The Prostitution of Sexuality

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A cross nation-states pimping, “living off the earnings of a prostitute,” is illegal. But propstitution movements in the West now propose to decriminalize pimping so that pimps can be treated as lovers or husbands, not enslavers of prostitute women. But it is a fact of prostitution that once a woman “tricks” for a man, she is never again not his “whore.” He thinks of her as such, whether or not he is otherwise known to her as husband, lover, brother, or father.

In all the world regions, estimates from organizations addressing the exploitation of women in prostitution, including some prostitution groups, show that 80% to 95% of all prostitution is pimp controlled. While 53% of the women interviewed by Evelina Giobbe in a study of prostitution were brought to it by a pimp, 90% of the women had pimps while in prostitution. ¹ To analyze pimping in prostitution from a feminist perspective, it is necessary to determine whether or not women in prostitution are in situations
they can leave. As I found, pimping is a condition of female sexual slavery.

*Female sexual slavery is present in ALL situations where women and girls cannot change the immediate conditions of their existence; where regardless of how they got into those conditions they cannot get out; and where they are subject to sexual violence and exploitation.*

Some women who willingly try out prostitution do not realize until later that they cannot leave. When they try to leave they learn that they must escape their pimps. In attempting to escape, women face physical brutality and torture. One 16-year-old who was procured in Minneapolis described the “going-away present” her pimp gave her when she tried to leave:

Well, first he put his foot in my face which broke my nose and knocked me out and I got out the door—we lived on the third floor of this building and I couldn’t get out the door in time before he caught me and there was just punches in the face and he had long fingernails which scarred up my body pretty much and kicking because I kept falling on the floor from being hit in the head. . . . I finally got out the door and was running out the middle of the street and he was trying to drag me into the place again when the police came.2

Female sexual slavery includes not only women in prostitution who are controlled by pimps but wives in marriages who are controlled by husbands and daughters who are incestuously assaulted by fathers. My definition of female sexual slavery breaks away from traditional distinctions between “forced” and “free” prostitution and between wives and whores. When women and/or girls are held *over time, for sexual use*, they are in conditions of slavery. Specifically, female sexual slavery is not an illusive condition; the word “slavery” is not merely rhetorical. Slavery is an objective social condition that requires escape in order for the victim to get out of it. Slavery is one aspect of the violation of women and children in prostitution, in marriage, and in families.

However, prostitution that is not pimp controlled is not slav-
ery. It is another form of sexual exploitation. Sexual exploitation and female sexual slavery are each different aspects or dimensions of the sexual relations of power in the patriarchal oppression of women.

*The Pimp-Whore Relationship*

According to Melinda, a former San Francisco prostitute,

Once a woman starts hoing [whoring] for a man, there’s no way out—unless she runs. Once I started, my man wasn’t going to let it stop. He wasn’t a flashy pimp. He was a lazy good-for-nothing who leched off of women!

The first time I came home without enough money and he put his foot in my ass—that’s when I realized I was his ho and he was my pimp and that’s the way it was going to be. Then the beatings were regular. He’d hit me up side my head with a 2 by 4 or a dog chain. When I was pregnant he’d kick me in the stomach. He put me in a tub and tried to drown me once. . . .

Pimps have two ways of holding on to women. One is verbal abuse, psychological beatings where they make you feel like you are worthless, like you’re trash. The other is fear. Beatings are the other way he’ll keep her because by having so much fear in her heart she is afraid to leave him. Yet by that time I was so much in love with him it really didn’t matter as long as he was there. When he put his arms around me nothing could hurt me. When he told me he loved me I believed everything would work out all right. I’d been alone for so long and he’d told me I’d be with him for the rest of my life.

Melinda recounted some of the “escape” valves she devised to relieve the pressure temporarily. She considered long evening dinners and drinks with her girlfriend before they would start working the streets together to be an “escape,” a time when she was away from it all. Prison was also temporary escape. “I got busted left and right. I knew if I’d get convicted that would be one way I could get away from my man for maybe four months. I could get away to regroup my mind to deal with another year.” But these
escapes were temporary as long as she was emotionally dependent on him.

A prostitute woman may be able to divert her pimp's attention away from her by bringing another woman to him. If she can convince a woman on the streets to "choose" her pimp and if he accepts the woman, she may get some relief from his attention and she may even get an opportunity to leave. But when a woman tries to escape from the life, whether or not there are other women around, she will invariably be hunted down. If she goes to relatives or friends, her pimp knows to look for her there. Once he locates her, he will "sweet talk" her (until he gets her alone) by telling her how much he has missed her, how he had lost his mind the last time he had beat her and could never do that again, and how miserable and lonely life is without her. This line of sweet talk, just like procuring strategies, is the same across cultures.

In San Francisco in 1977, Joey was convicted and sentenced for pimping and pandering. Jessica began dating Joey in January 1975, when she was 19. Soon after she fell in love with him, he began to talk to her about the easy money to be made in prostitution. According to Jessica, he told her that "within a month or two I could get him a car and I could get myself a car and we would travel around the world." He was persistent and convinced her to try prostitution if she really loved him. He instructed her on how to approach customers and set prices. He got her false identification with a new name "so that you can have a life under your real name that won't be soiled."

She did not succeed. When she came home 3 nights in a row without any money, he began to slap her around. For a year and a half the beatings increased. She eventually realized that despite her love for him, her dreams were not going to come true. She decided to leave him, and that was when she realized the extent of her enslavement.

He hunted her down and burst into her aunt's house, breaking down the door. His physical and verbal abuse terrorized her. He left without her but returned 3 days later.
He told me to bring my baby. So I got the baby and stuff. And we got to the freeway going towards Oakland. . . . I went with him because there was no other way out. The back yard was all fenced up and I knew—the door was already pushed open, it couldn’t close—I knew if I didn’t walk out, he would come and get me. We got on the freeway. He asked me about an incident that happened when I first left him and he accused me of lying to him and he hit me in my nose. It started really bleeding bad. Then he said “I’m going to pull off, take the next exit off and beat your ass until you can’t move.” And I kept asking him, “What about Michael?” Because Michael [her baby] was right in the back. He was looking at me with the blood on me. He just said, “You’re going to get it now.” We got off the freeway and he started beating me real bad . . . hitting me with his fists and trying to turn my neck. I lost track of how many times he hit me. I just know he hit me so many times that after a while I was so weak, and then he said “I’m not going to hurt myself hitting you.” And so he went to the truck and got the base of a jack and he hit me on the head.

He took her home with him. His other prostitute, her stable sister, seeing the severity of her condition, helped her get out and call the police a few days later. When she got away, the police took her to the hospital, where she found that her skull was fractured.³

Do all pimps treat their prostitutes in these ways? The Council for Prostitution Alternatives found that of 55 women in their program in 1990–91, 63% “were horribly beaten by pimps an average of 58 times per year.”⁴ Many women do not know the full range of a pimp’s wrath until they try to leave. Considering pimps’ control and violence, it is not surprising that in 1980 Mimi Silbert reported that 41% of the prostitutes she studied found no advantages to being with a pimp and only 4% indicated that they loved their pimp.⁵

Rules of the Pimp

Regardless of their race, and regardless of whether they operate on the street, from a house, or in higher levels of organized gangs,
all pimps have a clear rundown on the pimping rules. They see themselves as players running a game. After he retired from the life, notorious pimp Iceberg Slim called this knowledge “whorology.” The first rule is, “The best pimps keep a steel lid on their emotions and I was one of the iciest . . . any good pimp is his own best company. His inner life is so rich with cunning and scheming to out-think his whores.”  

This knowledge is learned and passed on from one pimp to the next on the streets and in prisons. A favored pimp philosophy likens the game to movies: the pimp is the producer and director and he runs everything according to his own will. Iceberg Slim explained the best philosophy he ever heard while in prison: “I picture the human mind as a movie screen. . . . Son, there is no reason except a stupid one for anybody to project on that screen anything that will worry him or dull that vital edge. After all, we were the absolute bosses of the whole theatre and show in our minds. We even write the script.”

The movie-set analogy appears in a contract confiscated from a pimp in a Washington, D.C., raid in 1977. The terms of the contract read,

You are reading this because you have passed one of the requirements to become a member of the illustrious family of ———. This life is just like a large scale movie production with me as the producer and you as the star. The world is your audience for the entire universe is your stage. It is also like a large scale business; you are the stockholders. In this business there is a president, director, and a teacher and a treasurer. All of these offices are held by me. In this business, there is no room for confusion. Anyone or anything opposing my will must be and will be destroyed.

Pimps exploit girls’ boredom that results from traditional female socialization, which leaves many young girls looking for excitement and glamour in their lives. One pimp wrote about the exploitable vulnerability of many teenage girls:

Here we have a group of “have-nots,” plain women who have, as a result of their plainness, lived plain unexciting lives, perpetuating their drab, plain existence, their drab morality on a potentially beautiful girl
child. . . . Mothers, teachers, school nurses, aunts, grandmothers, etc. in collusion to put a beautiful girl child in her place. . . .

Most potentially beautiful women arrive at the age of seventeen or eighteen for all intents and purposes a shell . . . like an unfinished house which is potentially a mansion; while the structure may be there, it needs to be finished on the outside . . . a woman who is potentially beautiful must also be finished, inside and out.

Pimps look for and target young girls or women who appear to be naive, lonely, and bitter and rebellious. Such women are often runaways from sexual abuse in their homes or from violent marriages. On the street, they are likely to be broke and without job skills.

The following pimp procuring scenario is typical: Suddenly he appears, he is friendly, he offers to buy her a meal and, later, he gives her a place to spend the night. She hears compliments for the first time in ages, as well as promises that he will buy her new clothes and have her hair done. This romantic-movie scenario is played out. But it may be days, weeks, or even months before she figures out what has happened to her.

In 1989, from the Göteborg Prostitution Group in Sweden, Lena’s story reveals how a pimp creates the conditions by which a woman ends up prostituting herself. Lena was incredibly attracted to Thomas, who offered her a job in a pizza parlor. After they had been seeing each other for some weeks he let it be known that “he’d had a girl who was a street hustler and that it wasn’t half as bad as it sounded.” Thomas knew Lena wanted to make lots of money. Her first reaction was, “I didn’t see how anybody could or how they dared.” But Thomas kept bringing up the subject of hustling. As it became a familiar topic, she finally said that she “was going to give it a try.” He prodded her by saying that she would never do it. “Then I started thinking more and more about it.” And finally she decided to go to the streets. She did not get any customers the first time but “I promised him I’d be brave enough to go down there again.” “I was kind of shocked that I dared to do it,” she added, but Thomas reassured her.
Thomas’s romantic spell over Lena and his seductive coaxing were broken the first time Lena encountered the Prostitution Group. Even though Lena initially rejected their representation of Thomas as a pimp, after she talked with the women from the Prostitution Group, “Thomas and I started fighting more and more.” That was the beginning of the end of prostitution for her.

Usually the pimp’s approach fulfills all the star-studded romantic images that popular magazines, television, and movies have promoted. When Officer Mary Christenson went undercover for the San Francisco Police Department to arrest pimps for pandering, some of the opening lines she heard were, “You are going to be my star lady,” or “I’m going to make you my foxy lady” or “my sportin’ lady,” or, as one pimp put it, “you are going to be my hope-to-die woman . . . ’cause that’s how long we going to be together.”

After his initial come-on, a pimp follows the strategy that most likely will win her over. If the girl he is procuring appears to be rebellious and daring, he can come right out with his proposal, offering her a challenge. Mary, who looked street wise, apparently seemed easily available to one pimp:

**PIMP:** I’m a businessman. We could be partners. You’ve got nice cord pants on, but you look like you should be wearing satin. I can take you to the hairdresser and buy you some nice clothes.

**MARY:** What is my role in this?

**PIMP:** Well, you’ll be my woman. I’ll turn you out on the street. Give you some schooling. If you are my partner you’ll have your pockets filled with money and you’ll fill my pockets too.

Lots of money, new cars, travel, the best clothes, flash, and glamour are the promises. Another pimp started off by explaining that he would take care of business, be her protector, stay with her forever, and that tricking would only be necessary until he got a big settlement from an insurance company on an accident. This, according to vice officers, is a frequent procuring line used by street pimps, who often represent themselves as about to come into some big money. Ultimately the appeal is to glamour:
PIMP: I'm going to be sure that you have your clothes, everything else you're suppose to have.
MARY: Like what?
PIMP: Anything that you want, anything. No limit to what you'll have, things of that nature. . . . Do you understand me? Seeing my lady getting it together and saying you understand me. . . . You're supposed to have the best. I like to see my lady with the best on. I like every mother-fucking body around to look at my lady.

For many girls it is attention and apparent affection that wins them over. In 1977, a young woman testifying to a crime committee in New York State reported being picked up at a bus stop in Minneapolis and eventually put in prostitution in New York City. She stated,

At the time I did it because I really liked him and it was more or less having someone, you know, and he said, you know, to prove to him that I really love him I had to do this because we needed the money. It was things he said, but I did it because I liked him. He made you feel like you were somebody important.¹⁰

When a pimp hits on a woman or teenager who is resistant, "prudish," or scared, he usually does not introduce prostitution immediately. He'll just be a nice guy who buys her a meal and offers her a place to stay. Then he makes his play for her as a lover. When a sexual relationship between them is established and he is sure she loves him, his next move is to set her up to prostitute herself as a condition of her love for him, with lines like, "If you love me, you'll do anything for me." To prove her love she must have sex for money with someone she does not know. If she resists or refuses, he will likely pout, create a scene, and insist that she does not truly love him. To restore his affection, she finally agrees to do what he asks, telling herself that "one time won't hurt," or "what does it matter." This rationale, used by women faced with unwanted sex from husbands, fathers, lovers, and rapists alike, is an entry into prostitution too. When she concedes to it, he has her hooked. When she turns one trick, he starts
pimping her. He gives her nightly quotas, takes the money she earns, and begins to treat her as the slut he intends to make her think she is. He tells her, “You are nothing but a goddamn whore,” and makes her believe that only out of the goodness of his heart will he have anything to do with such a despicable creature. She knows that is what society thinks of her. She knows she is a criminal. And most likely, she has nowhere else to turn.

Seasoning

The Council for Prostitution Alternatives in Portland, Oregon, reported that almost half of the 234 women who sought help from them in 1990 reported being raped by pimps on an average of 16 times per year. Likewise, 49% of the women had been kidnapped by pimps. Rape, kidnapping, and other forms of physical abuse and torture are often systematically practiced as forms of control over women in prostitution.

Typical of what continues in the 1990s is the story of Blood Stewart, who in 1976 picked up 14-year-old Jennifer in the vicinity of Penn Station in New York City. She had run away from her parents’ Long Island home and was confused, bewildered, and alone in the big city. Blood befriended her until he got her to his room. There he beat, raped, and tortured her for 3 days. Journalist Mark Schorr unraveled the details of this case: Blood Stewart presented himself as Ralph Moss and listened to her sad story.

She decided to trust him, so he told him her real name and age. Then she showed him the letter she was sending her father. “I know you tried stuff with her (Jennifer’s girlfriend) . . . and she told me where you touched her.” Still, the note was apologetic: “Daddy I’m really sorry. I feel like dying for what I’ve done to you.” Ralph Moss offered to help. He would act as a go-between, speak to Jennifer’s father man to man, and straighten out the problem. Jennifer could sleep over in his hotel room that night, and the next day they’d return to Long Island to work things out.
When she entered the hotel with Stewart, the young girl had no idea what was ahead of her.

To demonstrate his absolute power and reduce Jennifer’s defenses, Blood stripped her naked, then raped her, police say. They maintain that he terrorized her with his big “007” gravity-blade knife and told her, “If you don’t do what I tell you, I’ll use this on you.”

He then informed her that she was going to work the streets for him. After 3 days of abuse he sent her out to work in front of the New York Hilton. She hurried inside and hid in the women’s restroom in the lobby. When she finally got the courage to come out, she spotted a security guard and ran to him asking for help. In a back office she poured out her story; the police were called and ultimately Stewart was arrested. What Jennifer experienced after being procured was a seasoning that was meant to break her will and distort her perceptions so that she would not know where to turn or how to get away. Jennifer escaped before she was broken.

Seasoning is meant to break its victim’s will, reduce her ego, and separate her from her previous life. All procuring strategies include some form of seasoning. Often the extent or form of it is determined by the resistance of the woman or girl; sometimes it is a measure of the sadism of her procurer. Seasoning inculcates dependency and indebtedness in the victim. The meals, new clothes, and a place to stay all must be paid for. What appears at first to be freely given is later tallied up to be paid back, whether it is an act of affection, a meal, or some seemingly mutual sex. The pimp intends for affection and lovemaking to hook a woman, to make her emotionally and psychologically dependent, while she, on the other hand, is likely to be thinking in terms of a mutually developing relationship.

At the same time that Female Sexual Slavery was originally published, in 1979, Linda Marciano revealed her story as Linda Lovelace in Ordeal. Linda’s story was prototypical of that of all
victims of pimps’ love strategies. She was seduced by a man whom she did not know was a pimp. She began to live with him. He ran a bar with after-hours nude sex shows and prostitution. When she discovered the nature of his operation, she then tried to leave him, but the next day she found herself delivered to 5 businessmen in a hotel room:

“You’re going to fuck all five of them.”
“Chuck, don’t talk crazy.”
“Oh, you’re gonna fucking do it all right,” Chuck said. “Believe me, you’re gonna do it. I’ve promised these men. I’ve given my word. You tell me you don’t want to run my business. I give you every chance in the world and you tell me no. Okay. You don’t want to run it, then you can be part of it.”
“No, Chuck.” He smiled at that. “I mean it, Chuck, I’m not doing anything with anyone.”
“You got no fucking choice,” he said. “I already got their money. And that’s something I want you to remember. The first thing you do is get their money. I’ve taken care of that for you this time, but in the future you’ll have to be responsible for that. Now strip off your clothes.”
“I’m not taking off my clothes.”

I tried to sound strong but that wasn’t the way I was feeling. I suddenly realized that Chuck was crazy, really insane, that he actually expected me to take off my clothes and go out there to have sex with five strangers. When he took his hand out of his trouser pocket, he was holding his pistol and pointing it at me. It was the first time anyone ever pointed a gun at me but it wouldn’t be the last time.
“I’m going to shoot you right now,” he said. “Unless you get out there and do what I’m telling you.”

When Chuck Traynor turned Linda over to pornographers, she became the symbol of the sexual revolution for sexual liberals—Linda Lovelace. Many times, Linda desperately but unsuccessfully planned her escape. Eventually she did escape and finally in 1980 told her own story.

Procurers who employ the strategies of befriending or love and romance use both tactics together. They may begin by befriending a forlorn runaway and then calculate a romantic connection. The
strategy of befriending and love is designed to fit the vulnerabili-
ties of its potential victim. A procurer's goal is to find naive, needy
teenage girls or young women, con them into dependency, season
them to fear and submission, and turn them out into prostitution.

In breaking down their victims, some procurers rely only on
the dependency that results from taking their acquisition so far
away from home that she cannot return without money for trans-
portation. The language barrier that a victim of international
traffic faces will make it difficult for her to fend for herself in
a new country. Harsher methods may involve beating, raping,
sodomizing, drugging, and starving a woman before turning her
out on the streets or over to a brothel. Seasoning does not always
precede prostitution. It is as effective in forcing some women to
remain in prostitution as it is in putting others into it.

A critical early step in seasoning a girl is changing her identity.
She is given a new name and any necessary papers, such as a false
driver’s license, social security card, and birth certificate, so that
the police will not be able to trace her real identity or determine
her true age. But a new identity has an even more important
function than providing cover from the police. It separates the
woman from her past and focuses her totally on the moment in
time when she belongs to this man. According to anthropologists
Christina and Richard Milner, “A pimp wants his woman’s mind
more than her body. It is love, loyalty, and obedience he requires
as well as a capacity for self-discipline.”

In their field research on pimps, the Milners found out that
“turning out a square broad means that you must literally change
her mind.” (And it appears that Richard Milner did not ques-
tion the ethical limits of research. He reports that when he was
posing as a pimp for purposes of his research, he was required to
recommend a particular pimp to a new girl the pimp was trying
to procure. Even though Milner probably knew from his research
what the girl’s fate would be, he provided the recommendation
anyway.) Steve, a pimp, discussed with the Milners why a new
prostitute’s mind must be changed:
She must cut all family ties, because, you see, she can’t be with her family and ho [whore] too. You can’t cope with bringing disgrace upon your mother or father, your sister, or whoever it is. You have to get away from them. There’s nothing I could do with you over there because they’re telling you one thing and I’m telling you something else.  

Brock, another pimp, put it to the Milners this way:

You create a different environment. It’s a brainwashing process; the whole thing is creativity. When you turn a chick out, you take away every set of values and morality she had previously and create a different environment. You give her different friends.

Seasoning, among other things, creates perfect obedience in the newly procured woman. The pimp must have complete authority. One pimp who tried to procure undercover officer Mary Christenson promised her that when she went to work for him, “I am not going to beat on you. . . . I don’t want no tricks to beat you up.” She responded, “You won’t beat me?” “I ain’t that stupid,” he replied, “long as you obey, understand me, and act like a lady, then I don’t think we should ever have any misunderstanding, okay? Just do like I say, ’cause I’m not going to tell you to do nothing wrong.” Another pimp described how he would protect her out on the street: “The only thing is, you can’t make me mad at you. I don’t want you hiding out any of the money you make. You give it all to me and I take care of you.”

The romanticized role of pimp as protector stands in sharp contrast to the actual methods and behavior of procurers. Convincing his women and society at large that he is the prostitute’s protector is just another one of the pimp’s con games. Pimps do not protect prostitutes from violent customers. Often they are hanging out down the street in the local pimp bar when their woman faces a sadistic trick in a room by herself. Sometimes pimps, particularly those who run houses or massage parlors, will set their women up with a violent trick to teach her a lesson if she isn’t working hard enough.

Nor do pimps automatically respond when their prostitutes get
arrested. Depending on his mood and circumstances, a pimp may choose to leave his woman in jail, ignoring her call to be bailed out, or he may get her out immediately if he wants her back on the street working. All the promises made in the first meeting—glamour, travel, money, affection, protection, even child care if she is on her own with a small child—turn out to be means of enslavement. A certain glamour is necessary for the pimp's display of his new acquisition to other pimps and for her work in hooking customers. But as for travel, she soon finds out that she finances it with her work and that when she and her pimp go to another city, state, or country, she will continue to work long hours to meet her daily quotas.

Prostitution is not the economic alternative for women that many have believed it to be. The money a woman makes is usually not her own. The pimp takes most or all of it. He tells her where to work, how many hours a day, and what quota she must make before coming home. If he is angry at her or just wants to instill some obedience, he will threaten to "pimp her hard," that is, raise her hours and quota. Often a pimp will make arrangements for his woman to leave the money she makes in a convenient place when she comes in at night; he will pick it up the next day. This technicality is meant to protect him from prosecution: since he doesn't take money directly from her, he can't be charged, he hopes, with living off the earnings of a prostitute.

Even the child care he promises to provide for the young mother is part of his strategy. Almost always when a prostitute with a child is taken in by a pimp, she will ultimately find her child used as a weapon against her. By offering to take care of the child, to take the child to the babysitter or to school, to provide for his or her well-being while the mother works, a pimp gains physical control of the child. If a woman wants to leave her pimp, she may find her child held as hostage, forcing her back to work.

When the pimp controls his woman's body and soul, then she is set up to bring other women to him. One pimp told Mary
Christenson, “You get them for like, you know, sisters, you know, understand what I’m saying. Just get ’em to come and help you and the more, you understand, more that you get, the more sisters that you can get, honey, the better it is for you. They’ll help you and by you being my main lady, you see, you don’t have that to worry about, see, ’cause they ain’t going to never be able to take your place, you understand me? You bring ’em home, I’ll do the rest.” And the cycle of loving her, seasoning her, and pimping her starts all over again.

*Police Brutality*

The last resort for escape is to go to the police. But this is hardly an option for women who know they are legally and morally condemned by those from whom they would seek help. Indeed, police brutality of prostitutes is periodically reported by women working the streets.

One night in March 1977 when Mary was working the streets to get enough money to pay her rent, she was solicited by an undercover police officer. When he identified himself as the police, she didn’t believe him. A rapist had been working the area and the prostitutes were quite anxious about who his next victim would be. She thought he was a trick who was going to take her someplace and beat her. Mary resisted arrest. When she tried to get out of the car, she was severely beaten. A nearby taxi driver noticing a man beating a woman, rushed to intervene, whereupon a backup police officer arrived and beat the taxi driver. Mary was taken to a police department’s holding tank, a room in a downtown hotel where each night police held prostitutes as they were arrested until there were enough to call for a paddy wagon to pick them up and take them to the police station.

Another prostitute was already in the holding tank when the officers arrived with Mary. She witnessed and later testified to the beating that Mary received in the hotel’s lower chambers.
According to Mary and the witness, Mary was beaten to unconsciousness. The officers claimed that in the room at the hotel holding tank, Mary had tried to kick them and her injuries had occurred when they had tried to restrain her and had all fallen to the floor. I first met Mary when she left the hospital a few days later. Her face was swollen and puffy, and both of her eyes were blackened; a bone behind her eye had been fractured, and part of her cheekbone was crushed. She was still dazed and bruised from the beating. She had had surgery while in jail. As we talked she kept saying, "Why did they beat me so badly? Why did they have to mess up my face?"

The only thing unusual about this case is that it went to court. At the time, Margo St. James, head of COYOTE, had been organizing to expose the police brutality of prostitute women, and in this case she personally befriended the victim, bringing her clean clothes in jail and giving her support. As a result of agitation raised by her organization and some women’s groups, the police officers who beat Mary were suspended and formally charged with assault. In court the defense’s winning strategy was the fabrication of a prostitute conspiracy theory; the defense alleged that Mary and the other prostitute, along with COYOTE, the prostitute organization, were out to dishonor and discredit the police department. In addition, like so many victims who try to help their case by making the story more believable, Mary testified that she had been hit by a police officer at the hotel holding tank when it had already been established in court that she had been unconscious when the officer hit her. An acquittal of the officer followed.

I talked to Mary again after the trial and tried to encourage her to continue with her plans to get her high school equivalency diploma and enter a vocational training program. But she was bitter—not at the police, but because, as she saw it, she had been suckered into trying to get justice through the courts. As a victim of incest from her stepfather and, later, of battery from her boyfriend, Mary had come to accept beatings as inevitable, but she
just couldn't understand why it had been so bad this time. She was ridiculed by her friends on the street and felt, as they did, that she would have been better off if she had just accepted the beating and let it go at that.

**Escape**

Some pimps will allow a woman to buy back her freedom for an arbitrary amount of money that she must raise and pay him. In some cases women have been able to walk out of the life after paying the required fine. But most often the “fine” is just like the sweet talk; it is part of the game the pimp has been running, another fraudulent means of holding on with no intention of letting go. Some women manage to elude their pimps and escape into another town or state, taking on a new identity and the enormous task of putting their lives back together. Others, overwhelmed emotionally as well as physically, escape through suicide.

In 1976 Cynthia testified before a San Francisco grand jury about the times when she had tried to leave her pimp. The first time she left him, she was looking for an apartment when he began following her down the street. “I went into a restaurant. I was running around the tables screaming. I told the man to call the police. The man told me to get out of the restaurant.” The pimp took her home and beat her so badly she couldn’t leave the house.

Some time later, when she was beaten again by her pimp, she attempted another escape. She recuperated from the beating in a motel room until he tracked her down there. The motel manager gave him the key to her room; he went in and again beat her, complaining that she was avoiding him and not working. Again she managed to escape from him and ran to the motel office for help. Later, the rest of the story came out when the motel manager testified before the grand jury:
DISTRICT ATTORNEY: She ran around your motel screaming for someone to call the police, right?
MANAGER: Yes.
DISTRICT ATTORNEY: You grabbed her, pinned her arms back, and told the guests in the motel not to bother calling the police.
MANAGER: I tried to get her out of the office.
DISTRICT ATTORNEY: She was saying that A. was trying to kill her? Did it ever occur to you that he was trying to kill her?
MANAGER: No, it didn’t occur to me.

While the manager was holding her, the pimp came in, grabbed her, and took her away. Again she got away from him and finally went to the police. He was arrested and pleaded guilty to one count of pimping. When he was sentenced 1 to 10 years, he complained to the judge that the court was picking on him; he claimed that on the streets it was known that pimps who pleaded guilty never had to go prison.

A prostitute is known to be “out of pocket” with her pimp when he punishes her for talking back to him, disobeying him, or contradicting him. When the word goes out that she is “out of pocket,” she is fair game for other pimps, who may have a free hand with her without triggering a war. When I rode on patrol with San Francisco police officers on the Prostitution Detail in the summer of 1978, we stopped to talk to a prostitute who had been kidnapped by 2 pimps from Oakland 3 nights earlier. She had been picked up off the street, taken to Oakland, raped, and robbed. As she was telling us about this, she lifted her wig slightly to show us that they had shaved her head before dumping her back on the streets of San Francisco. This is a common occurrence in the high-crime prostitution section of the city. While we were talking with her, another prostitute joined us and reported that a similar thing had happened to her a few months earlier. The kidnapping had somewhat dimmed in her memory, and she was presently more concerned with the slashes on her arm and back. She took off her jacket to show us her slashed arm and lifted the back of her shirt to display her back, which had been criss-crossed
with razor slashes by a trick a few nights earlier. She didn’t consider reporting it the police. She appeared to accept the violence as inevitable.

Conclusion

Eleanor Miller,\textsuperscript{20} based on the work of Bernard Cohen,\textsuperscript{21} differentiates among men who control women in prostitution. She distinguishes between a “man” and a pimp according to the number of prostitutes they have: a “man” has only one prostitute while a pimp may have many. The “man” is said to provide protection and to watch over “his woman” while the pimp considers himself more like a manager.\textsuperscript{22} In her study of prostitution Miller extends this distinction into a continuum: “At one end is the pimp, a flamboyant male who manages a ‘stable’ (group of prostitutes) in a fairly bureaucratic way. At the other extreme is the ‘man,’ who is the husband/lover of the woman and really does work with her.”\textsuperscript{23}

Miller also notes that unless a man has reduced the relationship to a mere business transaction devoid of personal connection and intimacy, the prostitute is unlikely to refer to him as her pimp. As long as there is a relationship, he is “my man.”\textsuperscript{24} Pimps who develop a stable of several women usually maintain some form of private relationship with each one, and the addition of new women is treated as in polygamous marriage, each new woman being referred to as a “wife-in-law.”

Most of prostitution is pimp controlled, and most women are in emotionally entangled relationships with pimps. As Hoigard and Finstad have shown, the tendency is for women to deny that they are controlled by pimps.\textsuperscript{25} “Denying you have a pimp thus becomes a way of expressing that your own experience does not coincide with the stereotypical pimp-prostitute relationship.”\textsuperscript{26}

This is not significantly different from women’s experience of abuse in marriage. As long as women remain in the abusive
relationship, they tend to deny that their husbands abuse them. However, the difference, which at times may be slight, between prostitution and marriage is that the former is only sexual exploitation while marriage or a marital-like relationship may or may not be sexually exploitative. But all prostitution is sexual exploitation, and so every relationship that sustains it is abusive: with a customer, with a pimp or “my man,” or with a boyfriend or husband. While degrees of abuse and ranges of affection may vary in these relationships, they all promote, aid, and encourage the sexual exploitation of women through prostitution.

The parallel to marriage is important here because as the sexuality of prostitution has been transformed into the prostitution of sexuality, sexual exploitation has increasingly become the normative condition of private relationships. Miller is correct to assume that there is a continuum between a pimp and “a man,” but to the extent that he—pimp or “man”—is involved in a relationship with a prostitute woman, the real question regarding his role is whether she is subjected to sexual exploitation from him and/or because of him.

The proprostitution lobby objects to laws against pimping on the grounds that such laws deny women in prostitution a boyfriend, a lover, a real relationship, a genuine connection to another. This objection ignores the exploitation of women by pimps—the violence and abuse characteristic of pimps and the fact that pimps earn their livings off the sexual exploitation of women as commodities. It ignores the issue that faces all women in sexual relationships today—the question of whether or not their relationships are based on sexual exploitation or intimacy and love. A lover, husband, or boyfriend who promotes the sexual exploitation and commodification of a woman is a pimp, and together, pimping and procuring are among the most ruthless practices of male power and sexual dominance. These practices go far beyond the merchandising of women’s bodies for the market that demands them; they crystallize misogyny in acts of male hatred of femaleness as rendered into a commodity for whom
the marketer and the purchaser have contempt. Procuring today involves “convincing” a woman to be a prostitute through cunning, fraud, and/or physical force, taking her against her will or knowledge and putting her into prostitution. Procuring involves tactics for acquiring women and turning them into prostitution; pimping keeps them there. That some women, by their definition, choose to prostitute and choose to be with pimps as lovers or husbands is no more a defense of pimping than is a woman’s choice to remain in a marriage with a man who abuses her a defense of that marriage.