This is a study of the representations of prostitutes and prostitution produced within a particular historical framework—regulationism. Drawing support from public health movements, campaigns against depopulation and degeneration and protest from feminists and socialists, the “French system” of regulation of prostitution occupied center stage in social debates from the mid-nineteenth century to 1975. Within this context, images of prostitutes and their work proliferated. Prostitutes came to symbolize the key tensions of modern, industrial, urban life. Like women generally, prostitutes represented the social body. Their bodies, as female bodies, were caught in a network of attempts to “properly” channel sexual activity. Through their “promiscuous” lifestyles, class origins, and social mobility, they violated key tenets of familialism, and models of proper womanhood, and they eluded the determined gaze of regulationists.

Additionally, prostitution became associated with the “dangerous” working classes so that discourses about the control and regulation of prostitutes’ bodies were inseparable from similar discourses about the control of the working classes. The bourgeois fears and anxieties about the threats of working-class
revolt within the tight quarters of Paris brought to the surface underlying themes of the inherent danger of the city, the assumed irrationality of the “masses,” and the threat posed by dangerous and sexually “loose” women.

My method has been to examine these constructions and how they were produced in discourses. This makes my study a “discursive” one and situates my work in a particular genre of historical study usually referred to a “postmodern.” However, I would like to emphasize that part of my method has included an attempt to find a balance between the material conditions of a French society in transition by referring to the themes of industrialization and women’s condition with the more linguistic aspects of the production of subjects through language. This approach necessarily makes my project limited; but, as I discuss in the conclusion, there are no historical records of desire and pleasure that can merely be taken up and reproduced for our contemporary eyes. I refer to this as an empirical problem in the history of sexuality in the Conclusion. I have found that it is impossible to “discover” what women (and men) thought and felt, which necessitates dealing with discursive production.
Discourse and the Power of Symbols: Representation and Regulation of Prostitution in France 1831-1975.

by

Jennifer L. Sweatman

A THESIS

submitted to

Oregon State University

in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the
degree of

Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies

Presented May 6, 1999
Commencement June 1999
I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

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Jennifer L. Sweatman, Author
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Discourse and the Power of Symbols: Representation and Regulation of Prostitution in France 1831-1975.

Introduction

A former prostitute named Sandy summarized the tensions I will explore when she said, "it's like prostitutes are just these bodies who are somehow connected to something bad and evil or something good and on the cutting edge of revolution. They just turn us into symbols." While she is referring to 'middle-class feminists' of the 1970-1990's, her statement applies as well to the history of prostitution in France from the nineteenth century to the present. By examining the representations of prostitutes produced in the regulation of prostitution, called the "French system" by nineteenth century commentators, one can grasp more easily the weight of Sandy's statement.

My own motivations for this project were to seek out explanations for this symbolic role the prostitute plays in our contemporary society. Influenced by current feminist theorizing about sexuality and sex work, often referred to as the sex wars, I began to sense that something about this debate was problematic and that this debate was producing some of the key dilemmas for feminism. Through doing this project I have found that to adequately deal with the issue of prostitution and what it means for women, one must address the history of the symbolic role of the prostitute because it is here that the foundations of our contemporary debate becomes clear.

Our current association of the prostitute with social and moral problems is not new. Writers, artists, policy makers, reformers, feminists and other social groups deployed powerful images of prostitutes to address social issues throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century. Prostitutes came to symbolize the
unique set of problems associated with modern, urban, industrial society: disease, degeneration, depopulation, the breakdown of class and gender barriers, changes in sexual mores, the rise of consumer culture and the threat of political radicalism.

Timothy Gilfoyle, in a recent American Historical Review article, challenges historians of prostitution to re-examine their equation of prostitution with modernity by arguing that there are elements of commercial sex that transcend time. He asks what is unique about prostitution in the so-called “modern” period that distinguishes it from earlier forms and debates about prostitution.

Certainly Gilfoyle has a point; the modern association of prostitutes with disorder is not a new phenomenon. Alan Hunt, in his study of sumptuary law notes that medieval Europeans were also concerned with distinguishing “bad” women from “good” women and associated prostitutes with disorder. So, there does seem to be some continuity through historical time in images of prostitutes. However, what one sees in the modern representations of prostitutes and the regulation of their work as a social activity is different than the medieval forms. If historians can logically make a distinction between medieval and early mercantile economies and modern industrial capitalism without falling into this problem, why can historians of prostitution not do the same? One could ask the same question about the French Revolution, which provided a break with absolute monarchy and marked a cultural turn towards more secular bases of authority.

Modern prostitution is modern because of the particular way that its representation and regulation are bound up with the specific sets of problems and anxieties produced within this different economic and social context. Blending new sociological theories and the “science” of public health and hygiene with the ideological preoccupations unique to our modern class and gender divisions, the representations and regulation of nineteenth century prostitution reflect some of the
central problems of a society in transition. In some ways the fears and anxieties about the disorder of prostitutes are a continuation of the older myths from Christian – Medieval Europe, and perhaps from Antiquity; however, more recent anxieties show an increased concern with the secularization, urbanization, and medicalization of human society that cannot be ignored. The discourses about prostitution draw on and are constructed in conjunction with reactions to the changes and problems associated with industrial capitalism.

As Gilfoyle continues to point out, “because the ‘whore’ was also a metaphor, commercial sex was transformed into a vehicle by which elites and middle classes articulated their social boundaries, fears, agenda, and visions.” For this reason the study of prostitution must deal with this symbolic role of the “whore.” From its study one can learn not only the origin of the particular set of concerns expressed by contemporary feminists about prostitution, but one can glimpse the complex range of social questions that have preoccupied Westerners in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is this symbolic function of the prostitute and prostitution that I will analyze in this study. My aim is to contextualize contemporary feminist debates on commercial sex and to examine how prostitutes were represented.

In Chapter 1, “The Medico-Moral Framework”, I sketch the background of public health movements in France and their relationship to the development of a concern in modern societies with population. Central to this focus was the attempt to acquire knowledge about the body and its processes that could be turned into a mechanism by which to increase and preserve the population of a state. The development of the ideology of solidarism, built on a foundation of sexual difference, was crucial to this medico-moral vision.

Chapter 2, “The Role of Solidarism in Shaping Women’s Lives,” discusses the impact of solidarism on women’s lives and on the development of feminism.
Because solidarism promised class harmony through the resolidification of gender roles, feminists could not ignore its power as an ideology. Additionally, women had to confront the vision of the social body produced in solidarism that associated femininity with maternity and sought to limit women’s roles in the public sphere. For working-class women and prostitutes, this was particularly problematic.

In Chapter 3, “The Logic of Regulation,” I analyze the early regulationist discourse exemplified by Parent-Duchatelet. I outline the policy of enclosure and its relation to the carceral system outlined by Michel Foucault in Discipline and Punish. Also, I explore the “complications” for regulationists brought about by unregistered prostitution. The concern with women beyond the gaze of the regulationists was a preoccupation of policy makers and is one of the central themes in Emile Zola’s Nana. I will explore this literary representation in the context of regulationism to understand how pervasive the attempt to differentiate “good” and “bad” women was at this period.

Chapter 4 deals with the “Challenges to Regulationism” that emerged at the end of the nineteenth century from feminists, socialists, and liberal reformers. Also, it discusses the emergence of a new form of regulationism that reflects the triumph of social health and hygiene that characterized the turn-of-the-century and how that victory overlapped with a larger societal turn towards eugenics and other such “technocratic,” state controlled health initiatives.

In Chapter 5, “Woman as Fetish,” I delve into how images of prostitutes in art and literature reflect concerns that are distinctively modern. I analyze Zola’s Nana and the paintings of Edouard Manet to understand how commodity culture and fashion connect with images of “dangerous” women to produce “woman” as fetish. Here, I am concerned with the way in which prostitutes served as symbols not only of disease and disorder, but also as the most salient example of capitalism’s excesses.
The last chapter, "The Twentieth Century," deals with the change in prostitutional forms in the twentieth century and the prostitutes’ strike of 1975 in Lyons. This chapter is less extensive than the previous sections on nineteenth century prostitution because of the lack of sources for such study. Therefore, this chapter serves more as a way to form the context for the demands and concerns of the prostitutes themselves that emerged from their strike. I will examine how the existence of a prostitute’s strike and records of their own testimonies illustrate a significant yet ambiguous change in the representation of prostitution.
Chapter 1: The Medico-Moral Framework

In nineteenth century France, prostitution was situated at the intersection of a range of social problems. One could not have commented on prostitutes or prostitution without reference to a network of discourses about other social issues. In particular, theories of degeneration, social harmony, and ideological constructions of femininity formed this background. In this context, feminists, social reformers, public hygienists, and policy makers utilized the concept of the social body in making their demands. The social body was a concept that referred to the population as an entity that combined political, economic, and biological aspects. As the nineteenth century progressed, this concept gained popularity and credibility and hence its explanatory power was frequently referred to in discussions about social problems.

A whole body of knowledge that proliferated at this time was concerned with the proper regulation of population and the introduction of the concept of the social body. Foucault calls this process of state concern with population and the infusion of social questions with a moralistic scientific viewpoint the development of “bio-power.” Bio-power is the process by which “human’s reproduction was measured and assessed to determine the ‘bio-power’ of the state...,” hence “sexuality became a tool of the state and society, and procreative behavior a legitimate area of state concern.” In France, concern with the declining birthrate and the growing awareness of deteriorating living conditions, particularly of the poor, were the primary focus of these early studies of bio-power.

France’s stagnant population growth and the anxieties this phenomenon aroused about France’s position in European politics, particularly with reference to
Germany, served to bolster the increased study of human reproduction and of sexuality more generally. Additionally, the threats posed by rampant epidemics of disease, like the cholera outbreak of 1832, and the potential of venereal disease to slowly destroy the population were foremost concerns for social reformers and policy makers. Public health had become a major concern of French officials because it was widely held by social observers that “population constituted the indispensable foundation of wealth and national power.”

The Origin of Public Health

Even at its origin, the field of public health was linked to surveillance of the population. The Paris Health Council (Couseil de salubrite de Paris) of 1802 was under the Prefect of Police and its members included nearly all of the prominent public hygienists, including Parent-Duchatelet. Relying on police authority and discretion and bourgeois liberal economic and social theory, solidarism combined state intervention and protection of the health of its population with specific ideological perspectives. Early hygenists addressed the real problems of deteriorating social conditions and their biological consequences, but they did so often without questioning the economic causes of these degrading conditions.

As Foucault argues, “at the heart of this economic and political problem of population was sex...” The forms of sex had to be catalogued, studied, and regulated to ensure the proper ordering of sexual energy into productive channels for social progress. The notion that the reproduction of humans could be “assessed to determine the ‘bio-power’ of the state” was the motivation for the study of sexual practices and for the recommendations for state intervention into what had been considered the private realm of sexuality. Foreshadowing the twentieth century development of eugenics, early public health movements laid the foundation for this...
widespread state concern about sexuality as “procreative behavior was considered to
be...protected from pathogenic influences, and to be increased, limited, or
regenerated according to the needs of the state.”9

The regulationist schema fit into this “proper” channelling of sexual activity
by providing a controlled and closely observed laboratory in the maison de tolerance
and by limiting venal sex to this particular locale.10 Additionally, the regulationist
project was to control the spread of venereal disease, which posed a threat to the
biological regeneration and repopulation of the body of the French nation.

Paris, in particular, was considered to be a laboratory and a model for other
European nations because of its role in leading early public health movements. The
spatial reorganization of Paris under the Second Empire was an important facet of its
status as a prime testing ground for new social hygiene policies. In his study of the
origin of public health movements, Coleman notes that

the new reality which was Paris provided a model... for the unanticipated
human consequences of those agricultural, industrial, and demographic
changes that lay behind the formation of new, and the startling evolution of
old, cities. Paris was vast, it was diverse, its toll on mankind seemed beyond
both necessity and simple justice. The city, through vital statistics, economic
demographic changes, and public practices, was to become a laboratory, a center for social
discovery if not yet social amelioration. The city thus gave the hygienists
their great opportunity.11

This “opportunity” was also opened to novelists of this period, like Balzac, Sue, and
Hugo, whose realistic portrayal of urban life often overlapped with scientific
observers’ accounts. These literary figures helped to popularize some of the key
social ills that were noted by socio-medical investigators. By portraying the “filth,
noise, crime and prostitution” that were “notorious” in Paris according to public
hygienist’s and police perception, these figures drew attention to Paris’s role as both
laboratory and as a “singular” instance of the pathological threats posed by urban
industrialized growth.12
It seemed to a host of observers that the city was a prime spot for degeneration. Parent-Duchatelet’s study of prostitution reflects these tensions in early industrial cities. By linking prostitution and crime with sewers, he drew out the “coincidence of the material and the moral consequences of urban growth” to observers. A “general disquiet” about the connection between crime and threats to public health explain the close connections made in the literature and discourses of the early to mid-nineteenth century between prostitutes, the working classes and threats to public health and order. In particular, the cholera epidemic of 1832 provided a stage for these anxieties.

The cholera epidemic “lasted for 189 days and killed 18,402 residents of the city.” The commission appointed to study the epidemic was drawn almost exclusively from the ranks of public hygienists, excluding practicing physicians, and it “assigned a social cause to the differences in the pattern of suffering and death imposed upon by Paris by cholera.” These investigators found that it disproportionally impacted the poorest members of society. This finding overlapped with their other independent findings in studying public health generally, since it could be shown that the working-classes and the poor were already more subject to conditions that threatened health. The important point to emphasize for my purposes is that from its origins, public health and hygiene was centered around the study and regulation of working-class life. For both practical and ideological reasons, working-class men and women were to become the primary objects of state concern in this area, a status that would have important consequences throughout the century.

The Development of Solidarism

Following the Revolution of 1848, the workingman assumed a new identity. Part of this “new identity” was no doubt due to a growing class consciousness among
working people and the poor since as Coleman observes “by 1848 the urban poor had ceased to be an ill-defined minority...” and “had become a large, perhaps preponderant mass within the city. They formed a populace whose political persuasion was volatile and whose propensity to violence was already an established feature of French life.”

The growing size of this group in society and their deteriorating conditions of life drew social observers’ and reformers’ attention, but it also served as an impetus for the more vocal and increasingly political demands by this large group. Threatened by the potential revolutionary fervor of the “masses,” for whom the “right to work” was the rallying cry, a dominant theme in discourses of public health and social reform at this time became social harmony and cooperation. Striving to salvage liberal political ideals of liberty, usually meaning free market, fraternity and equality, which were easily undermined by simply observing the conditions of Paris, from the socialist threat, a discourse of solidarism developed.

Emerging with a reordering of working class life, this new discourse of social harmony, or solidarism, was developed, which placed more emphasis on responsibility and duty than on rights and individual caprices. This new discourse served not only to draw attention to the living conditions of the working classes and the poor, which was already being done by public hygienists, but it also created a desire to integrate the classes of society in the interest of social harmony. Matlock notes this trend toward altering bourgeois conceptions of the working classes. She points out that “the decade preceding the 1848 Revolution had prepared the stage for a new definition of the people, for new concern with workers’ salaries and education, and for a growing need to separate the laboring classes from the dangerous ones reportedly lurking in the urban wilds.”
Where once the bourgeois had avoided all contact with the working classes out of fear, since the working classes had been identified with the dangerous classes of criminals, beginning just before the Second Empire, the laboring classes had begun to be distinguished from the dangerous classes to facilitate their assimilation. A decline in abject and chronic poverty brought about by Haussmannization influenced the adaptation of bourgeois models of appropriate family life by the working classes.

The reorganization of space brought on by the restructuring of Paris meant a reorganization of relations between people. Corbin argues that the aim of this re-spatialization was “to assign precise, enclosed, and obligatory places for lovemaking to compress the volume of erotic behavior, to arrange things in such a way that the bedroom became the exclusive place of lovemaking.” It seems, then, that the logic of enclosure, to be discussed in the next chapter, did not merely apply to prostitutes, but to all sexual activity, which should be hidden in the private sphere, regulated by the “proper” rituals and authorities, and directed to “healthy” ends.

By emphasizing that “solutions to poverty and economic inequality must come from democratic governments not as philanthropic or expedient measures but in recognition of a natural and inalienable human right,” revolutionaries re-emphasized the primary place occupied by the family in maintaining a harmonious social order. In privileging family, a whole host of assumptions about and expectations for women were highlighted and strengthened. Working-class life began to be re-organized around a bourgeois model in which separate spheres and issues of sexual morality were fundamental, which had serious implications for women. Solidarism promised a class harmony built on the foundations of gender distinctions.
Michelle Perrot notes how in the nineteenth century, “as it became increasingly widespread to portray the family as “genetic capital,” anxieties over marriage and birth increased accordingly.” Two of the most significant perceived threats to the bourgeois family and to the social body more generally were mental illness and syphilis. Bolstered by fears of hereditary defects, both mental and physical, an idea of the “pathological family” characterized this period in French society. Corbin points out that this idea had its roots in the eighteenth century physicians who were firmly grounded in the concept of heredity. They “believed that the offspring of elderly parents were likely to be sickly; that love children were likely to be beautiful; an that a drunken parent was likely to give birth to a monster... Later, studies of industrial and urban pathologies, fear of ‘insurrectional hysteria,’ and the prevalence of neuropathy among artists suggested a link between civilization and degeneration...” A helpful metaphor for solidarism and its favored language was that of public health and degeneration. “Sharing some of the same etiology as the social theory of degeneration, and indeed complementing it, solidarism rested on the perception of society as a living organism, made up a large number of interdependent cells.” This quasi-scientific ideology justified governmental intrusion into the private sphere, especially the family, and restriction of a laissez-faire economic system.

Solidarism arose as a way to address the increasing tension between the state and various disenfranchised groups. The individual was being rethought as a being who was fundamentally social. A familial model served this purpose by linking individuals with what was considered the primary social group, the family, and by drawing out the importance of duties rather than rights, which were more characteristic of family life.
The family was responsible for the "reproduction of healthy and fertile offspring and the satisfaction of sexual needs without deceit, scandal or risk of debilitation." Because of France's declining population, a unique phenomenon in Europe at this time, French authorities were especially concerned with the risk of physical debilitations that may interfere with reproduction. This meant that the control of women's bodies as vehicles for reproducing healthy citizens must be maintained. Women, because of their strong connection to reproduction and familial life, became powerful symbols of what was wrong with France and of the ways these ills could be remedied. Women who neglected their families and their "proper" roles were not only pathological themselves, but they threatened the entire social body with disorder and degeneration.
Chapter 2: The Role of Solidarism in Shaping Women’s Lives

As France struggled to deal with the many class divisions brought on by the effects of industrialization and by frequent social upheaval, sexual difference deployed in the ideology of separate spheres became a foundation for the re-unification of the social body. The doctrine of separate spheres was integral to familialism and was influential in shaping public policy toward women, prostitute and non-prostitute alike.

Working class women, in particular, were affected by this redeployment of bourgeois models of proper womanhood. As it consisted in a reduction of women to the reproductive function of their bodies, symbolized by the mother, the ideology of separate spheres and familialism were particularly well suited to regulating working-class women’s bodies and sexualities. Because the ideology of separate spheres required that women stay at home to concentrate all of their energies on creating a peaceful, efficient, and healthy private space in which to nurture their children, working-class women, by virtue of their economic position, violated the key tenets of separate spheres.

For example, it was during the 1880’s that sex-specific labor protection laws were passed. By imposing labor laws on women officials of the Third Republic could justify intervention into a laissez-faire economy. Using the ideology of solidarism to argue their case, the supporters of sex-specific legislation were using “an indirect means of reinforcing the working-class family... in response to the economic and social dislocations of the depression” of 1885-1895. These laws limited women’s hours of work and demanded improved working-conditions. However, these laws were promulgated without working women’s input and often to their disadvantage. Here, the ideological basis of the laws is most evident. Rather
than actually improving their working conditions, these laws sought to remove women from the workplace, or, at least, to reduce the amount of competition they posed to the “true” breadwinners – men.

Working-class prostitutes were even more of a complication in this idealized vision of womanhood, since they violated the key tenets of sexual morality and dedication to family and home by selling their sexual (reproductive?) bodies on public streets. The image of the prostitute, who carries disease and moral and physical degeneration into the sanctified realm of the family, popular in the regulationist literature in mid to late nineteenth century France, was supported by the organic conception of society outlined above. In this scenario, the threat to the social body was likened to the way an individual’s body is threatened by decay, disease and death. Women played a special role in this biological process as the reproductive “capital” of the nation and in their role as the formative force in children’s early lives.

Given the influence of this network of ideology, women’s bodies became symbolic of the social body. Acting on policy and on politics, this ideological scheme portrayed “the working class woman” as “a potential stabilizer in the face of working class male threat to the bourgeois, republican order.” Because the rise of socialism and feminism posed threats to the status quo, it was necessary to deploy this idealized womanhood, “undivided by class” that could “convert workers in to good citizens.” Middle class women were to “educate their working class sisters so that they, in turn, could moralize men.” The bourgeois woman’s values of modesty, propriety, and “feminine compassion” were thought to be essential to healing the wounds of class division. This explains the primacy placed on motherhood as a woman’s duty to the nation that was prevalent at this time.
The maternal and its association with the irrational forces of nature shaped women's lives, their possibilities, and the social legislation that affected them in the Third Republic. In numerous debates in the period on suffrage, divorce, education and women's work, it was the physical bodily difference of women from men, combined with the fact that the social problems that emerged as issues were directly related to the regulation of biology and bodies, that made women the targets of legislation.

For women, this schema meant an increased amount of state intervention into their private lives and on their bodies. This intervention could be justified in two main ways. First, it was justified by the need for state administration of public hygiene. By referring to the dangers posed by degeneration to the social body as a whole, increased state regulation and control of women's bodies could be considered proper and necessary. Second, because women could not vote and were not officially recognized as political actors, the interventions were difficult to argue against and were easier to implement. For example, a critic of intrusion into the "affairs of women" could not use individual rights as an argument against this form of state control, since women were not recognized as having individual rights. Similarly, protective legislation for male workers was extremely hard to implement because these men were thought to possess such privacy rights.  

Within this context, women and women's bodies represented both the dangers of modern excess and the mechanism for their control. This represented a rather paradoxical configuration for women. On one hand, their bodies served as the justification for their exclusion from the status of citizen and hence from the position of social actor. On the other hand, these very bodies that were excluded from formal rights were ever present in formal, legal considerations. Although women did not have formal political agency, they were not absent from the social body; "the men of
the Third Republic did not simply ignore women as they built the state and implemented legislation, they had women very much in mind. The forms of agency women exercised were negotiated in relation to their position as representatives of the social body. This is evident in the movement for women’s suffrage in the mid to late nineteenth century in which feminists had to contend with these constructions of their bodies as vehicles for the preservation of the social body.

The Movement for Women’s Suffrage

In his discussion of the suffrage movement, Steven Hause argues that the terms “francais and citoyen indisputably implied women in tax law or criminal law—women paid on equal basis with men,” but they were not included in the terms for voting or the exercise of political rights. The suffrage movement in France serves as a useful example of the types of arguments used by proponents and opponents of women’s right to vote. These arguments reveal the uneasy link between women and their “natural” roles limited to the domestic sphere and what was considered the proper role for political citizenship.

Anti-feminist arguments were usually of two kinds. The first of these two arguments was the Republican argument which “acknowledged the justice of equal rights but postponed them indefinitely, until women were adequately prepared to vote without threatening the established order.” This argument primarily rested on the threat that women caused through their close association with the Catholic church. Political rights for women would have threatened the unstable Republic because, as Georges Clemenceau stated in a pamphlet in 1907, “almost all of their (women’s) influence is exerted to the benefit of reactionary parties...If the right to vote were granted to women tomorrow, France would all of a sudden jump backwards into the
This was the “black peril” argument, which held that women would elect a clerical government, closely linked to monarchical government, if enfranchised. Even Republicans who supported women’s voting rights on principle could not fully support them without some acknowledgement of the threat they could pose to liberal politics. The anxieties that surrounded Republicanism during the Third Republic served to further justify this argument, which had been deployed since the Revolution to oppose granting women political rights. The fact that many moderate feminist groups would turn their attention to battling “debauchery” in all forms, alcoholism, prostitution, and other “after dark” activities that circulated around the new cafes and boulevards, probably helped prove that women could not be trusted to maintain a separation between political participation and Christian morality.

The second type of anti-feminist argument was a conservative one, which argued that the family was the “fundamental cellule” of France, rooted in the species and in the Roman, Catholic and French religious and social traditions. Political rights for women would, they reasoned, dismantle the familial structure and would therefore challenge the “natural basis of social order.” This was the “la femme au foyer” argument, which stated that:

Women belonged at home, in the family – la femme au foyer. They had their own domain or sphere. Nature gave them a high and noble mission, more important than any public service: to be the Vesta of the home and to raise children according to Latin traditions. Change would bring discord into the household. It would imperil the authority of the husband, established through law and religion. Altered sex roles would lead to emasculation, alcoholism, licentiousness, suicide, and divorce. Virilized women would neglect their families, confuse human sexuality, and exacerbate depopulation. Children would suffer.

Ironically, the same gender roles often encouraged the “licentiousness” that conservatives claimed to deplore by justifying the double standard and by constructing women’s desire as either non-existent-frigid- or all-consuming-
nymphomaniac. To find a realm of sexual practice organized around pleasure, and perhaps made more seductive by the denial of conjugal pleasure, middle-class men sought prostitutes. But, to conservative observers of the “decline in morality” at this period, it was women’s bodily difference, and hence their moral difference, that must be emphasized to maintain social order. They focused on the way women’s “small brains, frail constitutions, hypersensitive nervous systems, emotional weakness, and pregnancy” limited them to the “natural vocation of their organism… an attempt to do so contravened the divine will, defying the roles ordained by God.”

Hence, women’s lack of political rights was a just situation since it followed from the inherent weaknesses of women, not the least of which was their irrationality.

Although these two arguments were coming from quarters opposed to one another politically, they are strikingly similar in their conceptions of women as a threat to order. In the Republican argument, women threaten the already unstable Republic as “pious handmaids,” which implies women’s perceived inability to make their own rational political decisions. The fear was that they would be influenced or swayed by their priests and that their vulnerability to the “unenlightened forces of religion made them unfit for suffrage.” In the conservative argument, women threaten order biologically through their natural link to irrationality – their bodies. Additionally, in the conservative argument, any change in women’s status causes social pathologies. These arguments both rely on a notion of women’s biological difference from men that directly influences their ability to perform rationally, morally and politically. Also, these arguments mirror a pattern of Third Republic social debates that linked social pathology with women and the control of women’s bodies.

For French feminists, these arguments were not so compelling. Feminists argued that the Third Republic was unfair and violated its own principles of justice.
and equality by denying women the vote. They pointed out that since “women pay taxes, women must vote.” The Republican anti-suffrage argument was undemocratic because it “was a prior restraint based on how the ballot might be used that rested on an unproven hypothesis about female clericalism.”

The “rapid increase in the laic education of women since the 1880’s (from 50 percent of primary schooling in 1881 to 92.5 percent in 1906) proved that Republican arguments about women’s piety and ignorance were unfounded. Feminists like Hubertine Auclert seized this inconsistency to expose that what the Republicans were arguing was that “it is not education that makes an elector, it is pants.”

If this was not convincing, feminists argued that it was expedient to grant women the vote because “from the emancipation of women will flow a source of good for all humanity.” Social feminists, who “favored this pragmatic argument for enfranchisement” and “often held that women possessed moral force in contrast to masculine brute force,” used this expediency argument. They claimed that granting the vote to women would allow women to combat alcoholism and prostitution, promote social hygiene, “reinforce family life and combat depopulation,” and “protect the weak and disadvantaged.” Drawing on women’s association with the maternal force of protection and moral guidance so dear to conservatives and Republican alike, this argument was strategic politically, but it placed women in a rather ambiguous position because of its failure to challenge women’s association with these same social problems. In making their arguments, feminists “often sounded like the family’s most ardent supporters.” They faced a unique challenge; they had to make arguments supporting radical reform without sounding radical. They had to challenge the notion that a woman’s body defines her destiny without challenging sexual difference.
Women's Bodies as the Social Body

This ambiguous position should be viewed against the background of the widespread anxieties about degeneration and depopulation already discussed. Women's bodies were the vehicles for the regeneration and repopulation of France. Supported by anxieties about depopulation, a sense of urgency and a rather paranoiac obsession with increasing births intensified, making it difficult to separate any social issue from the issue of depopulation. "The intensity of the depopulation debate in France suggests that any study of the woman question must consider it as a factor, both in understanding the resistance to altering the roles of women and the behavior of feminists themselves."53 Degeneration became a kind of catch-all term that applied to and explained depopulation and its relation to French social problems; "when one started asking what was wrong with France that caused her population to decline in the face of universal growth, one ended with an appalling inventory of perceived problems. Alcoholism, suicide, divorce, criminality, mental illness, juvenile delinquency, abortion, collective violence and prostitution were seen to be widespread and increasing."54

Whether identified as a loss of traditional values of family, religion and patriotism, or as an oppressive class structure that demeaned and caused the suffering of people, "the larger question of degeneration was inextricable from the woman question."55 Solidarism intersected with the latest scientific theories to resolidify the status quo by providing a "mechanism" for its maintenance. Accampo argues that "medical progress increased the power of physicians who provided scientific legitimation for a good deal of the political thinking about womanhood."56 Proper mothering techniques, infant mortality, the battle with depopulation, and the debate about prostitution, placed women's reproductive function, or sexuality within the confines of this discourse, into the forefront of social debates and justified state
intervention and regulation of women’s bodies. In this way, women bodies became representative of the social body to such an extent that feminists themselves could not simply ignore these issues and often used the rhetoric of degeneration to call for reforms.

For feminists, there were many possible areas of reform so that "the vote was neither the exclusive nor the foremost ambition of French feminists."\(^{57}\) Civil law, embodied in the Napoleonic Code, was a major target of feminist criticisms as it relegated women to the status of minors. For some feminists, like socialist women, economic emancipation was a crucial first step towards political freedom. There were also many feminists concerned about educational opportunities, who often met riotous protests when they challenged their inferior education.\(^{58}\) Feminist proposals for reform that challenged the state or the church’s right to control women’s bodies and reproductive capacities were the most divisive politically since the "most controversial feminist programs dealt with sexual, maternal and marital rights. The potential conflicts were immense: with bourgeois values, with masculine sensitivity, with Catholic teaching, and with national interests. Most feminists responded cautiously seeking women’s autonomy and equality consonant with fundamental French attitudes."\(^{59}\) This meant praising motherhood, marriage and family and deploring depopulation. This tension in feminism is evident in their responses to prostitution.

As we have seen, early public health movements were founded upon the ability of the state to effectively intervene into the private lives and on the bodies of women, particularly working class women. Regulationism was no exception. This trend continued in the Third Republic, but it did not go unchallenged. Perhaps paradoxically, it is in this cultural climate that feminism grew. Using these notions of femininity and attempting to redraw the lines of propriety, French feminists
formed alliances with working class movements to protest the regulationist system. Bringing this moralization of the working classes to its full flowering, these two groups provisionally united around the image of the fallen woman, usually working class, forced to neglect her proper womanly duties because of economic hardship, bourgeois male exploitation and abuse by a system of institutionalized immorality and sexual immorality. While conceived as a challenge to middle-class men’s assumed right to “debauch” working class women, these unions between workers’ movements and women’s movements relied on a rather rigid concept of sexual practice that could serve to bring women’s bodies further under a more subtle system of sexual regulation than the system of toleration.

The concern for a healthy population overlapped with ideological constructions of femininity and prostitutes fulfilled their role by providing what some regulationists referred to as a “seminal drain” to contain excessive desires. They also provided a point of contrast against whom “honest” women could be compared, thereby effectively bringing women’s bodies completely under the system of regulation that was more broad than the regulatory system of prostitution. As Foucault argues, “four figures emerged from this preoccupation with sex… the hysterical woman, the masturbating child, the Malthusian couple, and the perverse adult.” The prostitute could fit into any one of these categories, as a perverse and abject lesbian, as a hysterical and emotionally unstable woman, as an infertile woman or a woman who practiced contraception, as a logical outcome of a child produced in abject and inferior family circumstances. However, prostitutes were not the only women who could fit into this schema; all women were subject to the classification and regulation of sexuality that produced these types. What emerges from this ideological aspect of public health is a scenario in which some women are fit to
mother and some are not. Prostitutes become symbolic of the ways in which all women can “go wrong.”

Whether because they disrupted social order, or corrupted “good” women, prostitutes were targeted by moralists, reformists, and politicians in the social debates of the time as those in need of control. Like women generally, they could be used to represent and justify policies concerned with regulating and intervening into the lives of citizens. To some extent, the sexual bodies of women, particularly prostitutes, who tended to represent sexualized women, came to symbolize the social body. Within this matrix, women were always potentially prostitutes, and prostitutes were always potentially dangerous to social order. I will explore how representations of prostitutes reveal the ideological discourses prevalent in nineteenth century France, and how these discourses constructed a category of persons called prostitutes. Further, I wish to develop an explanation of how specific discourses about prostitutes implied ideological constructions of femininity and, in turn, how these constructs determined what kinds of political strategies were open to women. These constructions were deeply rooted in certain ideological assumptions about the working-classes, who, like prostitutes, in many cases were identified as a “threat from below” to the bourgeois reformers of the late nineteenth century.
Chapter 3: Logic of Regulationism

Any account of nineteenth century prostitution must begin with a discussion of Parent-Duchatelet. His _De La Prostitution Dans La Ville de Paris_ (Of Prostitution in the City of Paris) was one of the most foundational studies of the subject and informed public opinion, policy recommendations, and cultural representations of prostitutes and prostitution for the rest of the century. His work formed the basis and justification for the system of regulated prostitution, tolerated brothels. His influence on the regulationist schema was so significant that his study was “virtually an official report.”

Parent-Duchatelet argued that

prostitutes are as inevitable in an agglomeration of men as sewers, cesspits, and garbage dumps; civil authority should conduct itself in the same manner in regard to the one as to the other: its duty is to survey them, to attenuate by every possible means the detriments inherent to them, and for that purpose to hide them, to relegate them to the most obscure corners, in a word to render their presence as inconspicuous as possible.

There are several elements at work in this passage that indicate the key features of the regulationist project. Perhaps the most significant, in terms of indicating the perceived magnitude of the problem for regulationists, is his association of prostitutes with waste. By likening prostitutes to the waste of society, which is both essential to order and represents its decay, one can see that Parent “regards prostitution as an indispensable excremental phenomenon that protects the social body from disease.”

The similarity between the sewers of Paris and the prostitutes of Paris that Parent discussed was in their threat to public health and consequently to a well-ordered society.

Officially regulated prostitution paradoxically represents both the protection of the social body from disease, through containment and marginalization, and the
ever-present threat of contagion of the social body, which would lead to its decay, degeneration and death. Hence, surveillance was necessary to ensure containment. As Corbin points out, "like crime, prostitution forms a subterranean counter-society, a social base representing a threat which is at the same time moral, social, sanitary, and political."65 This inevitable, yet dangerous, character of prostitution made it tolerable so long as it was constantly under surveillance. It was to be enclosed, supervised, and hierarchized, "by avoiding as far as possible the mixing of age groups and classes."66

The early nineteenth century system of enclosed regulation closely resembles the kind of regime of discipline outlined by Foucault in Discipline and Punish in which the principles of Panopticism governed methods of organizing space to further the project of normalization.67 This is evident in the case of prostitutes as "a carceral system was constructed within which a woman moved throughout her prostitutional career."68 The tolerated house (maison), the hospital, the prison and the refuge formed the enclosed spaces available to the prostitute. The maisons de tolerance were supposed to "concentrate vice" by blending into the neighborhood in which they were established and by keeping the filles themselves out of sight. There were to be no visible signs of prostitution, such as advertisements, open windows, or street solicitors in front of these maisons. Additionally the women who worked in the maisons were considered inmates. Accordingly, they had to follow house rules, pay entrance fees and session fees in exchange for "lodging, food, indoor clothes, heat, light, and laundry."69

The dame de maison, or madam, served as a facilitator for police supervision, as she was expected to be cooperative with them. If a shrewd business woman, she would try to get the inmates to amass debts, which was not difficult since the filles were not supposed to go out into the public street to buy necessary items like
toiletries, clothes, or food. It would have violated the logic of enclosure to allow the
filles to mingle with the "respectable" or "honest" women in the neighborhood, so
inmates purchased needed items at higher rates from the house in which they served.
This system could render the fille dependent upon her continued service within the
maison, since they were not allowed to leave if they had accumulated debt. If a fille
tried "to escape while laden with debt, the police would make sure that the keeper
recovered what was owed her."70

This system, though founded upon principles of constant surveillance, was
undermined at every corner by clandestine prostitution, which was aided by the
spatial arrangements of pre-Haussmann Paris. The anxiety about locating and fixing
the prostitute expressed by regulationist discourses was manifest in the importance
placed on the process of inscription. All prostitutes practicing their trade in maisons
de tolerance were registered with the Police des Moeurs. The logic underlying this
process was that all filles, regardless of their place of practice, would register with the
police to facilitate medical examinations for syphilis and to help the authorities locate
and identify filles. A woman could voluntarily register by presenting a copy of her
birth certificate, and by answering questions about her family background, marriage
status, length of stay (in Paris) and reason for registration. This was followed by a
medical examination. Following her compliance with these procedures, she was
allowed to work in a maison or to establish her own place of business. There was
also a process of forced registration, which was used to inscribe fille insoumises,
women who practiced prostitution outside of the toleration system. These women
were investigated by the police if they refused the registration procedure and if found
to have venereal disease they were sent to Saint Lazare, a women's prison that could
also serve as a treatment center for venereal filles.
It is important to note that *fille insoumise* was a very loose term that could have been applied to any woman found out in public at a late hour. The police organized raids to round up suspected *insoumise* prostitutes who were then incarcerated in cells with other vagabonds and minor criminals. The potential for abuse was great in this system since the police held all discretionary power. They decided who would be taken to the station for alleged prostitution. The fact that prostitutes had no officially recognized legal status, since there were no laws on prostitution, made them invisible in the justice system. As Harsin notes, "the legality of prostitution was left conveniently vague; women were, however, allowed to engage in the trade so long as they followed police regulations governing their conduct."\(^7\) There was no system of redress for the women involved since they had put themselves "outside the law" by registering with the police.\(^2\) This allowed widespread abuse and arbitrary repression by the police. Given the perceived magnitude of prostitution, authorities were likely to be harsh and severe in their dealings with the women arrested.

A tendency to "see prostitutes everywhere" in regulationist literature and among the enforcers of regulation, could be traced to two important characteristics shared among those being arrested. They were working class and were vulnerable because of their economic situation, which left them powerless in "the growing industrial capitalism of nineteenth century France."\(^7\) Also, they were women, which meant they were legally invisible under the Napoleonic Code of 1804 and were subject to harsher judgements by judiciaries and by the public due to societal constructs of proper womanhood. Harsin argues that "the denial of full citizenship to women of all classes made it easy for the Paris police, by simple administrative fiat, to dispense with the most basis civil rights of prostitutes and eventually of many"
working-class women who were not prostitutes.” Anxieties about and misogynist notions of gender were inseparable from the issue of prostitution.

Alain Corbin outlines two fundamental postulates that underlie the regulationist project. The first is a “profound wish to condemn the freedom of sexual behavior that sustains prostitution.” For women specifically this was manifest in the image of the fallen woman who becomes lesbian or infertile, two particularly problematic figures for hygienists concerned with population. The second is that the predisposition to debauchery followed by prostitution is a matter of family origins. Building on the contemporary theories of crime and deviance that focused on the hereditary character of “defects,” regulation literature overlapped with theories of degeneration to emphasize the need for close supervision and authoritative control over prostitution. One of the most significant manifestations of the theory of hereditary degeneration was in the concept of hereditary syphilis. Since prostitutes were thought to be the main spreaders of venereal disease, they were also thought to be of degenerate family background. Further the prevalent view of French hygienists in mid-nineteenth century was that the moral and physical were intricately related, and that moral and physical characteristics of individuals were shaped by environmental circumstances. Therefore, the working classes, particularly prostitutes, were more vulnerable to degenerate tendencies given their spatial proximity to poverty, crime and disease, and due to their questionable morality.

These assumptions are manifest in the description of prostitutes offered by Parent-Duchatelet. He listed immaturity, love of food, drink and movement, emotional instability, excess and disorder, frivolity and laziness as central characteristics of prostitutes. Perhaps ironically, prostitutes exhibited some characteristics common with those of “honest” women like religious devotion, an attachment to young children, and a love of the countryside. However, they were
usually thought to possess these traits in excess of what was considered “normal.”

In short they share the same essential characteristics of all women as constructed by bourgeois ideology, yet they are unable to truly fulfill their duty as women because of their abject way of life.81

“Honest” women and prostitutes were not easy to distinguish from one another. For Parent-Duchatelet, any working class woman was or had been a prostitute. Jill Harsin calls this the “proletarianization of prostitution.”82 She highlights the way Parent set prostitutes apart by studying their physiology in order to find identifying characteristics, but that he “ended by seeing them as ordinary working class women... for whom prostitution was only a passage in life.”83 He linked prostitution to poverty and argued that it was only a stage women would go through when economic necessity demanded it; yet, his conclusions reinforced the notion that there was some inherent relation between the “dangerous” working classes and prostitutes. As Harsin notes, “officials believed that prostitutes were the natural consorts of vagabonds and thieves. It was administratively convenient to believe, conversely, that the consorts of vagabonds and thieves were all prostitutes.”84

This connection was based as much on class and the sharing of space as on any kind of necessary connection. Parent’s study emphasized the working class background of prostitutes and their overwhelming presence in working class neighborhoods and slums. In discourse, both groups could represent social disorder and the threat of revolution to conservatives, and the effects of an oppressive status quo to reformists. In either case, the women involved shared natural traits that set them apart from the rest of society. Matlock claims that the prostitute’s body took a central position in these struggles because she mobilized a series of old obsessions about revolution, libertinism, sexuality, gender, and class. Viewed as marginalized, she could be made to stand in for other members of the disenfranchised classes. Seen as victimized by her gender and her class, she could be transformed into a martyr for the desires
of the upper classes. Depicted as degraded, she could be associated with movements feared and hated by opposing groups. Censored, literally as well as figuratively, by laws banning her body from the stage and from the streets, she could be lent to plots that demanded the representation of all who lacked voices, any who lacked power.\(^8\)

This symbolic relationship is important in the ways it informed treatment of prostitutes, and the broader ideological and cultural context in which regulationism prevailed. Throughout the century these symbolic associations would continue to manifest the key themes in the social debates of the period.

This categorization of women overlaps with the processes of accumulating knowledge around sexuality discussed by Foucault in *The History of Sexuality*. He formulates what he calls the “hypocrisy of bourgeois societies,” who reasoned that if it was truly necessary to make room for illegitimate sexualities, let them take their infernal mischief elsewhere: to a place where they could be reintegrated, if not in the circuits of production, at least in those of profit. The brothel and the mental hospital would be those places of tolerance: the prostitute, the client, and the pimp, together with the psychiatrist and the hysteric... seem to have surreptitiously transferred the pleasures that are unspoken into the order of things that are counted.\(^8\)

This “reintegration into the circuits of profit” was largely accomplished by the system of toleration, which relied on keeping track of its producers. Regulationism integrated prostitution into the accepted order of social life by claiming to keep it under control, as one would a disease of the body, which was inevitable.

The regulationist system represented the impact of the ideology of sexual difference since “proponents of tolerated prostitution justified their methods by insisting that the physical needs of men might overload the social circuits if prostitution was outlawed entirely.”\(^8\) For men, prostitution was necessary to prevent their natural desires from upsetting the social order. However, for women prostitution was seen as a sign of their degeneration and abjection, or their failing at true (bourgeois) femininity. The double standard of sexual morality was the basis for this rather paradoxical configuration, in which women were split into madonnas
and whores. It was expected that respectable men would go to prostitutes, therefore their desires were provided for and sanctioned. Yet, for women on either side of the divide (madonna or whore) their desires were either not considered, or if taken into account were associated with hysteria, irrationality or some perversion. Matlock has argued that the discourse of hysteria attempted to “contain the desires of the bourgeois woman so that they could be productively channeled in the service of society. It sorted female bodies by investing them with sexual meanings, endowing “normal,” “healthy,” women with a difference that separated them from working class women.”

Complications in the Regulationist System

These attempts to separate and categorize women were complicated by two figures: the courtesan and the clandestine prostitute. For the regulationists, the most threatening entity to their enclosure scheme was the unregistered prostitute. Corbin notes that “since the establishment of the regulationist system, the authorities had distinguished between tolerated (registered) and clandestine (unregistered) prostitution. They claimed to be involved in a tireless campaign to root out the latter, with a view to its ultimate disappearance.” The raids they conducted were part of that attempt to eliminate clandestine prostitution. Clandestine prostitution eluded the scientific knowledge regulationists sought to achieve since it was invisible or out of the gaze of the regulation system. The differentiation between “honest” and prostitute women would become the central focus of concern as the regulation system was challenged later in the nineteenth century. The necessity to distinguish between honest women and insoumise prostitutes would continue throughout the century.

For July Monarchy regulationists the courtesan was “the most monstrous of all prostitutes.” Police commissioner Beraud in 1839 thought the courtesan was the
most dangerous of all prostitutes since “she often combines personal charms with the attractions of the most brilliant and most well-rounded education: music, singing, dance, pure language, a refined spirit, exquisite taster, and the most pleasant abandon.”91 She was visibly no different from a “respectable” woman and could move with ease in the established and elite circles of respectability and wealth.

A scene in Zola’s Nana, set in the Second Empire, but written during the Third Republic, plays on this indistinguishability in two dinner party scenes that occur on the same night. One of the scenes takes place at Count and Countess Muffat’s home and is attended by the haute-bourgeois and aristocratic crowd that are the focal point for the rest of the novel. The men are planning to visit Nana’s house for a party after they leave the Countess’s. At the “respectable” party, the ladies discuss Bismarck, music, and the latest Parisian gossip as a few of the men contemplate the Countess Sabine’s thighs and her sexual allure. At Nana’s later that evening, “there ensued a long discussion about Bismarck. Vandeuvres (one of the aristocratic men present at both social events) repeated the same phrases, and for a moment or two one was again in the Muffat’s drawing room, the only difference being that the ladies were changed.”92

This juxtaposition of a “respectable” social gathering with “honest” women and a suspicious social gathering with courtesans, or dishonest women, manifests some of the key tensions of the mid to late nineteenth century discourse about prostitution. One of these tensions concerns the similarity of courtesans to honest aristocratic, or upper-class bourgeois, women. The other tension was bound up with one’s inability to be sure if an honest woman was truly honest. The Countess Sabine symbolizes this difficulty.

Fauchery, a journalist who seems to represent certain central themes of the discourse on regulation in the narrative, observes the Countess. Since she was known
as a religious woman, Fauchery was intrigued by certain physical similarities between her and the infamous courtesan Nana. He observes that “a lamp, which had been placed behind her, threw into clear relief her dark, delicate, plump side face, wherein a certain heaviness in the contours of the mouth alone indicated a species of imperious sensuality.” Later, Fauchery notices that the Countess Sabine has a mole on her left cheek which strikes him as curious since Nana has the same mole. Her close physical resemblance to Nana, and her intimate involvement later in the story with Fauchery, highlight the ways that one can never be sure whether a woman is honest or not since all women carry within them the potential to become debauched. As Parent-Duchatelet claimed, the tendency to debauchery and to prostitution are the same essential movement.

The courtesan was considered a separate kind of prostitute by the authorities since she frequently was attached to men of high standing and of the upper classes. Early attempts to bring them under the inscription process met with protest from their “protectors,” so that the process was abandoned for the rest of the century. Literary portraits of courtesans referred to this exception. The fact that these women could pass undetected in high society circles despite their “dishonorable” trade served to heighten the anxiety of regulationists about the invisible threat to the social body posed by unregistered prostitution. By appearing “honest” and wealthy, courtesans could circulate in multiple social milieus. The invisibility of their profession, hidden behind the appearance of respectability, allowed them, in the eyes of regulationists, to threaten the entire population. Unsupervised by the authorities, these upper-class filles could potentially spread venereal disease, and its assumed companions of decadence, disorder and debauchery, throughout society, thereby infecting the entire social body.
In Emile Zola’s *Nana* the danger of these unregulated *filles* is commented on by Fauchery, who argues that these courtesans spread *disease* and excess to the aristocracy undetected behind their disguises of propriety and wealth. He writes an article that is supposed to be about the “life of a harlot” called “The Golden Fly.” He traces her descent from drunkards which has “tainted her blood... which in her case has taken the form of a nervous exaggeration of the sexual instinct.” She has ascended her high position from the slums and streets of Paris, and “with her the rottenness that is allowed to ferment among the populace is carried upwards and rots the aristocracy.” The article is a thinly veiled indictment of Nana that has a marked affect on her lover Count Muffat who has read the article in her presence. The Count begins to contemplate his degeneration and internal struggle as spelled out in the article, “he thought of his old dread of Woman, of the Beast of the Scriptures, at once lewd and wild... She (Nana) was, indeed, that Golden Creature, blind as brute force, whose very odor ruined the world.” By the end of the novel, Nana has wrecked the fortunes of at least five wealthy and highly stationed men in exactly this “blind” and unconscious fashion. Corbin argues that it was one of Zola’s more obvious intentions to make the reader of *Nana* sense the perpetual movement upward and downward to which the woman who had entered the cycle of venality was subjected. If the unregistered prostitute inspired such terror in the specialists, it was because she only appeared to be like other women, while moving throughout society and thus presenting an increased risk of moral and physical contagion. (Corbin 130)

In fact, in the novel, Nana is of working class origins and has worked her way up the hierarchy from the streets, where the threat of arrest is ever present, to the safe corridors of the ostentatious apartment bought for her by her wealthy and aristocratic lover, Count Muffat. At one point in the novel she returns to the streets of Paris after getting married “out of love” to a fellow actor who begins to abuse her and who eventually turns her out. After she has spent over half of their savings, her
husband Fontan takes the rest of the money away so that “in due course Nana’s very adoration of her darling...plunged her back into the muddiest depths of her calling. She roamed the streets, and loitered on the pavement in quest of a five-franc piece, just as when she was a slipshod baggage years ago.” She even has a couple of run-ins with the police, of whom she is terrified.

Nana’s descent back to her “degenerate” origins on the Paris streets highlights the danger of courtesans like her who travel unhindered between social classes. Her plight represents the most significant elements in the issue of prostitution for the mid- to late nineteenth century. The mobility of prostitutes, both public and among various social classes, and the street walker’s constant fear of arrest in the mass purges and raids of the period are captured in this novel. Nana moves in all social milieus and notices that “from one end of the social ladder to the other everybody was on the loose! Good gracious! Some nice things ought to be going on in Paris between nine o’clock in the evening and three in the morning!”

Blurring the Boundaries: Suspicious Women in the Streets

Part of this anxiety about locating and controlling prostitutes was the result of the changing forms prostitution. As the prevalent forms of prostitution begin to change in the mid-nineteenth century, so too did the concerns of the authorities. Corbin notes that by the middle years of the Second Empire, “the term clandestine had lost almost any meaning. In Paris and in the larger provincial towns, the ‘clandestine’ prostitutes solicited quite openly or were openly available in lodging houses or drinking places.” In fact the terms fille soumise and fille insoumise are probably more accurate than fille en carte and clandestine to describe this stage of prostitution. Fille soumise referred to those prostitutes who had been registered and
were therefore compliant with the regulation system. *Fille insoumise* referred to those prostitutes who fell outside the regulation system or who were unruly or non-compliant.

The change in classification of prostitutes emerged with a decrease in the number of *maisons de tolerance* at this time. This “crisis in the *maison de tolerance*” was sparked by several factors. Haussmannization, the restructuring of Paris, caused the destruction of many *maisons*; and the geographical shift in demand to the peripheral areas of cities caused the reconstruction of lodging houses to cater to the new geographical distribution of the clientele. The increase in rents brought about the restructuring caused *maisons de tolerance* to become too risky from an entrepreneurial standpoint and it was becoming more difficult to find employees for these kinds of establishments. The decline of the *maison close* or *maison de tolerance* was furthered as the nineteenth century progressed. Enclosed prostitution became the subject of heated social debate as arbitrary police action in the capital, the greater susceptibility of public opinion to human rights, and the development of a concern for municipal respectability became central themes of social dialogue from 1848 through the Third Republic. A change in sexual demand could also be said to be a factor in the changing forms of prostitution. The “semenal drain” idea of early regulationism had lost much of its appeal and a new concern for imitating romantic love became widespread in prostitutional activity. This is evident in the new forms of unregistered prostitution in which barmaids, dress makers, hat makers, and laundresses came to symbolize the uncertain boundary between respectable women and debauched women.

Also, Alain Corbin notes what he calls a change in sexual demand in his discussion of mid-to-late nineteenth century prostitution practices. This change reflected the process of the “embourgeoisement of the working classes,” in which a
new social strata made up of immigrant workers was slowly integrated into the social structure. This was accompanied by the "moral integration" of the working classes into a bourgeois moral structure that upheld conjugal duty and the doctrine of separate spheres as necessary components to social order. Corbin claims that in this context "there grew up a clientele that sought eroticism within the appearances of a bourgeois home: such desires could not be satisfied simply by moments of genital release" as was the case in the earlier model. One effect of this was to make the boundary between "good" women and "bad" women even more uncertain as a relationship that appeared romantic could have also been commercial.

Harsin notes how "by the late nineteenth century, entire groups of working-class women were set aside as objects of suspicion... Waitresses, and every woman whose job required contact with the public was open to suspicion." The concept of clandestinity, or fille insoumise, "served... as a means of curtailing the activities of lower-class women, whose lack of the (registration) card did not save them from arbitrary police judgements about their private behavior." This suspicion of working-class women as exacerbated by a tendency of the authorities to assume that if a woman was not a fille soumise, she must be a fille insoumise.

The assumption that a working-class woman must be a fille was in large part due to the early portrait of prostitutes provided by Parent-Duchatelet, whose successors never challenged his construction of working-class women as more prone to debauchery than other women. Harsin continues to describe how "writers of the period confidently assured their readers that hat shops, dress shops, glove merchants, novelty shops, bookstores, perfumeries, and various other establishments that used women behind the sales counter were 'known' to be havens for clandestine prostitutes, covering up their activities in the back room with the appearance of ordinary business in the shop itself."
Other scholars point out that contrary to the bourgeois ideology that envisioned women as the guardians of the home exclusively, many French women worked outside the home. If they were not working in the agricultural sector, they "were employed in three traditional areas: textile, the garment industry, and domestic service." And, "the low pay and unstable conditions of the garment industry and domestic service, which were the trades of most poor women in Paris, caused many to turn to prostitution." This explains the overwhelming number of images and representations in art and literature, as well as in medical, and sociological texts, of a working class woman with suspicious morality. Part of this tendency had a basis since these textile trades were seasonal and the income they provided could fluctuate greatly driving some working class women into occasional prostitution. However, there were no truly accurate figures for these kinds of unregistered prostitution and many observers' anxiety about "dangerous" women informed their estimations about the number of such women.

The working class prostitute was a potent symbol of the oppressive social system for reformers or of the inherent depravity of the working classes for conservatives. Some militants in the labor movement were sensitive to this construction of femininity and "argued that women should be prevented from working not just in factories but also in bars and cafes, where their morals might be all too easily undermined." Socialist movements were quick to exploit the image of the degraded prostitute, who often was a working-class woman, to symbolize the inequities of the current social situation. They used the bourgeois ideology of the housewife and mother, who represented the safety and tranquility of the home, to challenge the economic system of the mid-to late nineteenth century.

Socialist critics also pointed out that the "requirement of uncompromised virtue in the femme au foyer linked the issues of domesticity and morality, making
prostitutes, recruited from the urban poor, the necessary guardians of the bourgeois woman's virtue. The bourgeois ideology of separate spheres and its component ideology of women's natural duty to home and family, served to exacerbate the disproportionate recruitment of working class women as filles and further alienated them from the ideology of proper womanhood. Critics could argue that the bourgeois system and ideology perpetuated working class prostitution and therefore sought to force working-class women into "improper" roles. These socialist critics used the ideology of separate spheres to protest this aspect of prostitution.

While a degree of the literary trend of representing the filles de publique as common working women is purely a representation, there was in fact an increase in these forms of prostitutional activity as the maison de close and maison de tolerance declined. A "shift in sexual demand" could have much to do with this trend, as did the increased social mobility of the bourgeoisie. More significant was the development of different forms of prostitutional activity in which small shops and public meeting places, like taverns, became the main spaces within which prostitution was practiced.

The owners of small shops could be procurers or filles themselves. There were usually one or two women employed by these shops who were prostitutes. Wine and "pretext" shops, or clothing shops "around the Palais-Royale" that "had been converted by the women who ran them into centers of prostitution" were common focal points for unregistered prostitution. The new forms of prostitutional activity that emerged in the last third of the nineteenth century involved women who no longer feared the police and were not usually denounced by the medical establishment even when they had venereal disease. These new forms are the femmes de brasserie, or barmaids, the fille de Beugiant, or girls of the concert-café, and the maison de rendez-vous, which differed from the maison de tolerance in that it
had no residents and was an attempt to simulate seduction and casual adultery. In all cases the new forms share a common element of apparent seduction in which the women involved were not merely on display like animals to be chosen, but were “allowing themselves to be seduced.” This was accompanied by attempts by the women to appear respectable, which further confounded a clear distinction between “honest” and prostitute women.

Harsin points out that a new “space was opened to prostitution in 1880, with a law ending the restrictions on brasseries, or taverns.” This allowed tavern owners and lodging house keepers to keep prostitutes by providing a “legal loophole” with an ambiguous law, and by reducing the fines on keepers found to be cooperating with prostitutes. Harsin concludes that this shift towards more leniency on business owners who employed unregistered prostitutes was the result of the police’s desire to preserve the régime des moeurs against the increasing attacks it was suffering from social reform movements, rather than the result of changing sexual tastes. A shift in sexual tastes and a shift in public opinion and political pressures are not mutually exclusive and in fact probably influenced one another, and together altered the forms of prostitution in the late nineteenth century. Both of these changes need to be contextualized. When viewed as part of a larger social debate about the proper roles of women and, through symbolic association, about the proper ordering of society, the shift in sexual demand and in police tactics can be seen as a part of a process of redefining the nature of human relationships. Prostitutes were effective symbols of what was wrong between men and women and between the social body and its proper ordering. Increasingly in the later part of the nineteenth century, they represented women as victims of an unfair system, a tendency that served feminist and socialist purposes well.
Chapter 4: Challenges to Regulationism

The first significant challenge to the regulation system came from England. Josephine Butler, an English feminist, had organized opposition to the Contagious Disease Acts of 1864, 1866, and 1869, which were modeled on the "French system" of tolerated prostitution, enclosed in certain highly regulated areas. The campaign against the "French system" of toleration became an international movement in 1874 when Butler and her associates organized a conference in York, in which the beginnings of an alliance with Continental social reformers was forged. Following this conference, Butler traveled to Paris where she met with Charles Lecour, the head of the Brigade of Morals, and toured Saint Lazare, a prison/treatment facility for prostitutes. She contacted Protestant community leaders in France and was encouraged to attend a feminist meeting to discuss her opposition to toleration. She continued to travel throughout France and Switzerland, but the "crusade" remained a largely private affair, as public opinion had not yet been sufficiently aroused to engage large audiences. This situation changed a few years later as hostility towards the "vice squad" increased and related, no doubt, to the influence of feminist and other reform movements in highlighting abuses perpetrated by the police against women.

Josephine Butler considered the "French system" and "the Contagious Disease Acts that had been inspired by it" to be "doubly evil." Not only did tolerated prostitution exploit women, in her opinion, it also encouraged the "sexual immorality of men." Her attack was not only against the denial of women's liberty in the process of inscription and involuntary examinations by medical authorities and the police, but also against sexual immorality or debauchery, more generally. She
targeted the double standard of sexual morality as an example of the ways women
were exploited sexually and of the ways men were allowed and even encouraged to
be immoral. Using the language of anti-slavery campaigns, Butler drew a direct
connection between the abolition of slavery and the abolition of prostitution. She and
her allies "rejected the basic postulate of regulationism – namely, to recognize the
normality, even the necessity, of extramarital relations for young unmarried men."126
Stressing continence, sexual control, and the proper channeling of sexual desire into
the legitimate social forms of family and children, this "prohibitionist abolitionism"
set the stage for an essential ambiguity in the debates about regulationism in France.

In so far as the "defense of common law and of individual liberty coincided
exactly with the aims of the French extreme left," French Republicans could be said
to have adopted Butler's abolition perspective. However, the "desire for sexual
repression and prohibition of extramarital relations alarmed the liberals."127 This
tension explains why the majority of early French challenges to regulation from
leftist corners concentrated on the abuses of power by vice squads rather than the
inherent evil of prostitution. Yves Guyot, who argued that the "most important thing
was to limit the functions of the state and to guarantee clearly the rights of the human
being," was exemplary of this Republican position.128 The publication of his book in
1882, La Prostitution, and the "adoption by the (extraparliamentary) commission of
the municipal council of Dr. Louis Fiaux's report (1883), which concluded that the
vice squad should be abolished," are the two climactic events in the French left's
challenge to regulationism.129

Guyot's La Prostitution tends to focus less on observation of prostitutes, like
Parent-Duchatelet's ground-breaking study, than on putting forth his ideological
opposition to the power given the state over the individual in the registration
system.130 He managed to leave the stereotypes of prostitutes that emerged from
Parent’s study largely in place though with a few additions of his own. In the same way early regulationists needed prostitutes to represent filth, and contagion through a set of essential characteristics passed on through the family, so too did Republicans need to represent them as slaves. For Republican reformers like Guyot, the real issue was not public health or even prostitution per se, but the erosion of individual rights brought about by the bureau of morals. His real motivation, it seems, was to re-solidify the rights of the individual in the face of increasing state intervention. The image of the prostitute as a slave served this function well, since it highlighted the ways individual rights were being trampled upon by the police.

For conservatives and neo-regulationists, prostitutes continued to represent the dangers of degeneration which, by this time in the nineteenth century, had been linked with criminality in important ways. As prostitutes were thought to be the handmaidens of the “dark” Paris where criminals lurked, they were easily associated with this form of degeneration. Additionally, sociologists of this period were taking an interest in the study of poverty and its relationship to crime and were trying to formulate a coherent sociological explanation of the origins of these two social ills.\textsuperscript{131} Prostitution was one symptom of a whole host of other problems, most related to the need to re-secure the foundations of the family, to these conservative observers.

Liberal reformers were concerned with degeneration as well since syphilis, tuberculosis and alcoholism were quickly replacing cholera and small pox as the major public health concerns of the day.\textsuperscript{132} It is quite significant that two of these three new threats to the social body were strongly associated with prostitutes, who were thought to carry venereal disease and enjoy strong drink. Nye argues that “the most complicated conjunction that degenerational theorists succeeded in popularizing in the \textit{fin de siecle} was the link between venereal disease, prostitution, and “liberated” (read perverse) sexuality.”\textsuperscript{133} This means that not only was prostitution
and the "loose" sexual morality it perpetuated a moral problem, but that it was a public health problem as well.\textsuperscript{134} In the debates about regulationism, this medical-moral approach to the issue of prostitution, supported by theories of degeneration, would have significant effects on the reform of the French system since it created a common ground between liberal Republicans, conservatives and other social reformers.

**French Feminists Challenge Regulation**

Feminists mounted challenges of their own against regulationism, some of which borrowed from or overlapped with the Republican perspectives already discussed. Many feminist leaders were involved in abolitionism and dedicated their efforts to exposing the contradictions inherent in regulation discourse. French feminists had been using prostitution as an example of the degradation of women since the French Revolution. In the 1830's Saint Simonian feminists tried to fuse "sex and class analysis" to "uncover the causes and examine the meaning of prostitution."\textsuperscript{135} One writer stressed poverty as the cause of prostitution and emphasized that "women of all classes are vulnerable."\textsuperscript{136} However, in practice Saint Simonians had a difficult time deciding how much solidarity they could express towards prostitutes without corrupting morals.

A Saint Simonian member, Therese Nugues, thought that their leader ("father"), Enfantin, expressed too much sympathy with prostitutes. She wrote in *La Feminisme dans le socialisme francaise*: "it seems that you write only for prostitutes... Why should you base your ideas on that which is defective? Just because there are hunchbacks, must there be an order that all clothing have a place for a hump? It would be better to say to the hunchbacks, try to stand more erect, in
the end you will straighten up, for you were born to be straight also.” There is a clear tension in this early feminist literature between expressing sisterhood with prostitutes and condoning their sexual “immorality.” This tension is present in many feminist responses to the debates about regulation. This conflict is also evident in Ghenia Avril de Sainte Croix’s abolitionist article, “The Female Serf.”

Sainte-Croix was a French feminist opposed to prostitution, who began to participate in feminist activism by attending the “annual meeting of Protestant women’s charities known as the Conference of Versailles. A wide range of organizations reported to this meeting, especially social reforms groups dedicated to the suppression of pornography, alcoholism, and legalized prostitution.” She later started a philanthropic society for women leaving prostitution in 1901 called L’Œuvre liberatrice.

In her piece, “The Female Serf,” published in 1901, she argues that by regulating prostitution the State is thrice guilty. First, it aims a serious blow at a woman’s freedom by registering her as a prostitute; second, it destroys the principle of equality for punishing her for what is considered a pardonable offence in her accomplice; and finally, it is harmful to morality and creates pimping because of the registration that authorizes a woman to do business with her body.”

Her accusation illustrates the influence of the three themes of liberty, the double standard and sexual immorality. She draws attention to the alliance forged between middle-class feminists and working class men by arguing that “they (working class men) have finally understood that it is their daughters, sisters and wives we are defending.” She emphasizes the class politics of regulation by focusing on the “poor streetwalker,” who is more severely treated than the rich courtesan, who is protected and left alone.

Sainte-Croix used a series of letters written by a woman trying to “get away from prostitution and whom our present system sent mercilessly, not into prostitution.
with which she refused to have any dealing, but to her death" to arouse moral outrage at the tolerance system.\textsuperscript{141} She stressed that prostitution was “condemned by all” and quoted many journals that have expressed opposition to prostitution.\textsuperscript{142} The addition of a prostitute’s letter from Saint Lazare in her essay was a novel development in that it is an attempt to appropriate the voice of the prostitute. With the exception of the interviews carried out by Parent-Duchatelet, which were done from prison, no one had consulted the prostitutes themselves to generate a perspective on prostitution. It is a mark of this period of feminist agitation against prostitution that an effort was made to communicate with prostitutes and to present their self-representations.

However, it must be remembered that the leaders of this movement were middle-class women with their own set of prejudices and stereotypes about prostitutes, and their own desires to ‘rehabilitate’ the fallen women.

A key tension involved in the feminist discourse on prostitution was between their desire to promote a “message of liberation for enslaved woman” and their more repressive tendency to argue that “the individual...is to exercise self-censorship in order to submit to the sexual order.”\textsuperscript{143} Rooted in the divisions of the nineteenth century feminist movement, this tension has become one the most important divisions in the modern feminist “sex wars.”\textsuperscript{144}

Maria Deraismes, a wealthy feminist who stressed the importance of harmonious and egalitarian family relations also became an outspoken abolitionist. She argued that “although society seems to admire the courtesan more than the ‘honest’ woman, the courtesan is man’s victim in the sense that men have created her to satisfy needs they cannot satisfy within the sterile marriages they themselves have created.”\textsuperscript{145} Celebrating the need for sexual passion and fulfillment within the confines of marriage was a radical twist on the traditional view of conjugal sexuality and arguing for passion put Deraismes on the edge of propriety. However, her
argument that courtesans destroy family life was a well-worn argument, which did not seek sexual liberation for women as much as a return to a paternalist concept of proper sexuality within marriage. Sainte-Croix and Deraismes, and other feminist abolitionists, despite their adherence to bourgeois ideals of womanhood, called attention to the double standard, which would play a large role in opening the question of sexual liberation for later feminists.

Harsin notes that “by the late nineteenth century, anti-regime propaganda had settled into two well-worn tracks: the mistaken arrest and the iniquities of bordello life.” Both of these methods of opposition were exploited by opponents of regulation and in the process some of the gendered ideology of the Third Republic becomes more clear. Both were founded on the ideology of separate spheres and on criticisms of the double standard. Many abolitionist women adhered to the ideology of separate spheres though they envisioned a larger sphere in which to carry out their feminine moral influence and motherly duties. As we have seen, many of these middle-class feminists were firmly rooted in familial ideology, but sought to reform the excesses of sexism and male “debauchery” that they thought threatened family stability and conjugal love.

The double standard was targeted by these feminists, who sought to expose the hypocrisy of bourgeois men's claims about proper behavior for bourgeois women. This hypocrisy is evident since “bourgeois men were expected to acquire sexual experience while women of their class were required to retain their virginity until marriage, it followed that male debauchery could not take place in the beds of decent, well-brought up young ladies.” While the feminist and socialist perspectives call the sexual license of bourgeois men into question, they do so not to argue for greater sexual freedom for women, but to stress the importance of women's proper sexual role to be fulfilled within the confines of the family. Without reforming the
notions of proper sexuality, and by addressing the need for acceptable forms of sexual pleasure, these feminists failed to truly revolutionize gender relations. While the protest drew attention to the unfair sexual license given to men, it failed to problematize the class based reality of prostitution or the fact that only women in their economic position could achieve this kind of liberation from sex. Additionally, by stressing the exploitative aspects of prostitution, feminist abolitionists reinforced many of the problematic stereotypes of prostitutes that had been accepted since Parent-Duchatelet’s study.

By emphasizing the iniquities of bordello life, abolitionists could construct an image of prostitutes that deviated from Parent-Duchatelet’s only in overall goal but not in content. “The bordello literature” often stressed the dangers inherent in women living together in large groups and tended to imply the necessity for keeping women isolated from one another in the home. In other words, much abolitionist literature tended to reinforce the negative stereotypes about prostitutes and their need for guidance, whether that be moral or regulationist, and about working-class women’s sexuality. Additionally, though this approach targeted the denial of rights to women as central to the problem of regulation, “a tendency to slant these stories away from the constant difficulties suffered by prostitutes and toward the plight of innocent women arrested by mistake” reveals the moral bias of the abolitionists. The innocent victim of the system was a better symbol of the degradation of morals brought about by the system than was the actual prostitute who merely suffered because of her profession. Certainly, most bourgeois abolitionist groups of women focused on rehabilitation and re-moralization of prostitutes rather than making the system more responsive to the filles’ needs. Further, the effort to address the filles’ needs was not particularly important to many feminists, who did not opt to consult these women. The few who did often met with them in order to rehabilitate them.
and in so doing, they enacted the solidarist construction of middle-class women as the exemplars of proper virtues for working-class women. Similar to the role of feminists in temperance movements, abolitionists tended to stress stricter morality rather than alleviation of systematic abuse and exploitation, though some feminists did decry the rampant abuse of authority by the police and medical establishment.

One exception to this general rule was Madeleine Pelletier, a radical feminist, who advocated a single standard of sexual morality and women’s independence from men as a precondition to liberation in her essay “One Morality for Both Sexes.” She focuses on the need for a “feminist education” for girls and on the ways that women are made vulnerable when they are in public by the license afforded men to harass them. She points out that “there are police regulations to protect a man from the attentions of hookers, but a woman, no doubt because she is weaker, is left without protection, at the mercy of accosters. She is asked to contribute to street maintenance, but here she is in enemy territory, therefore she hurries.” She draws attention to the hypocrisy involved in placing a burden of public decency on women, who cannot appear to be anything but indecent when they walk the streets because of men’s behavior. It is not women’s sexual difference that causes the problem of debauchery to Pelletier, but the fact that men are socialized to treat women as debauchery personified.

She defends the “new woman,” who frequented the cafes or other public spaces alone, against charges of debauchery and she argues that feminists would do more for women by supporting a more public role for them than by “installing female ‘homes’ as they do now, which serve only to maintain women in their original timidity.” Her biting criticisms of the double standard and her radical solutions to women’s condition generally placed her on the margins of French feminism. Many more moderate feminist were hesitant to make the kinds of arguments Pelletier made
because of their own investment in the ideologies that she criticized and because these more radical arguments often produced few tangible results.

**Socialist Responses to Regulationism**

Socialist critics agreed with liberals that the vice squad should be abolished, but they cannot be said to have adopted a coherent position on prostitution. They generally agreed with one another that prostitution was a "scourge that was spreading" and that it was inextricably linked to capitalism. However, because of the limited role given to issues of sex in Marxism and the large range of positions adopted by socialists, no organized movement against prostitution developed in socialist circles. With the exception of some members of socialist circles who were also feminists, the issue remained peripheral to their discourse.

As Corbin notes,

> to demand legislation on prostitution amounted to granting the full sanction of the law to a form of repression of the prostitutes, who were largely of working class origin, and this the socialist could not bring themselves to do. But to make themselves apostles of total liberty in prostitution did not correspond to the deepest conviction of the movement’s leaders, who saw venal sex as a capitalist canker and who wanted to see the further development of social hygiene.

To many socialists, the bourgeois system of capitalist production way to blame for the existence of prostitution since the workshop engendered promiscuity through its demoralizing structure, the low pay given to women caused the poverty that made them practice prostitution, and the inability of working-class couples to share marital harmony and sexual fulfillment due to their exploitation by capitalists.

Their dilemma could be characterized as one between supporting the status quo, supporting legislation, which could increase the amount of repressive power exercised over prostitutes by medical authorities, or supporting the liberty arguments of Republican, which contradicted their feeling that prostitution was the handmaiden
to capitalism. They ended up generally supporting the liberal arguments, though “not one of them made an effort to bring the problem of prostitution to the attention of the deputies and senators.”

The Victory of the Medico-Moral Framework

The perspective to finally triumph in the debates about regulationism was the neoregulationist position. Guided by a scientific outlook and an emphasis on controlling the spread of venereal disease, the neoregulation movement “outflanked” the other movements for a change in regulation. Continuing the language of contagion made popular by Parent Duchatelet, this movement, led by medical men, argued that syphilis was “a scourge, whose progress was assuming the shape of a veritable invasion.” The disease, like the prostitute, “was rising from the depths” of society. It “circulated throughout the social body at precisely the points at which, through venal sex, the various classes are in contact.” The spread of syphilis, then, was likened to the increased class mobility and the unique ability of prostitutes to travel between different milieus. In this way, there was a strong connection made between the working classes or the masses who occupied the depths and the threat of social contagion. This class anxiety is evident in the emphasis these neoregulationists placed on the infection of “innocents.” They argued that “the venereal danger was all the more serious, in that, coming as it did from the social depths, it attacked not only the guilty but also the innocent bourgeois.” The threat posed by such contagion was also considered to be hereditary so that “social hygiene had higher and further aims. Its objectives surpass the simple preservation of the race and extend to its constant improvement, to its perfection. It attacks for example, diseases of a special order: tuberculosis, syphilis, and alcoholism which affect the individual and his descendents.”
This discourse “bore within it...the major anxieties of the time concerning health, sex, population, and the proletarian threat...”\textsuperscript{162} The proposals of neoregulationists focused on maintaining the “marginalization of prostitutes by demanding increased repression of unregistered prostitution and the sequestration of venereal patients.”\textsuperscript{163} The fears of social and physical degeneration and depopulation that dominated neoregulationists’ texts could be said to be an extension of the “ancient fear that the laboring classes inspired in the bourgeoisie” since the primary threat was perceived as originating in those quarters. Linked to neoregulationism in important ways, eugenics built on these pseudo-scientific foundations and incorporated the concerns of public health movements.\textsuperscript{164}

Clayton argues that the regulationist program, established on behalf of respectable French men, required the deviant lower-class woman but needed to maintain that deviance in a marginal space where it could be watched, its trajectories carefully traced. But men of the 1870s and 1880s saw that deviance moving towards the center of their city’s life, threatening to upset the social and sexual balance of power.\textsuperscript{165}

These “men of the 1870s and 1880s,” who were the makers of neoregulationism, sought to emphasize the dangers of “loose women.” “Loose” women were both outside the disciplinary regime and outside bourgeois sexual morality. Their visibility was a central issue to abolitionists and regulationists alike since as spectacles they must be contained and as danger to order they must be visible. Distinguishing the “loose” from the “honest” was no easy task and in this process, some of the key images of prostitutes that inform our twentieth century perspective were born.
Chapter 5: Woman as Fetish

This chapter deals with the way in which the discourse of regulation formed part of a cultural context for avant-garde writers and artists of the late nineteenth century, who, as I have tried to show in previous chapters, used prostitutes as symbols of the complexities of modern social life. While regulationists sought surveillance and control of prostitute women, artists and writers did not have such clear goals. Their representations do not merely repeat regulation discourse, though they are indebted to it. In important ways their images both reify the stereotypes of prostitutes (and women) already seen in works like Parent-Duchatelet’s and consider prostitution to be an ambiguity that cannot be reduced to a simple stereotype. To some extent, the images of the prostitute, or of women suspected of prostitution, found in the works of Zola and in the paintings of Manet, represent two aspects of an overall cultural trend toward using femininity to expose societal anxieties.

The commodification of social relations and the concept of dangerous women as spectacles in need of control informed this modern perspective on prostitutes. It is my position that both of these tendencies reinforce one another in important ways and both produce "woman," particularly prostitute women, as fetish. Sexualized women were closely associated with the feminine sublime, returns to the flesh, and with forms of alienation for writers and artists and one can see how these images of women were closely associated with the discourse on prostitution. Social debates about fashion and ornamentation must be seen in the context of this complex relationship between commodity fetishism and women's visibility.

Bernheimer argues that "etymologically, prostitution means to set or place forth in public. When Baudelaire wrote that art is prostitution, he may have had this etymology in mind, for indeed art is the making public of private fantasies, the public
exposition of one's imaginary creations. While Bernheimer goes on to argue that these artistic images of women/prostitutes reflect male modernists' fantasies, I will be arguing that, while this is certainly an element of these representations, there is a way to interpret these images as indications of an ambiguity that situates them as modern, and that is directly related to the ambiguity posed to the male gaze by attempts to categorize and differentiate women. Paradoxically, this ambiguity resists clear interpretation of the paintings/writings as primarily male fantasies and opens the works to multiple interpretations. As we will see, contemporaries did not agree on the meanings of these works, and it seems that part of the paintings’ brilliance is the ambiguity produced by their simultaneous reification and exposure of the workings of male fetishism.

The prostitute appealed to modernists, like avant-garde artists and writers, because “she marked the point of intersection of two widely disseminated ideologies of modernity... the modern was lived and seen at its most acute and true in what was temporary, unstable, and fleeting; and the modern social relation was understood to be more and more frozen in the form of a commodity.” When these two aspects of modernist ideology are placed next to the ideology that classified women’s sexuality in two forms: honest/healthy and deviant/contagious, the potency of the image of woman for these modern figures can be seen. Similar to the political uses of prostitutes and women to symbolize social problems, modernists could capture the tensions of political and social problems by deploying the image of the prostitute. She could represent the danger of women’s sexuality and the vulnerability of men to female sexual power. The prevalence of ambiguous images of women linking them to prostitutes can be explained by considering the impact of these social factors on the construction of femininity.
Commodification of Social Relationships

A key development at the end of the nineteenth century was the modernist attitude in which writers, like Simmel and Baudelaire, perceived the prostitute as an embodiment of the central tensions of modernity. They argued that "under capitalism, the modern social relationship tended increasingly to take the form of a commodity." Another way in which the new urban culture affected images of prostitutes was in the way they could disrupt traditional economic distinctions. In the "specularized urban culture of arcades, boulevards, and department stores, woman was inscribed both as consumer and commodity, purchaser and purchase, buyer and bought."

The women pictured in Manet's paintings also represented the limits of economic categories since they were portrayed as both seller of the goods and the goods sold. Linda Nead argues that "as a commodity, the prostitute both encapsulates and distorts all the classic features of bourgeois economics..." This economic ambiguity deserves some attention because of the way it still influences discourses about prostitution, particularly in contemporary feminist theory.

Prostitutes confound the categories of classical political economy and of Marx's re-interpretation of that theory because there is no clear way to separate the producer from the commodity produced. In his discussion of commodities and commodity fetishism, Marx defines a commodity as "a thing outside us," yet the "product" a prostitute brings to the market is not a commodity in this way. However, it is clear that there is an exchange taking place, and it is also rather clear that the economic exchange reflects social relations between the sexes in important ways. This is what Marx defines as commodity fetishism, in which the social relation that has determined the value of a product is displaced causing the commodity to seem to be a "mysterious thing." The mystery is that the value of a
thing does not arise from its physical nature or properties but from its status as a product of social relations.

Marx uses an analogy with religion to explain this point, where, he argues, the products of human imagination assume an objective value, thought to exist beyond the human realm. Similarly, then, the value of a prostitute can be analyzed using this latter concept of commodity fetishism, assuming one can find a way to include her under the category of commodity, since clearly there is a social relation that determines the value she can exchange for on the sexual market. This value is arrived at in a system of fetishistic images in which women figure as madonnas/whores, healthy/diseased, honest/deceptive, and through which images of women's adornment express this mystery at the level of desire.

The women in Manet's paintings were often working women, who worked in the service industry. Part of their function was to draw people, probably men, into the establishment and entice them to drink. So, in some sense their presence as workers served another function as well, that of advertising. Advertising exposes this role of fetishism in economics probably better than any other example, since the social relations Marx claims are obscured in the production of commodities are, particularly in the advertising function of the bar maid, closer to the surface. The question of what these bar maids were selling indicates that the social relation is more obvious in these markets than in the ones Marx may have imagined. Although these women were formally selling spirits, their possible double function was not lost on contemporaries. They could have also been selling sex.

In Figures 1 and 2, the women pictured are bar maids, and part of their purpose in the brasserie was to stimulate "intemperate drinking" and sexual relations. One observer wrote that "those brasseries a femmes are virtual maisons de passe (hotels commonly used for prostitutional activity) and houses of"
prostitution. They even look like them with their opaque windows, their loosely
dressed and enticing girls sticking their heads out the partially-opened door..."175
The close association of the bar maid, as well as the clothing shop girl and the
milliner, with prostitution was a common theme in avant-garde art of this period.
This association highlights the ways in which social relationships could become
indistinguishable from commodity exchange relationships. How is one to theorize
this dual relationship? What is for sale? Economic theory is rather limited in its
application to these forms of prostitutional activity, which are neither wholly social
nor wholly monetary. It is necessary to ask if in some way the ideology that divides
women into madonnas and whores, so beloved by regulationists, props up this
economy in which the aura of the public house has as its necessary complement the
public woman.

If this is the case, then the production of "woman" as fetish can be seen to be
related to the production of commodity fetishism discussed by Marx. While the
product itself is not a traditional kind of commodity, it is clear that the images
(phallic imaginary?) of prostitutes and suspicious women constructs women as
engaged in this display of their charms for sale, perhaps as commodities themselves.

However, Manet’s depiction of these women is not so clear. In Figure 1, the
two women in the background of the painting appear to be at work. There do not
appear to be any outward and visible signs of a double function, though to
contemporaries this almost mythical association of working-women with prostitutes
was common. The foreground woman could be accompanied by the imposing male
figure to her left, but their relationship is not clear. Similarly in Figure 2, the dancer
on stage is only present as part of a twirling skirt and an arm, so that the only woman
we can see is the waitress, who stares out at us. Her look does not seem to betray a
hidden purpose, but seems to expose the gaze that would try to appropriate her.
Figure 1
The Spectacle of Dangerous Women

When this role of commodity fetishism is coupled with the images of dangerous women, which were especially prevalent following the Paris Commune, who were nearly always thought to be hyper-sexual, this concept of fetishism becomes more clear. The suppression of the Paris Commune in 1871 was followed by a “concern that erupted about the continuing expansion of covert prostitution and male sexual demand.” This concern found expression in numerous images of crazed amazonian women with intentions of destroying Paris. These images reveal, in my opinion, the fears of the writers who authored them more than any real threat from crazy women. What is manifest in this construction of femininity is more a statement about men’s insecurities and fears of women’s active roles in public than about the women’s actions. A societal anxiety is captured in these images that shows how gender roles were a site of multiple struggles.

The Paris Commune produced many images of women that reflect this anxiety about gender roles. It serves as another example of the ways in which “dangerous” women, which included politicized middle-class women and especially women from the working classes, became representative of political and social changes that were often associated with violence. The images of the women of the Commune and of suffragists often overlapped in important ways so that both were problematized as aberrant women acting out their irrational natures. The Commune and the Boulanger Affair seemed to be the final outbreak of “disobedient and deviant women of Paris.”

Images of the petroleuses, women who were supposed to have burned down much of Paris, and of women at the barricades all share a common theme, regardless of their political position with respect to the political aims of the Commune. They all
agreed that there was something problematic about women holding guns and fighting “like men.”

Nearly the only role assumed to be appropriate was the role represented by the grieving female figure. Women who fought for the Commune were often referred to as “amazons” and were sometimes assumed to be “mad.”

There was a connection between these “amazon” figures and prostitution in that, for conservatives and many bourgeois, “the communardes were sexually promiscuous, if not actual prostitutes...” Signs of “corruption” and inquiries into women’s sexual activities occupied government agents who sought witnesses to the events of the Commune.

When on trial, women who had fought in the Commune were compared to those “commonly found in the neighborhood of soldier’s barracks, or in the lowest outskirts of Paris, squalid and dangerous localities, of which sketches are to be read in the pages of Sue and other romance writers, whose taste it is to dive into the lowest depths of human depravity and degradation.” The women of the Commune were often associated with prostitutes for their public exhibitions of violence and politics. These women’s perceived sexual morality could determine the outcome of their trial, with the assumption being that if a woman was sexually promiscuous, she was dangerous enough to be responsible for the chaos of the Commune.

The women of the Commune and the women targeted by neoregulationism were the same women. In both cases the public role assumed by the women and their consequent display of their sex, whether in battle or in sexual commerce, were to be condemned. For the new regulationists, like the early regulationists, the spectacle of woman needed control and surveillance. The belief that unregistered prostitution was “taking over” was common among doctors, police and moralists, who were concerned with two main trends. One was the “breakdown of the century long effort to organize and police sectors of the lower classes, especially women;” and the other
was the “apparent increase in sexuality in the female population as a whole – worries involving both lower-class and middle-class women.” More than ever before, it seemed, loose women needed containment. The concern with how to achieve this enclosure occupied authorities for the rest of the century. When modern welfare states came into existence, the scene shifted, though the players remained much the same.

The Masquerade

Shannon Bell claims that the nineteenth century bourgeoisie “constituted itself as a social class and constructed its self-identity by extruding the carnivalesque,” which represented a threat to social cohesion. She continues to argue that the “purpose of regulation was to avoid the carnivalesque by removing all signs of prostitution through containment.” Within this schema, the prostitute represented a loose spectacle who expressed the “evils of adornment.” This ‘carnivalesque’ could be defined as the visibility of the prostitute who solicited openly, or of the danger involved in public festivals in which alcohol figured prominently. Especially after the Commune, the “public abuse of alcohol was seen as a code phrase for working-class irrationality and as a violation of law.” Any public gathering of working-class people or of women was perceived as potentially dangerous to public order. This concept can also be seen in the assumptions made about women who were actresses, singers, or dancers, since they performed on stage, they were in essence masquerading and were suspected of loose morality.

In Zola’s Nana, it is significant that Nana is an actress and singer, though an untalented one, since a common association of the time was that these women were of questionable virtue. The theatre director, Bordenave, insists, at the beginning of
the novel, that the gentleman should refer to his theatre as a “brothel.” In England, as in France, “the theatre kept up its old tradition as a sexual marketplace; actresses were still associated with the demi-monde, while whores openly worked the auditoria, especially the private boxes and the plush theatre bars…” The theatres were spaces in which courtesans, honest women and wealthy men could intermingle. It serves, in Zola’s novel, as the meeting place for rich men and courtesans, with these meetings often taking place amongst the “respectable” wives of these wealthy men.

The courtesan’s were represented as the deluxe modern commodity, the image of Desire packaged and displayed... the courtesan’s performance was a matter of surface exhibition. She did not signify the sexual body so much as its production as elaborate spectacle. She was artfully constructed according to the codes defining modern desirability. Her appeal was thus largely a function of her ability to dissolve the beastly immediacy of the female animal in a play of intriguing signs and changing masks, all of them lavish and expensive.

The appeal of the prostitute was not as much her female body, which she shared with her “honest” counterpart, but her decoration. The particular way she was female involved her artificiality and her proximity to the idea of the sublime feminine.

The image of the prostitute as one who is constantly performing a masquerade appears in the work of Zola, with the character Nana, and in the art of the late nineteenth century. There was a correlation between high fashion and sexual immorality, particularly during the Second Empire, that informed how women’s self-decoration was represented and how women could achieve acceptable social presentation. As Clayton points out “a decent woman for whom shopping was an obsession, rather than a simple devoir (task to duty), was in danger of falling from the path of respectability and manageability, whereas the deviant woman who dressed to the nines was ipso facto immoral and could inflict societal damage by infecting the lady with an uncontrollable taste for extravagant clothes.” Like the danger of a
prostitute spreading disease and sexual immorality to the “honest” and “respectable” classes, women too concerned with fashion and adornment spread a kind of consumer immorality to “honest women.”

Additionally, the two kinds of women could become involved in a rivalry over fashion in which the “luxury of the courtesan’s way of life paraded through Paris placed the hone, well-to-do woman in a predicament.”

She could not imitate the courtesan’s fashion because the courtesan’s costume tended to highlight the sexual function of the toilette by deviating slightly from the norms of high fashion.

Also, too close of a resemblance between an “honest” woman and a courtesan could place the “honest” woman in a precarious position with respect to her propriety. This indiscretion meant more for the “honest” woman, who was supposed to maintain her virtue, than for the courtesan, whose appeal lay in her deviation from the ordinary codes of female virtue. Zola commented that the success of the *grands magasins* (department stores) was due to the fact that “women are thus dazzled by the accumulation of merchandise.” Zola continued to say that they *grands magasins* were replacing the church as places of recreation and worship for bourgeois women.

The belief that women on display in this fashion caused men to desire them and therefore increased not only prostitution, but also sexual activity generally, was an underlying theme of neo-regulationism. Women could now be seen “openly advertising themselves,” a trend that increased as commodity culture expanded in the twentieth century.

This display not only threatened to ensnare men, but it also threatened to corrupt honest women. In one of the final developments in Zola’s *Nana*, in which the Countess Sabine had become “infected” with Nana’s sexual looseness and decadent tastes by taking a lover, Fauchery, and by redecorating her home, the threat of this kind of corruption is evident. The Count is having financial
troubles because “in addition to Nana’s novel demands, his home expenses were extraordinarily confused... the Countess had suddenly manifested a taste for luxury, a longing for worldly pleasures, which was devouring their fortune.” At her most recent gathering, the Countess is seen wearing “all her diamonds,” a phrase which recurs throughout the book, but in reference to the courtesans when they wish to make a fine display of their own social positions. By describing the Countess in this way, Zola is drawing out this social preoccupation with the display of consumer goods and how they can either affect a woman’s sexual morality or can be a sign of her fallen state. In this case, the Countess had long been committing adultery, and her “sudden taste for luxury” can be interpreted as a sign of her debauchery and of her movement closer to the courtesan. Even her chair, which had been out of place in her previous drawing room, “had grown and spread till it filled the whole great house with voluptuous idleness and a sense of tense enjoyment not less fierce and hot than a fire which has long been burning up.” The allusions to the social anxiety about how products and decorations helped blur social distinctions and sexual morality, especially those between women, are unmistakable in these passages. The notion that one’s character was expressed in one’s display was a common theme in nineteenth century society and it informed nearly every aspect of women’s lives.

Feminists were concerned about their appearances when they adopted less militant and more “modest” tactics in making their demands. Bourgeois women, generally, worried about their appearances to avoid having their virtue questioned. Working-class women had to hope their appearance did not make people, like the police, think they were dishonest, or prostitutes. This concern with appearance and its relation to one’s supposed virtue or character could be said to be a universal phenomenon among nineteenth century French women. The discourses on prostitution, in particular the anxiety about insoumises, reinforced these notions about
- Oh! good grief but she looks nice! Ah! here's the woman
  that I've always dreamed of. Let's see! five and four is nine,
  and ten and ten, ten francs. I have ten francs.

- The dickens! she has the air of being an honest woman!
  That's charming, but annoying. I don't know what to offer her. But don't act like you're following her.

- Good grief! she's turning around! I'll act like I'm checking my watch. But I look rather stupid all the same! I want to get out of here.

- But no. Let's see, let's be enterprising. Hm! Ms... really, I don't dare. I must seem so stupid! And should I say Madam or Miss?

- Sir, I beg you not to follow me, or... But, Ma... Mademoiselle. I'm not following you at all. Believe me, if I had even noticed you, I would have headed in the opposite direction.

- My God! Did she snub me! I don't really have the courage to speak to her. It's very nice to say: 'Be brave!' But the woman has to put herself into it after all.

- No, let's see. I'm going to say to her: 'Ah! Madam, listen to the voice of a heart... the voice of a heart... No, let's be original and pain! No, after all!'

- It is best to be polite. I think. In stories, they are polite. I think. Let's see! let's take our courage in two hands. 'Madam, listen to the voice...'. Yes, that's working. Oh! good grief! she's turning around! Lord! is this annoying?

- Ah! I don't care, let's go! "Madame, is..." In the name of a dog! she's gone, I really don't have any luck! I always happen upon honest women.

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**Figure 3**
women's appearances by constructing a climate in which any woman not displaying the proper signs could be mistaken for a prostitute. Figure 3 plays on the confusion for a man who cannot tell if a woman passer-by is virtuous or “for sale.” As one commentator notes, luxurious dress was one sign of “the sexual danger posed by women” and attempts were made to separate “virtuous women” and prostitutes by their dress. It could be denied to either group in order to provide clear social markings of which women were “good” and which were “bad.”

There is a paradoxical element to this focus of ornamentation since though beauty is celebrated, its manifestation in a person is often reduced and reified so that the person becomes merely an ornament. Hunt argues that in this way women have become associated with “contrivance” and “deception.” Certainly, this association is clear in the works of Zola and Balzac, as well as in much Impressionist art of this period. When viewed in the context of regulationism, this focus on separating women according to their display is inseparable from the simultaneous desire to render prostitutes invisible. Another paradox emerges from this schema since high fashion allows a public presentation that blurs the distinction between “honest” and prostitute women. High fashion at this period was problematic precisely for this reason. One could no longer tell the prostitute from the “honest” middle class housewife. Both could buy their luxury at the new department stores arising at this time and both, by the turn of the century, could frequent bars and cafés alone. This both blurred this distinction and strengthened it as “honest” women sought to distinguish themselves from prostitutes.

The meanings invested in clothing displays can be seen as a way of inscribing social meanings on women's bodies in order to better manage and supervise them in a changing economic and social context. The motivation for emphasizing the social text of fashion was to find a way to hang on to the apparently
crucial distinctions between women, and between women and men, which were representative of other aspects of the social order. The prostitute was "defined primarily in terms of her difference from the feminine ideal, and, as a system, prostitution was seen as a negation of the respectable system of marriage and procreation." This image of the prostitute was emphasized "most strongly in relation to the 'natural role of motherhood.'" The prostitute and her display of her sexual immorality outraged neo-regulationists because she symbolized the increasing disparity between the idealized construction of women's sexuality as a vehicle for the reproduction of population and the actual situation. For many social conservatives, the new educational opportunities for women, new avenues for their careers, and the more liberal laws regarding the family, like the Naquet divorce law of 1883, signaled the destruction of the traditional foundations of social order. The prostitute, by symbolizing this "laxity in morals," could serve as a potent weapon for social critics. In many cases, the insistence on sexual differences in discourse was more vehement precisely when those distinctions were the most indistinguishable in social life.

Changes in fashion during the early years of the twentieth century met protest because of the ways they upset gender distinctions. The end of World War I until the 1930's was a period marked by debates about "low-cut dresses, short skirts, pyjamas, and the abandonment of the corset." The new fashions produced by Coco Chanel, which had an immense influence in this period of rising consumerism, provoked varied responses. Many thought that her "boyish" style clothing made women look like men, which gave rise to outcries about the masculinization of women and the erosion of gender distinctions. However, for some women, these new fashions were more simple and convenient and symbolized their greater mobility and public role. Others have commented that this role of fashion in defining women
increased at this period as part of a trend of bringing women more fully under the sway of commodity culture.206

The Paintings of Manet

This masquerade of the courtesan was the focus of avant-garde art in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. Art of this period, particularly that of Edouard Manet, manifests what could be called a politics of ambiguity that was characteristic of this phase of modern urban life. The societal concern expressed about the development of the “New Woman” led to an increased anxiety about gender roles and the gendered division of public space. The “new woman” was “literally and metaphorically inseparable from the new public spaces – arcades, cafes, theatres, department stores –of an increasingly urban, consumer oriented European society.”207 The courtesan symbolized the “new woman” effectively since both were of ambiguous gender and class status. The representations of the “new woman” could also be considered to be representations of prostitutes, since the line dividing the two were not clear to observers.

Manet’s pictures of women passing time in cafes with alcoholic beverages and cigarettes, Figures 4 and 5, reflect this key ambiguity. It would have been unclear to contemporary observers whether these women were merely women alone, or whether they were only alone to signal their sexual availability. In the first of the images, the women are not facing the viewer. One of the women is even looking down so that her gaze is not oriented toward the viewer. The other woman is preoccupied with drinking her beer. Neither woman seems to be soliciting, which would require at least some attempt to scan the room for likely clients. Manet’s representation captures the ambiguity of the women’s situation. They are likely only
drinking in the “public house,” rather than putting themselves on “public” display, though, given the context, the two acts were not entirely separable. In the second image, the woman is facing outward, but she seems distracted. Clayton points out that “she is not working on any seduction; nor is she eating her brandy-soaked plum…it includes all the ingredients of the usual social coding for the ‘indecent café woman,’ but her the codes are muffled and brought to a stalemate.”

This image tends to enact the assumption of the lonely woman of the café who is waiting for a “date,” but it does not follow through with this identification. The (in)decision about her virtue is left open. At this transitional time, these two modes of being in public were not clearly distinguishable. The fact that women alone in public, particularly those drinking or smoking, were often thought to be of questionable moral character only highlights this key ambiguity of late nineteenth century French society as captured in Manet’s paintings.

The outrage expressed by bourgeois observers of Manet’s Olympia, in Figure 6, is an exemplary case of the kinds of social tensions and questions involved in the use of the prostitute as a symbol. Bernheimer has argued that the scandal of Manet’s Olympia is “due to its simultaneous activation and exposure of the dynamic of the production of woman as fetish in patriarchal society.” Multiple critics of Olympia thought her “putrefied” and like a “cadaver in the morgue.” When it was first exhibited at the Salon of 1865, “the bourgeois public took such offense at this apparent effront to its morality that the painting had to be rehung higher up, out of its retaliatory reach.”

Like Baudelaire, “for whom the aesthetic experience depends on the ‘vacancy’ of the bodies the flaneur chooses to enter,” critics of the 1860’s focused on the empty and deathly appearance of Olympia. Bataille in the 1950’s picked up this interpretive framework to argue that the appeal of the painting is the way it exposes “the fixity of the female cadaver as (a) source of (male) aesthetic
pleasure." It is, in this view, her association with death that arouses the desire and indignation of her observers.

However, Bernheimer’s explanation of the moral indignation at the painting was that while the “traditional nude was supposed to flatter the male viewer and entice him sexually,” this nude had a gaze that was described as an irritating enigma. He argues that this perspective “suppresses … an entire set of inconsistencies, disparities, and ambiguities that constitute Olympia’s puzzling corporeality.” If this nude is compared to the nude on which it is based, Titian’s Venus of Urbino from 1538, in Figure 7, the differences between the two help to clarify this “puzzling corporeality.”

While Titian’s Venus has her head turned to one side in an inviting gesture, which is accentuated by her suggestively placed hand, and in which her gaze is indirect, Olympia’s gaze is blank, yet pointed. Her hand, also suggestively placed, covers the sign of her sex, her pubic hair, so that she seems to resist sexual contact. These features seem to indicate that Olympia possesses herself in a way that Venus does not. This was corroborated by critics, who since 1865, have described Olympia
It seems clear, however, that Olympia is female; there are plenty of symbols of feminine sexuality in the work, the flowers, the cat and the fact that the painting is a reclining nude, a common pose for women subjects. But, "in an important sense Olympia’s sexuality is in doubt. Her depiction deliberately activates in the male viewer doubts as to whether Olympia’s sexuality can indeed belong to her..." These doubts were expressed by the critics of Manet’s time, who believed her to be a prostitute. The notion that she possessed her sexuality was already in question. Bernheimer argues that Manet saturates “his picture of Olympia with elements constructed so that they mirror back to the
male viewer his fetishistic mode of appropriating woman... Olympia overtly displays that failure of the mechanisms whereby this fear (of female sexuality and its association with death) is mastered, a refusal of patriarchal positioning. It is, then, in the painting’s ambiguity on the level of desire, reflected in Olympia’s gaze, that caused the controversy. This ambiguity serves as another way of representing the prostitute as under the control of male desire and also resisting its appropriation.

Manet’s Nana (Figure 8) was not accepted to the Salon of Spring 1877, but it was displayed in a Parisian merchant’s shop. It is unclear whether Manet’s Nana was modeled on Zola’s Nana, who had first appeared in his novel, L’Assommoir, which was being published in serial form in April of 1876, although the similarities are hard to deny. While the two share an emphasis on the sexual implications of a woman’s toilette, and on the degree to which fashion and adornment constitute beauty, the two representations have different effects. Zola’s Nana leaves the reader frustrated and anxious about her frivolity and her unconscious destruction of all those who surround her, since her toilette serves as a way of ensnaring men and deceiving them. Manet’s Nana is more open ended since the man present appears calm and casual, a sharp contrast to the Count Muffat from Zola’s Nana, who was engaged in an internal moral struggle throughout his encounter with Nana’s toilette. He was sweating profusely and his terror-ridden desire produced an anxiety that served as a sign to Nana that her charms were working. Manet’s observer appears to not be the main audience for her “show,” since he is cut halfway out of the frame.

Clayton argues that the angle of Nana’s head contrasted with the angle of the rest of her body calls attention to “what she is looking at not at what she has been doing... She is aware that she is being watched...” Even the way she holds her lipstick and her powder puff highlights the contrived nature of her toilette which function to reveal her “artificiality” and her “flirtatiousness.” She continues to argue
that “this is not just an image of a narcissistic adornment practiced by a venal woman, but, rather, the process of adornment on display.”219 The fashionable clothing she wears, “her blue corset is up-to-date” and places her firmly in the 1870’s, secures her identity as an upper-class courtesan. The seated man supports this identification by his formal attire and his casual manner, he acts like one who has seen this many times, a sharp contrast to that fact that many middle and upper class men had never seen their wives’ toilette.

Clayton argues that this painting was considered too scandalous for the Salon because of the way it “collapsed the distinctions between public and private displays of fashion.”220 It exposes the way Nana’s power “is in what is visually immanent, her adornment, rather than in a narration of her interactions with men.”221 One critic described her as “more than nude” because the sexual innuendo invested in her clothing and in the crane on the wall made her “sordid one hundred times over, this whore.”222 Similarly, two other paintings displayed in 1882, Before the Mirror and The Toilette or The Garter, Figure 9, were immediately associated with Nana because of the sexual meanings invested in a woman’s toilette and the similarities in color scheme. The critics who saw these paintings instantly associated these women with prostitutes because of the un-self conscious way in which they perform their toilette. To these observers, they were clearly not “respectable” women because “they would not have been shown that way.”223 In all of these images of Nana her costume and her adornment are the primary features noted by critics and used to define her as a prostitute. It is her display of her sex, not overtly by showing her flesh, but deceptively by masquerading it behind make-up, corsets and poses that mark her as a prostitute.

In Before the Mirror, Figure 10, and Nana, the mirrors serve as ways to expose the function of the gaze. In Nana, the mirror shows us how professional Nana
is at putting on her mask. She can adorn herself without the aid of the mirror, which is indicated by the way she has been interrupted in the process of applying her make-up. She is holding her powder puff and her lipstick and seems to not need the mirror in front of her. Its purpose is perhaps to show us what is not in the picture. Her reflection is not shown in the mirror, which could be due to the angle of the mirror, but which could also be interpreted as the irrelevance of her reflection to the overall effect of the painting. In some ways, the crane on the wall serves as a reflection of her because of the close relation between the colors of the painting on the wall behind her and her own state of dress. She fades into the painting on the back wall, while clearly standing out against the sofa on which her client sits. The fact that the French word for crane, une grue, was also a “slang term for prostitute” serves to further illustrate this close relationship between the foreground woman and the background.

In Before the Mirror, the mirror’s function is ambiguous since the image reflected back to us, given the angle at which the scene is painted, is a smudge. There is little in the mirror to indicate who or what is in front of the mirror. The artist has already indicated this ambiguity by calling the work “Before the Mirror,” as if the action worthy of interest is taking place not in the mirror but in front of it. In this way, our attention is drawn to the woman and what she is doing before the mirror. She seems to be dressing, since her dress is hanging up to the right of the mirror, although the positioning of her hand could indicate that she is tying or untying the strings on her corset. But, the function of display seems to be the subject of the painting, because, although she is looking in the mirror, we cannot make out the image she may have seen. The only image we have is of her act of adornment.

In both of these paintings, the mirror functions to highlight the ambiguity of the image. While directing our attention to the “process of adornment on display,” it
shows us little of these women's perception of themselves in the mirrors they use to examine their reflections. Perhaps, this absence of her reflected gaze serves to expose the way this process was largely undertaken for another audience, the Count or some other admirer. The mirror in Manet's works seems to always function in this ambiguous way. No where is this more evident than in his A Bar at the Folies-Bergere.

Manet's A Bar at the Folies-Bergere, Figure 11, was exhibited at the Salon of 1882 and "has long been celebrated as an icon of modernist uncertainty" of the kind envisioned by Baudelaire and Simmel. Clayton argues that this uncertainty also carries with it implications for gender since the barmaids' "double profession," while creating the moral ambiguity necessary in modernism, locates her firmly within the confines of late nineteenth century discourse about unregistered prostitution. The painting has an uncertain narrative that revolves around a reflection in a mirror behind the bar, which is difficult to discern as it takes up the entire pictorial space. At first glance, the reflection of the crowd in front of the mirror appears to be the artist's rendering of the crowd behind the bar maid. Once one sees her "other" side it is clear that in fact the background is a mirror reflecting the foreground. The confusion is compounded by the double vision in the mirror. The "frontal" woman seems to have a rather aloof or detached air about her that makes it seem that she is alone surveying the crowded scene reflected in the mirror. However, in the reflection she is involved in a conversation (exchange? solicitation?) with a man. He is dressed fashionably, like the man pictured in Nana, and she is leaning forward slightly in the reflection, though not in the immediate or frontal image. Her role in the bar, like Nana's role at the toilette, is reflected in the background. In Nana, the crane reflects her role in the setting, while in this image, the double vision raises the question about
her sexual availability. The positioning of the mirror provides the ambiguity that highlights her questionable function.
What identifies the fundamental issue at stake in the painting—“does she or doesn’t she?”—is that for commentators of the time, this bar was reputed to be a front for prostitution. Manet plays on this ambiguity by leaving the viewer wondering if she is alone, standing (morally?) upright gazing out over the scene of debauchery with an air of indifference, slight disdain and alienation, or if she is part of the scene of venal exchange that one could interpret unfolding behind (actually in front of) her. While the question does not admit an easy answer, the painting reflects the tension about these issues that heightened as the century drew to a close and women were more frequently part of the public after hours landscape. Images of working-class women and their conflation with prostitutes, both captured and reconstructed social themes of the time. In particular, these images played on observers’ fears and desires about “dangerous” women and served to expose their fetishistic gaze(s).

The “spectacle of woman” would continue to inform social policy into the twentieth century welfare states, who would fine tune regulation and intervention strategies to fit an increasingly technological world. The modern attitude and its proponents would continue to deploy the image of the prostitute to symbolize key social tensions and eventually prostitutes would begin to seize spaces for self-representations. These political uses of the prostitute as a symbol are inseparable from the play of desire and anxiety about that desire in productions of ‘woman’ as fetish.
Chapter 6: The Twentieth Century

The twentieth century, particularly the period from 1914-1945, saw the blurring of gender categories to such an extent that regulation strategies had to change. The acknowledgement by medical authorities of some notion of women's sexual desire, the increase in numbers of women in the workplace and the rise of eugenics all combined to alter the way in which prostitution was represented. However, rather than diminishing the influence of the regulatory system, the way served to strengthen the perceived need for a more broad surveillance based on the need for public health.

The enclosure system and the ideological constructions of femininity on which it rested were being replaced with an emphasis on surveillance.227 Cleanliness was now the strategy of the neo-regulationists. The "health check was both strengthened and extended" without government input.228 During World War I, prostitutes and their enlisted clients were submitted to health checks and to moralizing propaganda that claimed that "acceptance of continence doubles one's strength against the enemy."229 The focus on cleanliness redirected regulation efforts towards clients, provided they were enlisted men.

The twentieth century can be characterized as a time of increasing "semiprostitution." Cafes that accepted femmes de seules (women alone), the popularity of bars, tea shops and lounges replaced the dance halls and bars of the late nineteenth century and provided a new milieu for soliciting. These new venues only increased with the advent of the new technologies of the telephone and the car as soliciting could be done through advertisement and by appointment.230 All of these
new developments meant that the maison de tolerance, and other enclosed venues of prostitution, were on their way out.

However, a few brothels were still in existence and the new maison d'abbattage, in which the women rarely lived, provided continuity with the previous age of enclosure. These establishments were often reinvigorated during the wars as they could, theoretically, “satisfy between 600 and 2,500 individuals a day.” They were characterized by a kind of “conveyor-belt” method in which alcohol and lingering were forbidden. The client was given a bar of soap and a towel and followed the girl to a room. Rather than serving as a place of relaxation through drink and social interaction, these maisons d'abbattage were a symbol of the new movement towards the “prophylactic brothel,” where “only good health and disease prevention could guarantee the survival of their establishments... In wartime, the keepers were keen to point out, the establishments would easily be turned into clinics.”

In 1936, Henri Sellier proposed a bill that would abolish arbitrary action by public authorities and the police, bring prostitutes within court jurisdiction, and make soliciting an offence. Driven by concern with venereal disease, this law, while advocating a turn away from arbitrary police and court action, actually strengthened their ability to persecute prostitutes by making soliciting an offense. Hence, the vice squads, whose power was supposed to be limited by the bill, reorganized and intensified their efforts to crack down on soliciting. Though generally viewed as an abolitionist bill, the Sellier bill was in practice a far cry from the kind of reform many feminists conceived.

Under the Vichy government, the enclosed brothel saw a new rise to prominence and with it the new strategies related to the prominence of eugenics movements. There was an increased amount of concern about preserving the health
of the soldiers and loose women were once again in need of containment. These two images from the late 1930's highlight the way in which women were not to be trusted. In Figure 12, a woman, who is clearly a prostitute, is represented as the face of death, and interestingly as the war itself. In Figure 13, the warning is against venereal disease and the woman is once again

"Come on in, I'll treat you right. I used to know your Daddy."


Figure 12
Hello boy friend, coming My way?

My girl friend spreads pyrants and Gonorrhoea, which unless properly treated may result in blindness, insanity, paralysis, premature death.

Figure 13
portrayed as death personified. Both images represent women, particularly prostitute women, as threats to soldiers' health. The discovery of penicillin in 1929 slightly altered the way venereal disease was viewed since the disease was no longer a death sentence. Though still associated with prostitutes and with sexual immorality, because the disease could be cured, the wayward man or woman could be cured as well. This dual "cure" captures the key elements in the mid-twentieth century position on venereal disease and prostitution. Concerned to achieve complete medical control over disease and its spreaders (assumed to be prostitutes) without condoning sexual behavior not channeled into propagating the race, the Vichy regime represents continuation of the ideals of regulationist discourse. Although brothels increased at this period, this should not be seen as an acceptance of extra-procreative behavior, but rather, a lapse back into the enclosure system.

Corbin argues that in the Vichy policy, "one finds the subtle mixture of traditionalism and technocratic modernity that characterized the regime." Its policy was to try to fight procurers, "who were seen as symbols of the immorality that had led to defeat," and to encourage enclosed prostitution under the maison de tolerance. Last, this regime strengthened "sanitary supervision" and gave more power to doctors and social service workers whose goals were to locate the infectors and bring them under the law and into treatment.

The brothels that had been set up during the Occupation became associated with German tyranny and French complicity with Nazism, so that after the Liberation, these old-style maisons were quickly destroyed. In this context, the prostitutes who continued to work during the Occupation, which often meant accompanying German soldiers or officers, were challenged as possible corroborators with Nazism. This was not unique to France: as this English cartoon suggests, Figure
fears of female spies masquerading as prostitutes suggested that these women were to be considered suspicious.

Corbin argues that the Liberation and the new measures on prostitution of 1946, called the Marthe Ricard law, “sounded the death knell of traditional neoregulationism. The then-dominant view that a rise in the birth rate should be encouraged revived the repopulationist discourse of the early years of the century and quietly encouraged prohibitionism”237 The maison de tolerance was abolished and new “sanitary and social national file” was established.238 This new file limited women’s ability to move in and out of prostitution and between milieus and may have been illegal given the wording of the law that no registration system should be set up.239

These new laws did not prohibit prostitution, but they caused the forms of prostitution to change. Perhaps unwittingly, these new laws increased the role of the pimp, “who now became an indispensable element in the smooth running of the system controlled by the owners of the hotels de passe.”24º Additionally, the increase in prohibitive mood and the expansion of police repression necessitated the protective functions of the pimp. Later laws in the 1950's expanded the definition of soliciting to “those whose attitude on the thoroughfare is of such a nature as to provoke debauchery” and of procuring so that the women could have no private life.241 Efforts towards reeducation and occupational training were taken to stop prostitution at its economic source, but these efforts were largely unsuccessful. France signed the United Nations Convention against prostitution and what was called the “white slave trade” in 1949. This international law assumed the woman involved in prostitution to be a victim and was built on the notion that prostitution was ever expanding through drawing unsuspecting and non-willful women into its clutches.242 Feminists in the nineteenth century had already used this myth of the white slave trade to arouse
support for abolitionism, and now that an abolitionist/prohibitionist mood had prevailed, these myths were written into law.\textsuperscript{243}
Many changes in ordinary life in the period from the late 1940’s to 1975 produced new forms of prostitution. The explosion of film and television, the liberalization of morals that allowed short skirts to become popular, the continued eroticization of working women and the prevalence of cars allowed more avenues for sexual practice. Prostitution was no exception. A set of new “needs” were produced in this process in which prostitutes came to serve as confidantes and pimps came to control the places and means of prostitutional activity rather than the direct profits from that activity. Prostitutes in Lyons at this time began to organize themselves on the sidewalk and began to look out for one another. The increase in what Corbin calls “long distance procuring,” meaning that it takes place outside of a particular milieu, has allowed the women more freedom to have personal lives separate from their “professional” lives.

All of these new changes are noted in the collection of essays edited by Claude Jaget called Prostitutes: Our Life, which attempts to present prostitute’s own words about their “condition.” This text serves as a useful piece of historical evidence and one of the only such materials available because of the lack of archival information on prostitution from this period. The text was conceived as an educational tool to help people understand what prostitutes do for a living and as a political tool to represent goals and motivations for the 1975 Prostitutes’ Strike in Lyons.

1975- The Prostitute’s Strike

The prostitutes’ strike in 1975 brought to the fore all of the current issues surrounding prostitution. They occupied a church called St. Nizier and hung a banner. Figure 15, reading “Our children don’t want their mothers in jail.” In occupying a church and playing on their role as mothers, the women represented
themselves as "normal" women doing legitimate work—work that supported their families—and as within religious order. They composed a "Group Statement," Figure 16, and a "List of Demands," Figure 17. They demanded recognition as legitimate workers, exposed the social double standard that punished them for a "service" created by client demand, and sought to educate the public about their lifestyles.

They called for the abolition of all laws against prostitution and demanded the release of state control over the milieu. They pointed out the hypocrisy involved in legislating about their work without their input and claimed that they were being persecuted because of old myths about women's sexuality and about prostitution.

Figure 15

Church of St. Nivier during the occupation by Lyons prostitutes. The banner reads: 'Our children don't want their mothers in jail.'
GROUP STATEMENT: DRAWN UP FOLLOWING THE FIRST MEETING OF THE COLLECTIVE FOR THE DEFENCE OF THE PROSTITUTES OF LYONS

1. Security
Six or seven prostitutes have been murdered since 1972. The most recent victims were Renée Granger and Chantal Rivier. These were ghastly murders and included torture. They haven't found the killers. We're also exposed to various attacks from all kinds of sadists, sadists, madmen, etc. Just recently, they arrested a man who molested eight girls. The last was very seriously hurt, and has been in the Edouard Herriot Hospital for three weeks. There are plenty of other cases like this. We draw your attention to the fact that:

a) Hotels used to provide a certain security — there were always people around. Nobody thinks working in hotels is ideal, far from it, since the hotel owners made a profit off it. But at least being able to work in hotels prevented murders.

b) Some girls, to get some minimal security, have tried to buy apartments together in twos and threes. They were told that setup was illegal, on the grounds of pimping, and that they risked prosecution.

c) No prostitute has the right to work in a furnished apartment. It's illegal.

The questions we are asking are: What measures have been taken so that the murders and violent attacks reported above don't happen again? What should be done to deal with this situation?

2. The abolition of repression

a) Fines. The offence in question is defined as follows: 'Behaviour likely to encourage debauchery'. There's no need to point out how vague and definition is. It seems that the mere fact of being known to the police as a prostitute and being in a public place or on the streets makes you liable to a fine, when you may be going to the cinema, walking your dog or doing your shopping. Some girls have been stopped when they were in a car. Others when they were out with their children.

Several years ago, the fines went up to 50 francs; now they're up to 150 francs. Among the women who attended the meeting, we discovered that in the last two weeks the number of fines has varied between two and ten per person. i.e. prostitutes in Lyons were paying out a sum ranging from 20 francs to 1,400 francs in those two weeks alone. Because prostitutes are under the control of various different police squads, they reported that it's not unusual to be given one, two, even three fines on the same day.

b) An end to the brutalities we're subjected to by the police. These brutalities are clearly illegal. But then, what's legal about police raids?

c) The bars. It seems that the decision by police headquarters to close a bar just on suspicion. On the other hand, certain well-known bars which are notorious for prostitution have stayed open. Why?

To sum up, those who attended Friday's meeting are aware that here we're only touching on a few of the problems we're facing. Problems linked to the acknowledgment of prostitution. Or rather, linked to the problem of the 'tolerance' of prostitution, which in fact is what exists, and which allows huge profits to be made from prostitution, either by the State (such the system in force in Lyons) or by a few individuals in the German system, for example: all thanks to the work of young women who are exploited by society without any respect for them. Doesn't the problem lie in this hypocritical 'tolerance' — one of the problems at least?

Figure 16
WHAT WE DEMAND
1. Abolition of article 34: incitement to debauchery. No more fines, no more summonses. We propose: non-punitive taxes giving us the right to welfare and pensions, like every French woman who is a mother.
2. We affirm that prostitution is a job determined by the sexual needs of one part of society.
3. We want to be full citizens.

WE REFUSE FIRMLY
1. The reopening of brothels, even in their modern and luxurious form of Eros Centres.
2. To be civil servants of sex completely without freedom.
3. To be nationalised.
4. To be municipalised.

OUR IMMEDIATE DEMANDS
1. The dropping of all jail sentences facing the people in Lyons.
3. To meet a government representative capable of understanding the problems of prostitutes and finding ground for agreement.
4. Reopening of the hotels in the neighbourhoods where prostitutes work.
5. Enforcement of the laws allowing the reintegration of prostitute women into society.

Figure 17

They also claimed to agree in essence with abolishing prostitution, but they argued one should accomplish this through ending poverty not by ending prostitutes. The 'bad faith' attempts by the government to prohibit prostitution but not its root cause, in their understanding, poverty, were another form of moral hypocrisy that they could not accept. This ineffective government position is reflected in Francoise Giroud's, the Secretary of State for Women's Affairs, silence on the issue. When the strike occurred the only response she had to it was that she didn't want to make a statement of support for the women because she did not want prostitution and women's status to be conflated.249

Prompted by the discoveries of two 'known' prostitutes who had been murdered, one found in a garbage dump and one in a bathtub in an apartment, the
prostitutes of Lyons held a meeting in June to draw up a collective statement.250

These were not the only murders and it is perhaps a central part of our late twentieth century mythology about prostitution that its practitioners are more vulnerable to rape, murder and many other forms of abuse exacerbated by its marginal legal position.251 The dangers of sexual vulnerability that often influence women's behavior, particularly at night, are often associated with a dark city. In this way, the early nineteenth century public health and regulationist concern with controlling the threats lurking in the urban wilds is still alive in the late twentieth century. For prostitute women, these dangers are enhanced because they lack institutional resources and protection against such forms of violence.

Self-Representation: The Prostitutes' Testimonies

The accounts of the six prostitutes printed in Jaget's collection include striking similarities. Nearly all of them note a distinction between the brothel and the street. They argue that on the street, one has more choice of clients and can "be one's own boss,"252 while in brothels or eros centers, one must take whoever one is given in order to keep a job. Also, in a brothel there is a detailed schedule that outlines all slots of time in a woman's day so that the madam or boss is always guaranteed to make as much money as possible.253 Another woman points out that in the brothel, though constrained, one was sheltered from the risks of police repression and fines, while in the street one can make more money but is vulnerable to arrest, fines and threatening clients.254 This division is exacerbated and the women's freedom of movement and to work are more constrained by strict laws against procuring or pimping in which two women sharing a flat for working can be considered illegal.255 One woman argues that there is an inherent hypocrisy in the system of eros centers
since the "brothels are the real pimps." Brothels are where the women earn less, and have less choice about with whom they exchange.

Another common theme in their accounts is about the stigma associated with prostitutes and prostitution. One woman argues that "if there were less repression, if the girls were less driven into a corner, I think the prostitute wouldn’t feel the same, people would see her differently, and above all, prostitution wouldn’t go on for so long." She continues to argue that it is the marginalization of the prostitute that leads to her becoming a prostitute and nothing else. Another woman notes that the system is set up so that once you are in it, you cannot get out. The money and the police form two barriers to a woman leaving. Certainly, these boundaries were strengthened by the more strict laws against solicitation, increased fines and the continued (illegal) file on prostitutes, which served to fix their identity as prostitutes and to undermine their ability to change professions.

Another commonality in their testimonies is their identification of prostitution with women's condition or status. Unlike Giroud, who wished to avoid this equation, these women wanted to fit their strike action into a feminist activist context. They sought to draw out parallels between women generally and prostitutes. As I have already noted, they did this with the banner that represented them as mothers, but they did it in a few other ways too. One of these methods of association was to point out that "all women's lives have a prostitute side to them. For a 'straight' woman, it may not be cash she gets in exchange, but it's not so different." This analysis is similar to the current socialist/Marxist feminist position on prostitution, which argues that marriage, in particular, is another form of prostitution. Another woman argues that "curiosity about these women, the prostitutes, who you know nothing about but who you know very well represent
something really fundamental for women generally. A sort of extreme situation, an archetypal.

Indeed, the way that prostitution symbolizes the key tensions of being a woman and of feminist theorizing about what it means to be a woman has occupied our cultural imagination since the nineteenth century. The wording of Decree no. 47 2253 of November 5, 1947, "defines the prostitute as, 'any woman who habitually consents to sexual intercourse with an indeterminate number of individuals in return for payment.' It's immediately obvious that, according to this definition, many more women could be labelled prostitutes than those the police put on file." The symbolic role of the prostitute, it seems, cannot be separated from the role of women in a sexist society. The law defining prostitution disallows an adequate distinction between a prostitute, as a distinct entity, and a woman who has no certain number of sexual partners and who receives some form of "payment."

The law against pimping is similarly vague. It says that

those subject to prosecution under the law on pimping shall be not only those who profit from a prostitute’s earnings, but also: those who maintain regular relationships with prostitutes without being able to give proof of means corresponding to their way of life; those who frustrate efforts undertaken by organisations concerned with the assistance of prostitutes and their re-education.

This law is sufficiently vague to disallow prostitute women any personal life or "regular relationship" and to attempt to legislate that the women not enjoy or wish to remain in their profession despite the fact that the state can run brothels. This indicates the continuation of certain elements of the early regulationist schema in which the women could practice their profession only under the gaze of the state run system.

This leads to my final analysis of prostutional forms in the twentieth century. While Corbin argues that disenclosure characterized the modern forms of
prostitution, I think this needs to be more carefully analyzed. Although his claim is true to the extent that brothels were giving way to more “disenclosed” forms and regulationists and other parties to debates on prostitution seemed to move away from the enclosed surveillance of Parent-Duchatelet, prostitutes now were becoming enclosed by not being allowed to find “enclosed” spaces in which to practice. While they were not enclosed within maisons, the women experienced a kind of enclosure due to the lack stable places in which to work. For example, two women could not rent or buy a flat together from which to work, because this violated the law. Additionally, they had a difficult time finding hotels that would accept them for fear of fines for procuring. This lack of space within which to practice their trade forced them to the streets and to back alleys, abandoned or moving cars, and other such temporary (disenclosed) spaces. In turn, it seems logical to assume that this increased their vulnerability to murder, rape and other forms of violence because it left them without “safe spaces.” Further, the prohibitionist tendencies of the 1950’s through the strike pushed them further to the margins of the law so that legal protection was not available nor was it sought out by the women themselves.

All of these aspects of their work are captured in their Group Statement, which draws out certain historical questions about Corbin’s characterization of new forms of prostitution. One of the problems for the study of twentieth century prostitution is the lack of archival and statistical information. This is exacerbated by the interaction of myths about prostitution reflected in research and studies and the “unregistered” forms of prostitution which elude classification. While the accounts of the prostitutes themselves put forth in Jaget’s book provide a useful historical record, they too have political aims and their statements are therefore difficult to evaluate. This is an area that needs more attention but which is beyond the scope of this paper.
Chapter 7: Conclusion

In conclusion, the representations of prostitutes and prostitution are inseparable from the fears, anxieties and complexities of modern industrial, and urban life. The uneasy divide between “honest” women and prostitute women represented in the regulationist literature and in the social debates that, through the ideology of solidarism, brought concern about gender roles to the fore can be seen to operate in our contemporary context. We still search for an answer about gender relations in the metaphor of prostitution. The problems of male/female heterosexual relationships are often criticized as embodying the same kind of economic and fetishistic relations that I have argued was produced in the nineteenth century. Current social services for the syphilis of the millenium, AIDS, still target prostitutes and sex workers as the primary agents of spreading disease and we generally accept the notion that poverty not pleasure motivates women to engage in prostitution.

My project has not been to disprove these associations, for certainly some are true; but I have sought to contextualize these constructions. I have tried to illustrate that though actual threats have historically prompted these kinds of social debates, the ideological problems of discourse cannot be avoided. For example, though it is true that many women enter prostitution to avoid poverty, this should not be taken to be their only motivation, since some will argue that they also find pleasure there. To deny that pleasure or conversely to focus solely upon it is to erase the complexity of the issue and to fall into this historical pattern of representing the prostitute without his/her input and without a consideration of the limitations imposed by discourse.

Similarly, I have tried to raise the issue of discourse and its pervasiveness by showing how artist, writers, and feminist movements, have both reified and
challenged various aspects of the regulationist discourse about prostitution. Often, the only way to make oppositional arguments in a context of domination are to appropriate the “master’s tools,” as Audre Lorde calls them. The debates about prostitution are no exception. One of the problems for contemporary feminists, and I would argue for historians as well, is how to represent historical practices without erasing the individuals involved and without ignoring the discursive production of those individuals.

Though usually conceived as mutually exclusive sides of a theoretical debate, with “realists” on one side and “nominalists” on the other, I would advise that scholars reconceive their task by attempting to pay attention to both discursive aspects of history, which are unavoidable in text-based historical research, and the actions of individuals and groups. The problem, of course, is that often the recorded actions of individuals that exist in historical texts are all we have to work with for recreating a context, and the question becomes how is one to distinguish between the actuality and the discursive? This is a flawed approach in my opinion because to truly realize the pervasiveness of discourse necessitates that one re-think what constitutes actuality.

For my study of prostitution, this has raised questions about how I can know what the women actually involved in prostitution felt or thought, since the regulationist project depended for its existence on their silence. Also, even if their silence was not insured, how could they speak? What words would they use? Would not their own words re-present them as objects of regulationist discourse? My attempt to answer these kinds of questions had led me to point out the overlap between prostitutes’ self-representations and the representations of them by others, particularly noting the differences and similarities between nineteenth and twentieth century representations. The issue of “self-representation” for women was becoming
a concern for women in the late nineteenth century, but the accounts of prostitutes were not common in debates about regulationism, except for rare exceptions. Perhaps it took a cultural moment like the 1970's women's movement, which was simultaneous with the French students' movements of 1968, to allow prostitute voice to be heard. Yet, their voices still met resistance from Giroud, the official representative of women's interests, and from many feminist groups uncomfortable with supporting prostitutes for fear of supporting prostitution.

This problem is familiar to any one writing the history of women since s/he immediately must confront the paradox of that project. If women are hidden from history and if historical texts serve to further obscure them from us, how are we to find them? Early attempts to write the history of women focused on merely bringing back female figures, the "great women" approach, which suffered from ignoring questions about how subjects were produced. Later attempts to focus on the discursive production of an entity called woman often ignore the "real" women and what they accomplished.

I have tried to use both approaches, though, as I mentioned earlier, there often were no actual records of what the women themselves did or how they felt about it. I have tried, then, to show how the production of all women as potential prostitutes shaped the avenues by which they could challenge the social order and their place within it. I have also tried to examine the ways in which the regulationist project could not possibly achieve the kind of total surveillance that it desired and inevitably was subverted by women escaping its gaze. In some sense, this elusiveness was not something the women did or were, as regulationists would have us believe, but was something produced by the very nature of the regulatory system.

Another aim I hoped to achieve was to expose the twist in logic whereby regulationist discourse assigned behaviors and characteristics to specific group of
women in a cultural context in which “woman” functioned as a term that included those qualities already. The attempt to distinguish prostitute from “honest” women was already complicated by the cultural construction of all women as potentially prostitutes. As contemporary feminists have pointed out, the difference between a kept woman and a married woman was very slight given the denial of economic power and political constituency to women in the nineteenth century. The production of “woman” as fetish in which she is put on the market as a harbinger of social ills in need of re-education or regulation, and as the embodiment of a host of tensions in modern life, indicates that all women were involved in the symbolic use of prostitution. This symbolic function shows us that we are still grappling with the same issues that preoccupied our nineteenth century French observers and that we are building on their legacy.

One of the conclusions I was forced to make in doing this project was that historical research about issues of sexuality, particularly marginal forms of sexuality, is extremely difficult. I have already addressed the problem of too few sources in the last chapter, but throughout the paper I was struck by the way in which literary portraits, pseudo-scientific studies and other such sociological studies are the only “evidence” modern historians have to reconstruct prostitutional activity. This is not an empirical science, not because I don’t want it to be, but because it cannot be. The ideological assumptions of the “scientific” accounts of prostitution have made the project of writing the social history of prostitution inevitably fall into writing the history of the representations of prostitution.

Throughout my research I continually stumbled onto discursive productions of prostitutes rather than the women themselves. This has advantages and disadvantages. One of the disadvantages is that we still do not know exactly what these women did, why they did it or, perhaps most importantly, how they felt about
it. Certainly any academic study, particularly an historical one suffers from this burden since all we have to study from the nineteenth century are documents. These documents force us onto the terrain of language study, and hurl us into the realm of discursive theorizing. A second problem with this approach is that it further obscures the question of women's desire. None of the sources I consulted, even the literary ones, mention women's desire. This is hardly surprising since part of the project of feminism had been to point out this erasure of women's sexuality from historical record. But, in important ways, this is a key problem for feminism. Where are the records of women's desire? How would we know them if we saw them? Also, assuming that we find a text or representation of women's desire, how will we view it? For a study of prostitution these are key issues. Unfortunately, it is not clear to me that we would recognize or accept the kinds of discursive productions of women's desire that we could find, even if they had been authored by women, since women also use the language that exists to express themselves.

This consideration leads me to the advantages of discursive study. It forces us to ask what kinds of language were present in a society and a certain time to express desire, or anything else. For example, feminists used the discourse of propriety to resist the double standard in their movements against prostitution. They adopted an apparently sexist discourse that represented women as primarily housewives and mothers in order to challenge the sexual double standard. But what was their desire? Did they have desire, or were they upholding a discourse that presented them as frigid? Could they after deploying the “femme au foyer” argument, lay claim to assertive female sexual desire? This is the kind of paradox that causes empirical scientists much grief. However, it draws one's attention to the ways in which 'subjects' of study are not simply discovered, but are created and must be viewed as sites of contested meaning. In this way, discursive study opens up
questions about the social construction of identity, sexuality, etc., and about the ways in which empirical studies are flawed in seeking one neat and tidy answer to a complicated question. Perhaps, there is something about sexuality itself that eludes a clear classification so that we are constantly required to re-evaluate and re-invent our notions of desire. Whether this is an advantage or disadvantage to discursive study depends on one's political position; I would count it among the advantages.

It has been an advantage to me because I thought that I would find two accounts of prostitution, one authored by male observers, and policy makers and another written by women, feminists and prostitutes. Perhaps because of my own education in the politics of identity, I expected a neat portrait of prostitution in which beliefs, facts and the social location and/or identity of the observer lined up to provide a coherent and unified account. What I found was much more complicated.

On one hand, regulationist discourse was inescapable for feminists, socialists, and even, in the 1975 strike accounts, for the prostitutes themselves. They all used the assumptions, images and constructs of this medico-moral framework. However, there were differences between them in political goals. When Parent-Duchatelet claims that prostitutes love children, he is enacting a myth about their assumed similarity to children and about their inherent feminine desire for a maternal role. When "C" in Jaget's collection argues that "for them (pros) children are something really sacred," she is trying to put forth an image of the "pros" as like normal women in order to gain acceptance against what she calls "taboos."266 Despite their different political or practical goals, both arguments try to connect prostitute women with "normal" women in an attempt to make a generalization about their "natures." Both are essentially "women," which means they must love children. The banner, as "C" points out, highlights this attempt by the prostitutes occupying St. Nizier to construct a "respectable" image. Are these arguments the same? Certainly
they both reflect the power of regulationist discourse in shaping the kinds of claims one can or cannot make. I would say yes and no. The prostitute’s accounts express sentiments at once within and outside of this discourse. Their aims were not to further surveillance and impose moral/medical penalties on prostitutes, but to remove these kinds of obstacles. Despite this difference, or perhaps because of it, they had to deploy the key tenets of regulationist dogma.

This problem is not unique to twentieth century debates about prostitution, but shaped the nineteenth century feminist responses to regulation as well. In the context of feminism, the debate becomes one about whether prostitution is liberating or exploitative to women. Wendy Chapkis argues that in the current “sex wars” “the prostitute (thus) comes to function as both the most literal of sexual slaves and as the most subversive of sexual agent within a sexist social order.” For nineteenth century feminists involved in abolitionist campaigns, like their twentieth century “radical feminist” counterparts, the exploitative nature of prostitution is proven by accounts of a “white slave trade.” This notion provoked enormous protests in the late nineteenth century, especially in London, where abolitionist feminists picked up this cause as part of their battle against the “French” system, in which, they claimed, women were not only raped medically by doctors’ use of the speculum, but were effectively being made into sexual slaves by being forced to practice prostitution to enrich their “protector/pimp.” Similarly, Kathleen Barry’s analysis of prostitution continues this theme of innocent women being exploited by powerful and cruel men in her book Female Sexual Slavery. Chapkis argues that “the belief in a pervasive sexual slave trade in the absence of widespread evidence suggests that the notion of white slavery was not dependent on large numbers of documented cases. Instead, it was fueled by more general anxieties about changing gender, sex, class and race relations at the turn of the century.” I would argue that this is not unique to the
turn of the century, but that this association is still shaped by our anxieties about sex, gender, class and race.

While there are surely exploitative practices that occur in commercial sex, as in any other capitalistic business venture in our global economy, that are related to sexist practices, the exclusive focus on this exploitative element, particularly when supported by largely non-existent evidence about a white slave trade, ignores the other ideological constructs that produce prostitution as a symbol of social ills.

As Carol Vance argues in her collection *Pleasure and Danger*, "to focus only on pleasure and gratification ignores the patriarchal structure in which women act, yet to speak only of sexual violence and oppression ignores women's experience with sexual agency and choice and unwittingly increases the sexual terror and despair in which women live." This has been the conclusion I have made in this study by realizing that our modern preoccupation with prostitution as either revolutionary or exploitative, but not a little of each, is rooted in the discourses produced within the context of debates about regulationism. In France, the case I have examined, these debates can be traced through the 1975 strike, in which the persistence of regulation stereotypes can be seen. In feminist theory in the West, this debate cannot be viewed as separate from larger societal constructions of femininity and from the association of female bodies with the social body.
ENDOTES

4 Gilfoyle, p. 139.
6 Coleman, William, *Death is a Social Disease*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1982, p. 34.
7 Ibid., p. 20.
9 Schneider, p. 7.
11 Coleman, p. 43.
12 Ibid., p. 41.
14 Coleman, p. 172.
15 Ibid., p. 173.
16 Ibid., p. 57.
18 For a discussion of the problem posed by reconciling the ideal of liberty with the reality of class strife, see Coleman, p. 92.
19 Matlock, p. 194.
21 Ibid., p. 190.
22 This mirrors regulationists’ preoccupation with the visibility of prostitutes in that both were concerned with shifting the space in which sexual activity could be expressed to an enclosed milieu that avoids spectacle and is properly ordered and contained.
harmonizing class conflict. She views solidarism’s policies as a means of reinforcing gender roles.

26 Ibid., p. 147.
29 Scott, p. 93.
30 Perrot, p. 123.
31 This is not to say that this ideology did not constrain middle-class women as well, it certainly did, but that working-class women were already implicated in societal “plots,” to borrow Matlock’s terminology, that placed them in a precarious position with respect to discourse of propriety.
32 Stewart, p. 12.
34 Ibid., p. 15.
35 See Scott and Stewart for a full discussion of this exclusion.
36 Accampo, p. 2.
39 Ibid., p. 16.
40 Ibid., p. 17.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
44 See Steven Hause for a full discussion of this argument where he notes that although a degree of this argument was ideological, based on constructions of women as irrational and more susceptible to emotional responses, women did in fact represent the largest constituency who attended church and practiced religion.
45 Hause, p. 15.
46 Ibid., p. 18.
47 Hubertine Auclert quoted in Hause, p. 18.
48 Hause, p. 18.
49 Ibid., 15.
50 Ibid., p. 16.
51 Ibid., p. 18.
52 For an excellent analysis of the equality-difference paradox, see Joan Scott’s Only Paradoxes to Offer, which deals with this era of feminist agitation and the limits of the tactics available to them.
53 Hause, p. 22.
54 Ibid.
55 Ibid.
56 Accampo, p. 15.
57 Hause, p. 22.
58 Ibid., p. 24.
59 Ibid.
60 Foucault, The History of Sexuality, p. 104.
61 Coleman, p. 97.
63 Corbin, p. 4.
64 Chevalier, pp. 48-49.
65 Corbin, p. 5.
66 Ibid., p. 9.
68 Corbin, p. 10.
69 Corbin, p. 77.
70 Ibid., p. 78.
72 Ibid., p. xvii.
73 Ibid., p. xviii.
74 Ibid., p. xx.
75 Corbin, p. 6.
76 Ibid., p. 7.
78 Coleman, p. 108.
79 Parent-Duchatelet, pp. 95-127.
80 Corbin, pp. 7-8.
81 Ibid., p. 8.
82 Harsin, p. 103.
83 Ibid.
84 Harsin, p. 79.
85 Matlock, p. 61.
86 Foucault, The History of Sexuality, p. 4.
87 Matlock, p. 4.
88 Ibid., p. 3.
89 Corbin, p. 128.
90 Matlock, p. 106.
91 Beraud quoted in Matlock, pp. 106-107.
93 Zola, p. 71.
94 Ibid., p. 73.
95 Parent-Duchatelet, p. 92. This was a common cultural assumption of the time, which held that women could have an inherent tendency towards debauchery and degeneration, particularly sexual depravity.
96 Corbin, p. 133.
97 Zola, p. 234.
98 Ibid.
99 Ibid., p. 236.
100 Corbin, p. 130.
101 Zola, p. 290.
102 Ibid., p. 295.
Corbin, p. 128.

Ibid., p. 115.

Ibid., p. 116.

Ibid., p. 118. Also see Chapters 1 and 2 for a discussion of solidarism and the themes of bourgeois morality that shaped social debates.

Ibid.

Ibid., p. 186.

Harsin, p. 248.

Ibid., p. 279.

Ibid.

Ibid., p. 248.


Ibid.


Clayton, pp., 114-115.

Corbin, p. 143.

Ibid., p. 168.

Ibid., pp. 168-185.

Ibid.

Harsin, p. 317.

Ibid., pp. 316-317.

Ibid., p. 322. I am undecided on this point. It seems to me that they mutually reinforce one another so that separating them is very difficult, a difficulty that is compounded by the lack of tangible evidence of desire or a shift in pleasure.

Corbin, p. 214.

Ibid., p. 216.

Ibid., p. 217.

Ibid., p. 218.

Ibid., p. 219.

Ibid., p. 225.

Ibid.

Nye, p. 99.

Ibid., p. 135.

Ibid., p. 158.

Republicans did not often stress that sexual immorality should be regulated, since they strove to minimize governmental power over individual or “private” concerns like sexuality.


Ibid.

Ibid., pp. 76 and 258.


Ibid., p. 170.

Ibid., pp. 172-173.

Ibid., pp. 173-174.
The continuation of the tensions involved in feminist discourse on prostitution will be examined later in the last chapter, "The Twentieth Century," and in the Conclusion.

This tendency to identify courtesans with the slow internal decay of familial and social order was also popular in the naturalist literature of the period. Writers, like Zola and Balzac, employed the image of this socially mobile prostitute to explore the precariousness of family, wealth, and morality in mid to late nineteenth century society. In this way, all three discourses, literary, feminist and regulationist, overlap in their treatment of the threat posed by the courtesan.

There were some exceptions to this tendency as some feminists argued that marriage itself should be re-conceptualized as an opportunity for sexual fulfillment through equal companionship, though these arguments were not as common as the more repressive versions. Further it is possible that feminists' support of a more strict sexual morality exacerbated the association of working-class women with sexual outlets or, as Parent-Duchatelet argued, with seminal drains for the frustrated sexual desires of middle-class men by not challenging their own association with exclusively reproductive sexuality.

See Schneider's Quality and Quantity for a detailed treatment of how public health, social hygiene and eugenics became associated in the twentieth century.


173 Ibid., p. 336.
174 Clayton, pp. 236-238.
175 Ibid., pp. 239-240
176 Ibid., p. 7.
177 Ibid., p. 12.
179 Ibid., pp. 82-85.
180 Ibid., pp. 85-86.
181 Ibid., p. 201.
182 Ibid.
183 Ibid., p. 197.
186 Ibid., p. 50.
187 Ibid., pp. 54 and 60.
188 Clayton, p. 96.
189 Zola, pp. 4 and 36.
191 Bernheimer, p. 96.
192 Clayton, p. 60.
193 Ibid., p. 63.
194 Ibid.
195 Zola quoted in Clayton, p. 64.
197 Zola, p. 431.
198 Ibid., p. 435. Her “burning” could also be interpreted as her realization that if her husband was destroying their fortune with Nana she should also be so entitled.
199 Clayton, p. 57.
200 Hunt, p. 242.
201 Ibid., p. 23.
203 Ibid., p. 100.
205 Ibid., pp. 72-74.
208 Clayton, p. 99.
209 Bernheimer, p. 104.
210 Ibid., pp. 103-104.
211 Ibid., p. 115.
212 Ibid., pp. 104-107.
213 Ibid., p. 115.
214 Ibid., p. 109.
215 Ibid.
216 ibid., p. 125.
217 Clayton, p. 69.
218 Ibid.
219 ibid., p. 70.
220 Ibid., p. 75.
221 Ibid., p. 75.
222 Quoted in Clayton, p. 76.
223 Ibid., p. 79.
224 Ibid., p. 70.
225 Clayton, p. 151.
226 Ibid.
227 Corbin, p. 332.
228 Ibid., p. 333.
229 Ibid., p. 335.
230 Ibid., pp. 336-337.
231 Ibid., p. 338.
232 Ibid., p. 339.
233 Ibid., p. 342.
234 Images from Gubar, Susan, "'This is My Rifle, This is My Gun': World War II and the Blitz on Women," Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars, eds. Higonnet, Margaret Randolph, et.al., Yale University Press, New Haven, 1987, pp. 244 and 245.
235 Corbin, p. 344.
236 Image reprinted from Gubar, Susan, p. 243.
237 Corbin, p. 347.
238 Ibid., p. 350.
240 Corbin, p. 351.
241 Ibid., p. 352.
242 Stetson, p. 354.
243 I am not trying to argue that there were not any cases of women/girls being sold into prostitution by parents, men, etc., but that the number of cases was small and documentation of anything extensive enough to be called a "white slave trade" did not exist, except, perhaps, in metaphor.
244 Corbin, p. 356.
246 Re-printed from Jaget, pp. 36 and 19.
247 Jaget, pp. 16-17.
248 Ibid., pp. 22-23.
249 Stetson, p. 176.
250 Jaget, pp. 33-34, See Figure 16.
253 Ibid., p. 167.
255 “D,” quoted in Jaget, p. 130.
See Delacoste, Frederique and Alexander, Priscilla, Sex Work: Writings by Women in the Sex Industry for accounts of the complexities of prostitution and other forms of "sex work." Also see Vance, Carol, Pleasure and Danger, Weeks, Jeffrey, Sexuality and Its Discontents, Chapkis, Wendy, Live Sex Acts, and Reconcilable Differences for a discussion of the tensions in feminism around issues of sexuality, pleasure, and coercion.


In fields other than history, this debate is conceived as one between the materialists and the post-structuralists or post-modernists, with standpoint theorists and identity politics falling somewhere in between the two extremes, though often leaning more towards the materialist conception of women’s condition.

See Judith Walkowitz’s Prostitution in Victorian Society for a discussion of English feminists’ arguments against the medical examination and against the “French system.”

Barry, Kathleen, Female Sexual Slavery.

Chapkis, p. 42.

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