patron Don Ameche was "the pussiest-eatin son of a bitch she'd ever seen—'He ate every girl in the house!'" 45 Although New Orleans was often noted for its unconventional sex practices, even supposedly more traditional midwestern prostitutes

40 Modern prostitutes, for example, often refuse to kiss customers because it is seen as too personal.
41 H.K., Investigation, 3 August 1921, Committee of Fourteen Papers, Box 38, folder Investigators' Field Reports on Prostitution, 1st Inspection District, Special Collections, Manuscript Division, NYPL.
42 Belle Rochelle, a New York City prostitute working out of her Chrystie Street brothel, advertised that she gave the "'French treatment.'" Quoted in Gilfoyle, City of Eros, 176.
45 Norma Wallace, quoted in Wiltz, Last Madam, 119.
provided alternatives to missionary-style sex. In Chicago, a reportedly “homosexual” man revealed that “the first couple of times I gave them [prostitutes] $2.00 without having an erection nor ejaculation. But the third time, cunnilingus, and I was satisfied. . . . With my girl I have had intercourse per vagina, but for the first half dozen times I failed to have an erection. She as well as I was disgusted. Now, the preliminaries [sic] I have before intercourse with her, first I suck her vagina. Then I suck every part of her body, kissing etc.”46 Similarly, relaying a conversation he overheard between a drunk woman and man in a New York bar, a vice investigator reported that the man “ordered drinks[,] then in talking the woman told him to kiss her ass he said no I will kiss your pussy; this house I think is a frenchman’s place then men and women were talking vile language.”47

In addition to vaginal coitus and oral sex, Johns sought out anal sex and some prostitutes regularly included this service in their repertoire. When a New Orleans crib prostitute identified by only the initial “J” solicited a vice investigator who queried her if she provided French services, she replied “A---- too,” which the investigator explained meant anal sex.48 For some prostitutes, it was a dreaded and unpleasant experience. One night, Rose Mary, one of Norma Wallace’s girls, fled from a customer in her bedroom yelling, “‘He wants me to get on my hands and knees—like a dog! He wanted to come in the back door. I won’t do it. Not now, not ever!’”49 Some prostitutes, however, preferred anal sex to vaginal intercourse as a way to avoid impregnation. Samuel Kahn, a psychologist who studied incarcerated female homosexuals, many of whom had engaged

46 [Burgess], untitled report about a homosexual man, n.d., Box 98, folder 4, p. 9, Ernest W. Burgess Papers, UCSC.
47 [Name illegible, Stockdale?], untitled investigation, 21 August 1911, New York Committee of Fourteen Papers, Box 28, folder 1910-1912, Special Collections, Manuscript Division, NYPL.
48 “Storyville,” 25 April 1927, HP-20, MSS film 148, TUSC.
49 Wiltz, Last Madam, 136.
in prostitution prior to their arrest, noted that in addition to fear of pregnancy, "a number of women indulge in rectal intercourse . . . because of curiosity, finances, or drug addiction." He believed that the same conditions applied oral sex practices. According to Kahn, prostitutes initially engaged in oral sex because of the financial compensation. However, "when same is continued for a long time, the physique and physical habit of sexual relations develop so that this particular act is tolerated by an individual as normal."50 Because he was predominantly interested in homosexuality, Kahn's correlation of behaviors learned in the commercial sex environment to later homosexual identification is especially telling. What had begun as purely commercial sex practices could indelibly mark women as lesbians if they persisted in such behavior as oral or anal sex. Kahn ignored the fact that these women may have learned at least their oral technique in sexual relationships with women, choosing to emphasize that such practices were engaged in and taught by female prostitutes and their male customers in a heterosexual context.

Interracial sex was also commonly available among commercial sex workers. White men, for example, purchased sex from African American, Chinese, or interracial women.51 The famous New Orleans Blue Book guides to the red light district, otherwise known as Storyville, in the early part of the twentieth century, demarcated white women with a "w" and octoroons—light-skinned mulatto women—with the abbreviation "oct," allowing men to patronize the race of woman they preferred.52 White men, for example,

50 Samuel Kahn, Mentality and Homosexuality (Boston: Meador Press, 1937), 94-95.
51 Perhaps the best account of interracial commercial sex is Mumford, Interzones. For information on Chinese women as prostitutes, see Benson Tong, Unsubmissive Women: Chinese Prostitutes in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994).
52 See Al Rose, Storyville, New Orleans: Being an Authentic, Illustrated Account of the Notorious Red-Light District (University: University of Alabama Press, 1974), 138; and Herbert Asbury, The French 210
purchased sex from African-American or interracial women. An 1889 guide to Chicago brothels listed a number of “colored houses,” noting that “Colored people are no freer from vice than their white brethren, and in as much as it may be useful to some of the latter to print where the better classes of colored houses are to be found, we do so below.”

In other words, these places were for white men who wanted to have sex with black women but who did not want to frequent those prostitutes who also had sex with black men. “No colored men [were] admitted” to either of the places that the guide listed.53 Clarence C. Church, a married but nonmonogamous white Chicago resident who wrote his sexual autobiography in the late 1930s, described his numerous extramarital sexual liaisons with what he referred to as “colored” women. Church noted that he gave some of these women money, often over the period of a few years, in return for sexual favors. Iva, a married chambermaid whom he had met while exterminating roaches in her apartment, accepted approximately fifty to seventy dollars a year from Church between 1928 and 1932.54 Church paid Lola Woods $1, plus fifty cents for a hotel room, to engage in sex with him.55 While working as a journalist in Mobile, Alabama, in the early part of the twentieth century, Wilbur Burton frequented “Darktown” for prostitutes.56 Such behavior may have been common in the South—one white policeman who escorted Wilbur on his escapades in Darktown explained that he had been “‘raised on nigger tail’ . . . and he still

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Quarter: An Informal History of the New Orleans Underworld (New York: Knopf, 1936), 446. For a history of the Blue Books and other so-called sporting guides to New Orleans brothels distributed during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Semper Idem, The “Blue Book”: A Bibliographical Attempt to Describe the Guide Books to the Houses of Ill Fame in New Orleans as They Were Published There. Together with Some Pertinent and Illuminating Remarks Pertaining to the Establishments and Courtesans as well as to Harlotry in General in New Orleans, Heartman’s Historical series, no. 50 (n.p.: privately printed, 1936).

would not take any other kind if he could do anything at all anymore.” In Chicago, an investigator casing an area notorious for interracial sex, was solicited on Grand Boulevard for prostitution by a “large light painted up Negress” plying her wares. “[I] was acosted [sic] by the above described woman and she took me to above address and said Don’t you want a little jazz? I said not. Well how about a French? She asked. I asked her how much and she said 3.00.”

Similarly, Althea and another African-American prostitute solicited “Investigator 222” and his accomplice for sex. “Althea a well built mulatto took us into the front room where another colored girls was sitting. I asked for a white girl. ‘There aint no white girls here honey’ said Althea ‘but us two girls can give you boys a better jazzin’ than a white girl and we only charge 3.00 too.’”

African American women often charged less for their sexual services than did white women—or, perhaps, white men were not willing to pay the same amounts for black women’s sexual services, which they felt entitled to based on racist assumptions about black women’s sexuality. Church, for example, paid Mabel Macmillan, a white teenager with whom he had sex, one thousand dollars over a period of five years. When compared to the seventy or so dollars he paid African American Iva for the same period of time, it appears that he placed a higher dollar value on the sex he received from the younger white woman.

55 Church, “Autobiography,” 68.
56 Wilbur Burton, “Erotic Autobiography,” [1951], p. 120, Kinsey manuscript no. 12, Kinsey Institute.
57 [Investigator 222], untitled report, 10 January [1927], Chicago, Committee of Fifteen, Research Data, Volume 5, 252, UCSC.
58 [OJT, Investigator 100], untitled report, 1 September [1926], Committee of Fifteen, Research Data, Volume 6, 445, UCSC.
59 In fact, many black women charged white men more for their services than they did black men. However, white prostitutes for the most part still received higher pay for their services. There was also a hierarchy among black women selling sex, with lighter-skinned women making more money than those with darker skin. See Mumford, Interzones, 104-6.
Many whites in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries ascribed to the idea that African-American women had a more sexual nature and enjoyed sex more than their white counterparts—a relic of white slave owners’ justifications of their sexual coercion and rape of slave women that were based in biological ideas about the sexual natures of different races. Church noted that “Their [colored women and girls] way was different and I had the feeling that they were more approachable sexually. They were free and somewhat varietist women, though few were indiscriminately promiscuous.” A coworker of his had summed it up: “‘There is some pretty hot stuff among the Colored, not much among the White.’”61 Similarly, Wilbur noted that a “bright copyboy” in his office “aphorize[d] that ‘Burton likes his coffee as his women[,] black,’” to which Wilbur quoted a line from a black musical comedy, “‘If you’ve never been vamped by a brownskin you’ve never been vamped at all.’”62 Of the Columbus, Ohio, prostitutes whom he had visited in the 1920s, the “best Negro whores” were more “adept” in “‘loving’ as petting then was generally called” than their white counterparts, white working-class girls whom he referred to as “park pickups.”63 Wilbur was convinced that “at least some of the Negro whores came with me; but I do not believe any of the park ‘pickups’ did save one—and then she weepingly said she shouldn’t have let me make her.”64 Wilbur enjoyed his sexual encounters with black prostitutes more so than he did with whites. He was pleased that they always undressed for him as he “wanted my women naked, their flesh cleaving to mine from head to feet for at least the initial part of

64 Burton, “Erotic Autobiography,” 76.
the erotic union.” He later learned that most white men never undressed completely for sex with black women or asked them to do so; similarly, Wilbur explained that “lots of white whores . . . disliked to undress beyond pulling their slips over their bellies.”

Wilbur’s “most notable ‘find’” in Mobile’s “Darktown” was nineteen-year old, married mother of triplets, Miranda. Although his narrative about Miranda is fraught with what may or may not be racist fantasy on Wilbur’s part, the story is fascinating. “Obviously not more than half Negro, unusually tall—almost six feet—quite pretty, and with a warm smile,” Wilbur “spent as much as $40 on Miranda, in cash and presents” and could not say enough about her prowess: “every time with her was like the first time—only more so!” Interestingly, Miranda’s husband was fully aware of his wife’s illicit sexual encounters. When he returned home during Wilbur’s first tryst with Miranda, she called out “‘There’s a white gentleman here now,’” to which her nonplussed husband replied, “‘All right, but you save some of that stuff for me, ‘cause I’se kinda horny today myself.’” Reporting that he was amazed at this blatant exchange but not thwarted in his desire, Wilbur proceeded to have two successive orgasms, the first of many such fulfilling encounters with Miranda. After they had finished, Wilbur walked into the living room where he found Miranda’s husband nonchalantly smoking a cigarette. “‘Upon seeing me, he smiled broadly, rose and bowed. ‘Miranda’s hot stuff, aint she, Mistah White Man,’ he said rhetorically.” Wilbur, agreeing with the man, tried to appear nonchalant as well. “Well come back again, anytime. There aint no limit to that woman’s capacity for

fornication, as the preacher calls it; and she completely peters me out if some other
gentlemans don’t take care of her now and then.”

White men, particularly in the South, may have believed that black women were
more sexual than their white counterparts, or at least portrayed them that way to justify
sexual access to them with impunity. However, certain taboos existed in sexual relations
between white men and black women. Wilbur noted that he learned much from the
women he frequented in Darktown about racialized sexual mores and boundaries in the
South. He emphasized the double standard that allowed white men unlimited sexual
access to black women, even to the extent of admitting paternity of a child “so long as it
kept its inferior place as a Negro.” Miscegenation laws, he pointed out, may have existed,
but were not applied where white men and black women were concerned. Law or no
law, however, black men having sex with white women was strictly taboo and grounds
for lynching in the South. Yet not all forms of sexual acts were considered acceptable
among white men and black women. Wilbur found out “that while it was condonable for
a white man to engage in coition with a Negro woman, he must not kiss her mouth.” In a
conversation with a “high state official” in Georgia, Wilbur queried the southern man
whether the African American woman with whom he had had sex in his youth had been
“affectionate in kissing.” The Georgian astonishingly replied, “‘Only a damnyankee [sic]
would ever think of kissing a nigger bitch!’” Wilbur found it odd that in the South, “it
might be proper to kiss or long torridly pet a white woman one would not be so vile as to
try to lay outside marriage while you would engage in coition with—but must not kiss—

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any Negro woman you could get.”⁷¹ According to Wilbur, kissing was not the only taboo between Southern white men and black women. While he stated that he had not discussed it with any southerners, Wilbur argued that “a white man cunnilingcting any Negro woman would have been qualitatively worse than cunnilingcting the lowest poor white whore” in the South.⁷²

Not only did white male patrons purchase sex from African-American or mulatto women in both the North and South in the United States, but black men, at least in the North, also bought sex from white prostitutes. A female vice investigator filed reports with the New York Committee of Fourteen, referring to mixed-race places where white men could pick up “colored” prostitutes and white women could pick up or solicit colored men. At Percy Brown's Café, in New York City, there were:

“Colored entertainers—a man and woman. Low order singing and dancing—Piano music and drum—anything to make a big noise. Pianist Plenny Heath, colored. He has several white girls in the street, getting money for him. Cocaine and opium fiends hang out there, also a lot of pimps, who strive to meet working girls, who are attracted there by the dancing. These men make a time over these girls, get them to be their girls, get all their money, and soon put them out on the town teaching them to steal by telling them it is the easiest way to live. Such men usually dress well, an in some cases wear flashy stones in their shirt front or on their hands. White and colored people frequent the place. White girls to meet colored men. It is open all night.”⁷³

Historian Kevin J. Mumford has noted that although this may have seemed a great freedom and benefit for African-American men moving North—or at least represented a great change for them—few such cases made it in to New York City courts in the early

⁷³ The woman, Mrs. A. M. White, may have been African American and appears to have been associated with the National League for Protection of Colored Women (NLPCW). The report claims to have been the result of a “night investigation” of vice resorts conducted in conjunction with the NLPCW on 30 April 1910. Mrs. A. M. White, report on Percy Brown’s Café, 2 May 1910, New York Committee of Fourteen Papers, Box 28, folder 1910-1912, Special Collections, Manuscript Division, NYPL.
twentieth century, proving either that it happened rarely or that African-American men who wished to have sex with white women were very discreet in their actions.\textsuperscript{74} In one New York case, however, an African-American man insisted to a judge that he had believed that the supposedly white girl with whom he had sex had been passing as black. "If I knew she was white when I met her I never would have had anything to do with her."\textsuperscript{75} If the latter were true, it may have been because this African-American man really would not have had sex with white women either because he sexually preferred women of his own race or because he knew the possible consequences of such actions.

Asian men also purchased sex from white, black, and interracial female prostitutes. Paul Siu, a Chicagoan of Chinese descent, often had sex with a twenty-two-year-old mixed-race woman, whom he referred to as "E Thomson" and described as "a white-negro hybrid." Thomson prostituted herself to a number of men in Chinatown. One of her other regulars, Hoi, reported having great sex with her: "She is very hot, very good facker [\textit{sic}], lot of water too, Oh boy, when she called out; Honey, little devil you—you pretty soon kill me—and so on. That just make you crazy." Another patron described her similarly: "She's all right with me. Out of the many prostitutes I had facked [\textit{sic}], E was the best choice. Although she was not so beautiful, yet she was a hot mama. She seemed to enjoy it just as much as you do. That's the only thing she is different [\textit{sic}] from the other prostitutes."\textsuperscript{76} Again, Thomson's patrons attributed her enhanced sexual desire to her race.

\textsuperscript{74} Mumford, \textit{Interzones}, 101.
\textsuperscript{75} Quoted in Mumford, \textit{Interzones}, 101.
\textsuperscript{76} Paul Siu, "Prostitutes in Chinatown, Document No. 2," Box 137, folder 2, Ernest W. Burgess Papers, UCSC.
Female prostitutes also had sex with each other for paying male customers. Men paid women to perform sex acts on one another either for their viewing pleasure. Two young New Orleans prostitutes performed sex acts with each other in the early part of the twentieth century (before the closing of Storyville in 1917) as part of the act at madam Emma Johnson’s French Studio. Liz and Violet “did a dance we had worked out where we jerked ourselves and each other off.” They got to like the “dyke act” so much that “we’d lots of times do it when we was by ourselves.”77 In addition to watching prostitutes have sex with each other, patrons also often participated in ménages à trois. Threesomes occasionally included mother-daughter combinations. Anna B. Marshall, for example, ran a house of prostitution in Chicago that had “several girl rooming at the house and Mrs. Marshall and her daughter are both prostitutes. They pass them off as ‘entertainers’ but they are really prostitutes.”78 Although a fictionalized account, the movie Pretty Baby—based loosely on the life of New Orleans photographer Ernest Bellocq and the prostitutes whom he immortalized—depicts how easy it was for the child of a prostitute who was born and raised in a brothel to participate in sex acts, often with or promoted by her mother.79 One of Bellocq’s photographs of prostitutes in New Orleans sported two women reclining in front of a backdrop painted to represent a beach. Attired in swimming costumes, the women bear a striking resemblance to one another. Historian of New Orleans Al Rose has noted that the pair was most likely a mother-daughter combination, of which there were many in Storyville brothels.80 New York madam Polly

77 “Violet,” interview by Al Rose, in Rose, Storyville, 150. This interview was probably conducted in 1963, as Rose noted that Violet was not yet sixty years old at the time of the interview and had been born in 1904.
78 Report of Number 100 for November 30th, 1914, Box 88, folder 1, Charles E. Merriam Papers, UCSC.
80 Rose, Storyville, 63.
Adler described how Helen, a prostitute who worked in her house in the early 1920s, begged Polly to allow her drug-addicted daughter Joan to come live and work at the house. Polly noted that this was how she became aware that “in some people sexual gratification is obtained in dark and terrible ways. For when the relationship between Joan and Helen was discovered, there were men who would pay double and triple for the kick of having a mother and daughter in bed with them.”

“Violet” referred to herself as a “‘trick’ baby,” by which she meant that “my father was just one of them johns that paid my mother for a fuck.” Born in 1904 and raised in a Storyville brothel, Violet began her own career in sex work at an early age helping her mother with customers. One night she happened upon her mother, who was in the middle of washing a customer’s penis prior to having sex. Her mother told him that Violet was her daughter. “He said don’t I think a good little girl ought to help her mother[?] They both laughed. My mother asked me if I wanted to help and she held up the wash cloth. I didn’t think nothin’ of it.” The man paid Violet a dollar and soon her mother and the other women began to use her to wash all the customers. Violet was clear that, at least at first, the men were not interested in having sex with her, “but they liked to have me around in the room while they fucked. One time Cora one of the girls had a john and she was sucking him off. It was nothing new to me. I seen it plenty of times before but only lately I’d be in the room while they were doing it. I said “I can do that.” So we took turns. . . Then he fucked her while I felt his balls. . . I made five dollars for my end of that one, and then I started turning tricks myself just by blowing. I was still

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only ten years old and not very big so I didn’t fuck. It was two years more before I did that. So I was a virgin for two years.”

Prostitutes’ writings reveal the possibility that female “johns” also purchased sex from female prostitutes. In a study of “homosexual” men and women incarcerated on New York’s Blackwell’s Island between 1922 and 1926, psychologist Samuel Kahn also revealed incidences of women purchasing sex from women. A nineteen-year-old gay man described his friend, a twenty-six-year-old addicted female prostitute, with whom he had worked in a New York brothel. “She and I averaged $200 per week, and sometimes more. Later we both continued with our homosexual acts at ‘call houses’ (ordinary red light house kept by a landlady who furnished a house for such purposes). Men and women phoned the landlady in advance when they would come and this lady would have a man or woman or several ready. I knew over one hundred male and twice that number female homosexuals who [were] contracted at these ‘call houses.’” Iwan Bloch noted in his anthropological study of sex practices that “tribadic prostitution” was readily available to lesbians, and had “assumed great proportions” (perhaps not surprisingly) in Paris. According to reports from a French sexologist Bloch quoted, lesbian prostitutes were “quartered in the brothels, in rooming houses, in perfume and glove shops, and brasseries, and the like, and its recruits are adult women and little girls of ten to fifteen who practise [sic] Sapphic manipulations for pay.”

82 “Violet,” interview by Al Rose, in Rose, Storyville, 148-49.
83 Kinsey noted in 1948: “the rarest of the four types of prostitution involves females who are paid for the homosexual relations with which they supply other females.” Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin, Sexual Behavior in the Human Male, 596.
84 Samuel Kahn, Mentality and Homosexuality (Boston: Meador Press, 1937), 43.
During her initiation into brothel life, Lola’s madam informed her that she would
“have other clients ever so often and they will be of your own sex and kind.” In fact,
Louise told Lola, “just about as many of our clients are girls as they are men and
boys.”86 Lola wrote, “not only boys and men came to this place, there were also many
feminine visitors and I must confess that they were just as eager and ready to be thrilled
as their brothers, fathers and husbands.”87 Most of these were “older women who
want[ed] to enjoy some exciting moments,” but not all.88 “Girls in their teens . . . little
coeds getting an education . . . girls who worked in stores, doctor’s offices and even
schoolteachers” would be Lola’s customers. The madam insisted, however, that her
employees do whatever their female customers asked of them. “‘When you get a girl to
entertain just let her tell you how she likes to be amused. Don’t suggest anything to her
and of all things, don’t be surprised at anything she wants to do to your, or have done to
her own, body.’” Although her madam was more concerned that the prostitutes get
female customers to spend money, Lola prided herself on her ability to pleasure women
sexually. At first, she was amazed that women might buy sex from women. Once she
overcame her surprise, however, she confessed that she was “very much interested in all
of them and when I entertained a girl with hot panties I usually sent her away with her
mind at rest.” And, as did occasional male customers, Lola’s female patrons sometimes
repaid the favor. She noted that, with some women, “I gave her all the thrills she wanted

and some of them gave me a good time." Lola made it clear that such performances with women were not rare.

Lola also claimed that sex with a woman was the defining event that led her into prostitution. Upon moving from her rural home to the city, teen-aged Lola found a roommate. Irma seduced her (not unwillingly), and manually stimulated her to her first orgasm. Lola described the night as a "turning point in my life. After that first come I was a sybarite . . . desiring the thrills and sensations which could only be obtained in this manner." Such scenes resonated with the very actions that nineteenth-century Americans feared might set off a woman's nymphomania. If sexologists were concerned that masturbation, lesbianism, and hypersexuality might drive women into prostitution, Lola was their nightmare. Not only was Lola's "last night as a virgin" the result of sex with a woman, but she was also resolute that "Irma's caresses were the means of making me choose a life of sex and become a whore . . . a girl of pleasure and perversion." Money was no small enticement either. After Irma showed Lola just how much cash she could make as a prostitute, Lola added income to the anticipation of pleasure as justification of her job choice.

Some prostitutes were known to participate in same-sex sex acts and/or to be lesbians. Lola wrote about an older woman that "one of the newer girls later told me that she would even pay a girl to let her suck her cunt while it was full of gism [sic]." In another example of women purchasing sex from women, American prostitute Madeleine went "slumming" with some male companions dressed as a man. When a young

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redheaded prostitute, Nanette, came on to her, Madeleine hesitantly followed her upstairs.93 Madeleine pondered the situation in her memoir: “Whether the assumption of male clothes had worked a sexual transformation within me and my feelings were those of a man for a woman, or whether I had brought to light a heretofore concealed homosexual tendency, or not, I cannot say. A simple explanation would be that the presence of anything associated with sexual pleasure—and lord knows this creature’s every curve and fold spoke only of the extremest [sic] sensual ecstasies—would stimulate alike, male or female, being interpreted associatively either actively or passively, as the case might be. ‘I would like to fuck her’ or ‘I would like to be her when she gets fucked is the idea.’”94 When Nanette found out that Madeleine was a woman, she expressed her pleasure at the discovery, praising Madeleine’s beauty. Rather than being disappointed, as Madeleine had feared, Nanette looked Madeleine up and down with interest and said, “But I don’t care. I’d rather you were a woman anyway. I don’t like men. They’re just my business.”95

Pleased that Nanette preferred that she was woman, Madeleine was unsure about what role she should play in the exchange. She told Nanette that although her female gender had been revealed, “Even now I wish I were a man,” apparently so that she could still enjoy Nanette sexually. Yet, in the next paragraph, noted that “For the first time in that whole hectic evening I felt happy and released from the strain of carrying on my pretense” of being a man.96 Nanette quickly took the active role, undressed Madeleine,

94 Memoirs of Madame Madeleine, 1:45-46.
95 Memoirs of Madame Madeleine, 1:153.
96 Memoirs of Madame Madeleine, 1:153.

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and had sex with her. Soon, they engaged in mutual oral sex, which brought them both to orgasm. In her excitement, Nanette lapsed into “her native language,” crying “‘Ah! Mon Dieu! Que je t’aime! [My God! I love you!’.” Perhaps not surprisingly, Nanette was supposedly French.97

After their initial encounter in the brothel, Madeleine and Nanette engaged in numerous sexual liaisons. Madeleine never explained if she paid Nanette for her services but it appears that she did not since she makes it clear that she and Nanette could spend much time together without arousing suspicion, “since we’re both of the same sex.”98 Nanette, Madeleine explained, had entered prostitution for an altruistic reason. “Though she disliked men heartily for their sexual selfishness and inadequacy, and rarely got from a fuck a deep satisfaction that love in the lesbian manner afforded her, she had nevertheless insisted on entering her mother’s profession for no other reason that to keep her mother from ever having to consider herself on a level lower than her daughter.”99

Much like Kahn, Madeleine believed that homosexuality was a learned trait and that all people went through a period of plasticity, during which the sex instinct was subject to the influence of behavior. If, at this point, a habit of homosexual behavior were established, then the habit would take over and create the “so-called abnormal types.”100

“There would be no such creatures as perverts, if, at the first definite sexual awakening, the youth of both sexes could have normal assuagement for their normal desires.”

Madeleine, however, seemed to consider herself a “pervert” of sorts, noting, “No such

97 Memoirs of Madame Madeleine, 1:161.
98 Memoirs of Madame Madeleine, 1:170.
99 Memoirs of Madame Madeleine, 1:171-72.
100 Memoirs of Madame Madeleine, 1:172-73.
fate was in store for me. My senses were to remain elastic—open to all further kinds of stimulation.”101

Nineteenth- and twentieth-century prostitutes also participated in larger group-sex activities, often dubbed “circuses.” According to Harold H. U. Cross, who conducted investigations of brothels between 1928 and 1932, “apart from straightforward and polymorphous sexual relations, all the houses above the most plebeian offered ‘spectacles’ or ‘circuses’—sexual representations in which two or more girls took part. In the best establishments these took on the dignity of a revue. Male roles were played, with rare exceptions, by women furnished with fabricated anatomical attachments. Sometimes these performances had a plot, and lasted for thirty minutes or more. Though some dignity was maintained at the commencement, they soon proceeded, by way of heavy petting, to downright orgies.”102 In 1875, an undercover New York police officer testified that he had watched six prostitutes perform a sex act together in a Tenderloin brothel. One prostitute “‘placed a portion of a lighted segar [sic] in the private parts of another . . . who was lying on her back with her feet elevated to her head.”103 Another “‘took a rubber implement shaped in the form of a Penis, commonly called a dildo,’” and “‘simulated intercourse’” with one of the remaining four.104 A sensational 1935 article about New Orleans reported, “In the [red light] district are several places where ‘circuses’ are arranged for those interested. The most notorious of these places was ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin,’” where “perversions were demonstrated with both male and female..."
performers.”

Earlier in the century, New Orleans madam Emma Johnson, who was often referred to as “The Parisian Queen of America” and who was a mulatto and reported lesbian herself, was famous for the circuses that took place in her house in the first decades of the twentieth century. As a historian later reported about the establishment, “deviations of all kinds would be performed on a raised stage, surrounded by an audience.” Johnson advertised her establishment in local papers and sporting guides as “The French Studio,” which, in 1906, was “crowded with girls of all nations and[,] to those who are looking for a genuine circus[,] is the place.”

Paying customers both watched and joined in such activities. “‘Trick’ baby” Violet and her comrade, Liz, participated in circuses at the French Studio in 1916. “‘I was twelve and Edna [the madam at her mother’s brothel] had been sendin’ me over there nights to be in the circus. I don’t need to explain what that is do I? Well, I was in the circus two or three nights a week. . . . Neither one of us was afraid to do them things the johns liked, so we’d get a hundred a night to be in the circus.” Such performances paid well, and in a 1939 book about prostitution, Courtney Ryley Cooper noted “Sooner or later a girl learns that the reason she doesn’t make as much money as other workers is because she doesn’t do ‘tricks.’ That means perversion.” Such women often then began

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This is most likely related to the idea that two women could not have sex with one another if a penis was not involved. However, given the presence of the dildo, it is not clear what is meant in this case.

105 Edward Anderson, “Uncovering the Vice Cesspool of New Orleans,” Real Detective 34, no. 1 (March 1935); 40-43, quotation on 40.
108 “Violet,” interview by Al Rose, in Rose, Storyville, 149.

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to perform in the "'circus,' which includes two girls and a man in a parlor exhibition of the perversions."109

In 1911, a Chicago grand jury investigated madam Josephine Williams (Margerette Douglas) and four of her employees for "crime[s] against nature" and a potential municipal violation for disorderly conduct. Two men and a woman had accused four of Williams's prostitutes of performing perverted sex acts in a brothel and Williams of "guilty knowledge of the performance [of] January 31st 1911 and February 1st 1911."110 While members of the grand jury could find no evidence that the women had committed crimes against nature, they swore out disorderly warrants for the participants in the "immoral show."111 In the end, the municipal court fined Williams and three of the women $10 plus court costs, and dismissed charges against one of them. While this case provides only one "official" example and little specific evidence about sexual behavior, the existence of the case reveals that prostitutes were performing "immoral shows" in brothels. Since the original charge was "crime against nature"—a label usually applied to (male) sodomy cases—it seems clear that these women were participating, with the consent of the madam, in some combination of nonheterosexual sex acts with one another and/or their customers. Whether men were participating is hard to discern since they were not arrested in this case. That the men escaped indictment was not unusual, as it has not historically been illegal for men to have sex with prostitutes. It does indicate, however,

109 Courtney Ryley Cooper, Designs in Scarlet (Boston: Little, Brown, 1939), 346-47.
110 People v. Margerette Douglas et al. [Opal Ford, Etta Dixon, Daisy Redd, Lena Johnson] for Crime against Nature and Violation of Sex. 1456, 25: 122-23, Chicago Committee of Fifteen Papers, UCSC. A later hearing of this case revealed that the women apparently were using pseudonyms when first arrested. See City v. Josephine Williams, Myrtle Finne, Clara Bell, Bertha Berry, Myrtle Johnson, Viol. Sec. 1456, 25:124, Chicago Committee of Fifteen Papers, UCSC.
111 City v. Josephine Williams et al.
that if men were involved they were not having sex with other men, since if they had been they probably would have been arrested for sodomy, which was illegal.

The Williams case is interesting for a number of reasons. First, that charges were brought at all may indicate yet another attempt on the part of vice commission investigators or other reformers (who were quite active during this time) to expose the “perverted” sex acts in which prostitutes engaged. The grand jury’s unwillingness, however, to interpret an “immoral” show as a crime against nature, may imply different things. Evidence in the case may simply not have revealed that the women committed “unnatural” acts—a crime which, for women, has been almost impossible to define or prove. It is possible that disgruntled competitors brought the charges as an act of retribution; that Williams’s morally outraged neighbors had finally had enough of her loud, risqué parties; or that husbands of local wives had ventured out with the “boys” one too many times. Or it may indicate that the grand jury, which was almost certainly composed of white, middle-class businessmen, clergy, or other officials, were unwilling either to imagine women performing such acts or prosecute them for activities in which these men themselves participated. In any of these scenarios, it is apparent that prostitutes and their customers sometimes participated in group-sex activities.

Many of Norma Wallace’s patrons were heterosexual couples looking for sexual titillation and stimulation. In the 1930s, some of the women in Norma’s bordello began to do what they called “‘interpretive dance.’” These dances soon expanded into “‘fake shows,’” which were “‘quite popular with the conventioneers’ ladies. ‘We’d be booked all night, and it got to be that there were more couples coming to the shows than single men.’” In these performances, women simulated sexual intercourse with men in front of
an audience. Norma noted, however, that many of the male performers were gay. "The only way this boy could get a hard-on was with a device known as the wimpus. It was a glass tube with a little pump. He'd go out in the hall before the show and pump that thing until his prick got hard—and he had a big one. Then he'd go in and mount the girls like a big deal was going on, but he never had an orgasm. I saw him put on numerous shows in one night when a big convention was in town, yet he'd never have an orgasm with a girl. It was all fake."\textsuperscript{112}

Also for sale in many brothels were virgins and very young girls. Sex with virgins was a lucrative business and men whose tastes ran toward the prepubescent or who feared venereal disease paid handsomely for the privilege. Sometimes young women would be "deflowered" more than once until madams could no longer fool their customers into paying the exorbitant rates a real or supposed virgin brought. Emma Johnson was notorious for such behavior. In 1892, the \textit{New Orleans Mascot}, a local rag for the French Quarter's vice district, labeled Johnson "lewd and abandoned" and depicted her standing at her window, her octopus-like tentacles ensnaring three men, a young boy, and a young girl. "Having enticed a man, the procuress whispers to him that the girls are young and innocent, leering at him with filthy meaning. She seduces him into staying for a while. If he does, a girl loses her virtue, he stains his soul, and the procuress is enriched by sin."\textsuperscript{113}

The article called on the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children to keep tabs on Johnson's infamous place and others like it. While the \textit{Mascot} editors firmly believed that prostitution should be legal, they, along with a majority of people in the late nineteenth century, believed that brothels should be legal but tightly regulated.

\textsuperscript{112} Wiltz, \textit{Last Madam}, 47.
\textsuperscript{113} "Lewd and Abandoned: Emma Johnson, the Notorious Keeper of No. 20 Gasquet Street, Is Fined upon the Above Charges," \textit{Mascot}, 21 May 1892, 8.
and early twentieth centuries, did not condone the corruption or exploitation of young children.\footnote{The Mascot's position on prostitution was that it should be “congregated and licensed.” “Against houses of ill-fame, as such, the Mascot makes no crusade so long as they are conducted in a decorous manner and are not located in respectable neighborhoods, for they are a necessary evil. The subject is a delicate one to handle, but it must be admitted that such places are useful in ministering to the passions of men who otherwise would be tempted to seduce the young ladies of their acquaintance.” “A Plague of Prostitutes,” Mascot, 11 June 1892, 2. See also “Licensing of Prostitutes: Doctors and Methodists Kick, Let Them Kick,” Mascot, 3 September 1892, 2; and Mascot, 26 March 1887, quoted in Rose, Storyville, 37. New Orleans officials later acted on such sentiment and created a segregated vice district in the city which went into effect on 1 January 1898 and came to be known as Storyville after its main proponent, Alderman Sidney Story. See Rose, Storyville, 37-39.}

Violet, as did many young women entering or coerced into the commercial sex world, sold her virginity to the highest bidder. After a number of performances in French Studio sex circuses, Emma decided that it was time for her and her young friend, Liz, to have sex. Emma Johnson made a speech about “‘how everybody in the District knew we were virgins, even though we did all these other things and that if the price was right, tonight was the night and she’d have an auction.’” One man, wanting both to himself, bid $775 for each girl and took them upstairs. “He wanted us both together, and you know how it is, we though he ought to be entitled to somethin’ for all that money, so we came on with everything we could think of, includin’ the dyke act.’” After much ado, the girls managed to “‘get him into Liz. I could tell it hurt her and she bled pretty good too, but afterwards she said it wasn’t so bad and she was glad it was over.’” Too tired to continue, the john came to Violet’s house the next night “‘and that’s when I got broke in. It wasn’t bad, and he really thought, all around, he had his money’s worth.’”\footnote{The Mascot’s position on prostitution was that it should be “congregated and licensed.” “Against houses of ill-fame, as such, the Mascot makes no crusade so long as they are conducted in a decorous manner and are not located in respectable neighborhoods, for they are a necessary evil. The subject is a delicate one to handle, but it must be admitted that such places are useful in ministering to the passions of men who otherwise would be tempted to seduce the young ladies of their acquaintance.” “A Plague of Prostitutes,” Mascot, 11 June 1892, 2. See also “Licensing of Prostitutes: Doctors and Methodists Kick, Let Them Kick,” Mascot, 3 September 1892, 2; and Mascot, 26 March 1887, quoted in Rose, Storyville, 37. New Orleans officials later acted on such sentiment and created a segregated vice district in the city which went into effect on 1 January 1898 and came to be known as Storyville after its main proponent, Alderman Sidney Story. See Rose, Storyville, 37-39.}

Women were not the only virgins who had sex in brothels, however. Young men sometimes experienced their first intercourse with a prostitute. Wilbur Burton, for example, had sex for the first time with Hazel, a white Columbus, Ohio, prostitute. While
walking in downtown Columbus wishing he had female companionship, a man solicited Wilbur to "Start the New Year right, my boy; there's a nice girl upstairs waiting for you." After paying him a dollar, Wilbur went into the hotel and met Hazel who was happily surprised to find out he was a virgin. Hazel undressed Wilbur and proceeded to initiate him into the art of sex. Wilbur reported that she babbled, "It's New Year, and I'm a bit drunk, but not too drunk for a good time, . . . your first . . . well, I was virgin once, only three years ago, and I ain't quite 19 now . . . don't hurry, dearie, never hurry when you want to have a good time . . . I make most customers hurry, but you're special. . . . A virgin on New Year, and a swell virgin, too . . . Now don't be in no hurry, dearie; never hurry when you want to have a good time." According to Wilbur, he and Hazel both enjoyed the encounter.

Although two scholars recently have documented the existence of dildos and sex toys in brothels and bedrooms over the past few centuries, scant attention has been paid to mechanical and electrical devices with sexual applications.117 Evidence reveals, however, that prostitutes provided sexual services for Johns. They were also paid to have sex with machines while others watched. In a fascinating chapter about a "mechanical whorehouse" that she supposedly visited and then worked at in Los Angeles, Lola described in great detail the three types of machines by which "one could enjoy thrills

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115 "Violet," interview by Al Rose, in Rose, Storyville, 149-50.
and be amused”: machines that used movements, machines that used electricity, and machines that the user or another person operated.\textsuperscript{118}

The first category included vibrators, which came about almost as soon as electricity was widely available in the late 1800s.\textsuperscript{119} The second type of machine operated on battery power. After an involved technical description of the means by which battery power was transferred to the machine, which she did not name, Lola described how it worked. “Making and breaking the slow of the current many times in a second, this action results in a knocking effect which is nearly like an action performed by the vibrator. It has another effect for there is a sense of warmth and tingling which is desireable [sic] to the user. When this machine has been attached to a part of the body it makes that part buzz and throb with strange, nerve-wracking thrills and any male organ soon becomes hard and taunt [sic] when the current is surging through that organ.” This particular device was mostly a “man’s machine,” however; “that biting current isn’t so satisfactory to a sensitive pussy.”\textsuperscript{120} Women, instead, used the electrified “violet-ray machine,” since the “warm, thrilling current is very stimulating to the soft nerve-laden flesh of the female parts.” The violet-ray machine had attachments “made of either glass tubes of a design shaped like the male organ, or a metal tube of the same general type. The tube is inserted into the sheath [vagina] and when the tickling current sprays the tip of the womb the poor girl just sinks into a valley of nice thrills and sensations.”\textsuperscript{121}

A few prostitutes reportedly had sex with animals. Whether reports of bestiality are verifiable is hard to prove, although the numerous anecdotal accounts of such

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{118} “Memoirs of a Pleasure Girl,” 74.
\footnotetext{119} Maines, \textit{Technology of Orgasm}.
\footnotetext{120} “Memoirs of a Pleasure Girl,” 75.
\end{footnotes}
behavior seem to justify the existence of such behavior.\textsuperscript{122} The few accounts that exist often attribute it to prostitutes in other countries—often Latin American—or portray it as part of larger circus acts.\textsuperscript{123} Violet’s mother, for example, “used to fuck the pony” at Emma Thompson’s circus shows.\textsuperscript{124} (Violet found it amusing that she and Liz would ride the two ponies or horse around the yard during the day, fully knowing what they were used for at night.) Whether or not prostitutes actually consummated intercourse with animals is questionable; many such acts were reportedly faked or were simply rumors used to lure voyeuristic customers into brothels. Norma Wallace mentioned in her memoirs that “‘cabdrivers liked to tell their fares about the dog and pony shows at Norma Wallace’s. Word got around about a show with a pony and a girl, but that the girls would only do it if the audience were large enough. When the couples got to the house, they’d ask Norma if the girl and pony were going to perform that night. Norma would say, “Oh, the girl was oversexed; she screwed the pony to death.” Then they’d want to know if the girl was there. “No,” Norma would tell them, “she’s dead from screwin too.” Norma said, ‘What the hell. I was selling something. And the people kept flocking in!’” Supposedly, the rumor held that Simone was the girl who screwed the pony. Those “in the know” said that it was really a small donkey. As Wallace’s biographer has noted “fact and legend meshed, and the legend of Norma Wallace’s house grew.”\textsuperscript{125} Sexologist Irving Rosse reported the case of a woman allowing people to watch her have sex with a

\textsuperscript{121} “Memoirs of a Pleasure Girl,” 76.
\textsuperscript{122} For reports of bestiality and laws against such acts (which imply that they occurred, or were feared to occur) in noncommercial sex contexts, see Freedman and D’Emilio, \textit{Intimate Matters}, 17, 118.
\textsuperscript{123} See Hasselrodt, \textit{Twilight Women around the World}, chaps. 9-10.
\textsuperscript{124} “Violet,” interview by Al Rose, in Rose, \textit{Storyville}, 149.
\textsuperscript{125} Wiltz, \textit{Last Madam}, 109. A male friend who was stationed in the U.S. Army in South Texas during the early 1990s, recently told me that he had heard similar stories about a Mexican whorehouse where there
donkey for a small sum. A similar show took place in San Francisco, in which a
prostitute and a large Newfoundland dog were the actors. According to the prostitute,
once a woman copulated with a dog she would forever prefer the dog to a man.126

Some brothels catered to other “deviant” practices. Early in 1922, A. B. Farwell
reported in the Chicago Tribune that “massage parlors” were not only a place of
prostitution for men, but a place where “dissatisfied or discontented married women”
could hook up with men who were looking for a certain type of woman or a certain kind
of “perversion” or “idiosyncracy,” including flagellation.127 Cross’s investigations
revealed many establishments that catered to johns with unconventional tastes in sexual
stimulation. One brothel sported a “pseudo-graveyard.” “Black Masses were held here
once a month, and people who, in police parlance, were of des moeurs particulières
(perverts) attended by invitation.”128 Another room in this house replicated an Inquisition
torture chamber and was the site of numerous sadomasochistic activities. “People with
peculiar ideas congregated here. No appointment was needed; they outnumbered the
applicants for the graveyard.”129 At Norma Wallace’s brothel, Terry serviced one
particularly “special” client who traveled from North Carolina to New Orleans an average
of four times a year to satisfy his sexual needs. Not interested in Yum-Yum’s well-known
oral specialty, this man instead wanted Terry to stick needles in his penis and hammer on
it as hard as she could. Terry obliged, producing multiple orgasms in her pleased

and Mental Disorders 19 (1892): 795-811, quotation on 801-2.
127 A. B. Farwell, Chicago Tribune, 1 January 1922, quoted in James G. Kieman, “‘Massage Shops’ and
‘Idiosyncracies,’” 26, no. 6 (June 1922): 378-79.
128 Cross, Lust Market, 53.
129 Cross, Lust Market, 54.
customer. Soon, however, this was not enough and he asked her to cut his testicles with a razor blade and then sew them back up. Although it was a messy job, Terry complied, although her madam Norma was appalled. After one bloody session, she told Terry that the room looked like an abattoir. Terry explained about the razor, saying, “He pays well for it and he leaves happy.” Norma, however, insisted that the man never return. Once locals learned of Terry’s exploits with the john, Yum-Yum earned a new nickname: “Terry the Cutter.”

Prostitutes catered to other perversions as well. Known to be available to do anything for a price, Simone, Norma’s “dog and pony show” girl, performed some of the more eccentric sex practices for customers. She would “bathe them in golden showers and serve up hot lunches” (urolagnia and coprolagnia) on request.

Conclusions

In historical commercial sex relationships neither nature nor nurture played an important role in defining sexual orientation and its parallel, sexuality, terms that took on complex and amorphous forms in the teeming brothel. Rather, sex for pay manifested in infinite combinations among people who claimed any number of sexual identities—or thought nothing of them. In the brothel, anything went, as long as it was paid for. Self-defined heterosexual women had sex with women, and never questioned their heterosexual identity. Other women who had paid sex with women wondered if they were

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130 Wiltz, Last Madam, 128-29.
131 Wiltz, Last Madam, 127. When I queried my fellow subscribers on an email list devoted to the history of sex about the meaning of the phrase “hot lunches,” one person claimed to have heard it commonly used to describe the act of defecating in someone’s mouth. Amy Forsyth to Heather Miller, email correspondence, 3 May 2000. “Golden showers” is a much more common phrase describing the act of urinating on or in front of someone for sexual titillation.
lesbians or denied that such acts possibly had such ramifications. Self-defined lesbians had commercial sex with men. And yet other women—lesbians, heterosexual, or other—had sex with animals, machines, men and women, men and men, women and women, and any number of potential variations thereof, and rarely stopped to wonder if it meant that they were homosexual, heterosexual, or somewhere in between.
CONCLUSION

This dissertation has attempted to show the complicated relationship among sexual acts, desire, and sexual identities in the United States in approximately the last half of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries by first addressing the relationship of sexual deviance to both normal and so-called abnormal women and secondly revealing the multiplicities of acts, desires, and identities to be found within the commercial sex context. In parallel yet intertwined discussions, I have traced not only the history of deviant and normal female sexuality in the medical and social discourse during that time, but also have outlined the wide variety of sexual combinations and permutations that occurred among sex workers in the past. The story that is told here of both changing scientific methods used to examine and describe sex acts among women and how the social milieu interpreted such scientific evidence at different times and continuity in the many varieties of sex acts that occurred and were believed to have occurred leads to important conclusions both for the history of sexuality and for the historical profession.

First, prostitution, when considered as a category of sexuality alongside those of heterosexuality and homosexuality, complicates our ideas of sexual identities as being simply about sexual object choice or desire. Rarely has prostitution itself been considered a category of sexuality that can be historicized, despite the fact that sex acts

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and desire (whether of men soliciting prostitutes or of sex workers themselves) play a
daily role in the life of commercial sex workers. Evidence shows that prostitution was
not only a category of work, but it may also be considered, to a certain extent, a
complicated sexual identity that doctors, reformers, and prostitutes themselves applied
and resisted during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Doctors and reformers
categorized prostitutes as sexual deviants, often lumping them in with other so-called
abnormal women—nymphomaniacs, excessive masturbators, lesbians, and the like.
Prostitutes have also categorized themselves as sexually different, although they do not
appear to have seen themselves as sexually deviant, from “normal” women. Sometimes
they used this as a marketing strategy (for example, women who were known to perform
such nontraditional sex acts as fellatio or flagellation). Sometimes they may simply have
been verbalizing to whomever would listen that they were engaged in sex acts which
society deemed deviant (perhaps out of defiance or unwillingness to conform to strict
social norms).

Looking at prostitution as a category of sexual identity also confounds the now-
traditional chronology of a major change occurring in the late nineteenth and early
ten twentieth centuries from sexual inversion to a naturalized sexuality (or race, as
Somerville would argue). Historiography of sexuality has divided the history of sexuality
into two time periods: the time before ideas of sexual identity, when sex acts defined
what was deviant, and the time when a person’s sex acts defined his or her identity. In the
mid-nineteenth century, such sexologists as Karl Heinrich Ulrichs and Karl Westphal
began to argue that sexuality was an innate personal quality that was inherent in a person
and thus should not be persecuted. Historical evidence from commercial sex environments and contemporary theory, however, renders this seemingly clear-cut change over time increasingly unclear. Although prostitutes’ sexuality was often referred to as innately perverted or excessive during the entire period studied and women were thought sometimes to become prostitutes because of excessive sexual desire (whether for men or women), prostitutes’ willingness to exchange sex for money was an equally defining factor of their sexual and social identity.

Although prostitution has always been a predominantly heterosexual exchange in which men purchased sex from women, men buying sex from women was only one of many combinations and permutations available in the commercial sex environment. Female prostitutes often participated in sex acts with people of both sexes (and often of other races than their own) both for pleasure and for profit. What the historical evidence presented in this dissertation shows us is that—at least in the world of commercial sex—there were (and apparently still are) no hard and fast categories into which one’s acts or identities fit. Such labels as heterosexual or homosexual were often irrelevant to men and women buying and selling sex acts. Instead, for at least most sex workers, for whom turning a trick and getting paid was the priority, a particular sex act or desire did not necessarily reflect the sexual identity of the performer with which it was most usually associated. Thus, a “lesbian” prostitute could perform heterosexual sex acts or same-sex sex acts within the same evening, expressing disgust with or desire for either her male or female customer; similarly, a “heterosexual” prostitute may have had sex with a paying

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female customer or with another woman for the pleasure of a man, again possessing none
or much desire for either or neither of her customers. Was the former any less a lesbian or
the latter any less straight because of their sexual activity and/or desire, or lack therof?
Conversely, was a prostitute who desired and had sex with a paying male customer
necessarily heterosexual, or the woman who desired or paid for sex with another woman
a lesbian? At least in the brothel, the lines between sex acts, desires, and sexual identities
were blurred.

Not only does this blurring of boundaries among desire, acts, identities, and
commercial exchanges change the idea of sexuality as a modern conception. On the one
hand, it challenges Whiggish versions of the history of sexuality, history of prostitution,
and women's history, which imply that the social, political, and economic situation for
gays and lesbians, prostitutes, and women as a whole has improved since the late
nineteenth century. On the other hand, the complex nature of prostitutes' sexuality also
calls into question those who argue that because of the medicalization of homosexuality
and naturalizing of gender and race in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries "deviant"
sexuality—be it homosexuality, female sexual aggressiveness, or prostitution—has
become more stigmatized over the twentieth century than it had been in previous
centuries. Neither is exactly the case.

My evidence shows that the picture is and always has been far more complicated.
For some women, same-sex sex acts became more stigmatized as the nineteenth century
turned into the twentieth. As fear of all "deviant" female sexuality increased and as
women's worlds melded more into those of men's (at least among white middle-class
Americans) and as marital ideals changed, women's intimate relationships (which may or
may not have been genitally sexual) fell under increased scrutiny. Moreover, as historians have pointed out, the past has revealed many examples of unprosecuted same-sex acts as well as documented cases of sacred and state-sanctioned prostitution and prostitutes claiming some power in society whereas prostitution became increasingly stigmatized over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Second, exploring prostitutes' sexuality "queers" both the history of prostitution and the history of sexuality. Many scholars of sexuality along with gays and lesbians currently refer to themselves and their ways of thinking as "queer," a term that does not look for explanations of one's gayness, but seeks instead to subvert the dominant heterosexual paradigm and embrace all consensual sex acts as "normal." Perhaps ironically, the inhabitants and promoters of red light districts sought to do this more than a century ago—in fact, guides to New Orleans Storyville from 1910 and 1911 referred to the district as the "Queer Zone."\(^2\) As the term is used now in queer studies, "queer" replaces the norm (often referred to as heteronormativity), thus negating the need for an either/or interpretation of sexuality. This either/or binary has traditionally been posited as heterosexual vs. homosexual, but I also believe its parallel may be found along the commercial sex vs. noncommercial sex divide. My evidence about the complex nature of sex and sexuality among commercial sex workers further "queers" the history of sexuality by suggesting both that there are no binaries of sexuality and that there are no simple correlations between sexual acts and sexual identities. The variations of sexual acts available commercially have been and still are mind-boggling. But the implications of the teeming brothel are even more important.

\(^2\) *Blue Book* (New Orleans, La.: n.p., 1910-1911).
Perhaps it is not surprising that women in the past performed sex with other women for male consumption, especially given what we know about contemporary commercial sex practices and male fantasy. However, the few historians of prostitution who even mention the existence of such acts never examine the meanings of those acts, either dismissing the possibility that these women were potentially lesbians—women who preferred other women as their primary sex partners or love interests; that they may have performed such acts for purely selfish physical reasons, or any other combination of desire or motivation; or that these were purely profit-driven acts. Similarly, how may we understand a self-defined homosexual having sex with female prostitutes? The problem is that historians have presumed that prostitutes were female and that customers were male and that the sex acts in which they participated were strictly heterosexual and strictly commercial, despite contradictory evidence. And yet some prostitutes performing same-sex acts have been defined (and have defined themselves) as lesbian, gay men who patronize female prostitutes are still considered homosexual, while others simply refuse or see no need to apply such labels to themselves or others. Such seeming inconsistencies illuminate a larger question in the study of sex acts and sexual identities: How does one distinguish between the acts people perform, the desires they feel, and the identities they embrace (or reject) if the line between the two is so blurred? I wonder if it is even useful to try to do so.

Finally, this dissertation shows the importance of putting sex and desire back into the history of sexuality—indeed, into all histories—for two important reasons. The first

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reason is to tell more accurate stories about people’s lives in the past, all of which encompass sex to some degree, even if it is the presumed absence of sex, for example, among such people as priests and nuns, or young children. As historians it is our duty to draw as full pictures of our subjects as we can in order to understand not only how they fit into their historical context but also to try to understand their conceptions of the world in which they lived. How can someone’s sexuality be removed from their conception of life, their motivations for choosing partners and often jobs, how they spend their leisure time, and how they mark changes in their life? This is not to say that sex should be the end all and be all of humanity. Only that it behooves all historians to consider people’s sexuality and the sex acts in which they engaged as much as class, race, gender, and location.

The second important reason to put sex back into history is hopefully to move historians of sexuality—indeed, all historians—past the tired political strategies they often continue to exercise in their histories. I believe that the omission of sex from history has been rooted in feminist theory and gay liberation strategy of the 1970s and 1980s, which often shied away from explicit discussion of sex acts (lesbian, gay, or commercial) as a means to excoriate heterosexual men for their sexual exploitation of women and to deflect attention away from “deviant” sex acts among lesbians and gay men. As Donna Penn has noted, most lesbian history prior to the 1990s concentrated on romantic love shared by women. This was a successful strategy, she argues, for recovering lesbians from the “dustbins of history,” however this approach failed adequately to define who lesbians were and nurtured an essentialist view of women as
nurturers rather than lusty, desiring beings.\(^4\) Hiding sex has only served to further discrimination and fear when it becomes clear that prostitutes and lesbians, or any women, for that matter, have sex and like it.

In part, the lack of evidence (or the ignoring of such evidence when it does exist) has fostered this silence and/or led to more theoretical discussions over those based more on "facts." Penn has argued, for example, that the lack of genital evidence that has led historians such as Bennett to broaden the definitions of lesbian to include any behavior deemed "lesbian-like" has "desexualized" lesbian subjects.\(^5\) To a certain extent, the same can be said to be true of prostitutes. In part, I think this desexualization has been purposeful. By taking "sex" out of the history of sexuality, feminists and gay and lesbian historians have been able to concentrate more on critiquing discourses of power and the ways in which these discourses perpetuated longstanding exploitation and discrimination against women and people engaging in same-sex sex acts. Such critiques are no doubt essential to the feminist quest to topple patriarchal hegemony. However, by ignoring that the history of sexuality necessarily stems from sexual acts and desires, historians of such so-called deviant behaviors as prostitution have not painted complete pictures of women’s (and men’s) sexual behaviors, desires, and identities in the past and have thus ironically perpetuated the sexual subjugation of women (and, for that matter, the members of any group deemed sexually deviant).


Furthermore, many of these historians allowed stereotypical, and often unspoken, assumptions about sex acts they refused to mention to pigeonhole their work. For example, on the one hand, historians of prostitution have largely presumed that prostitutes' sexual behavior was heterosexual (servicing only male orgasm) and that all prostitutes were women, a presumption that neglects the existence of sexual variety in commercial sex work acts and the presence of male sex workers and female sex consumers. On the other hand, historians of lesbianism rarely mention lesbians' participation in sex work because it entailed heterosexual sex acts and therefore must not have been the realm of "true" lesbians who presumably desired only women as lovers and companions. Because of the political intent of many historians, maintaining binaries has been essential. Thankfully, queer theory has rendered much of the need for such oppositional tactics unnecessary.

I hope that in the future we can disregard those who would judge a person's mettle based on her or his sexual acts, object choices, or fantasies. This may seem politically naïve, but I believe that if historians begin to discuss sex acts intentionally, those acts that are often perceived as dangerous will become less so as the ignorance and fear that surrounds them disappears.
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