

**THE POLITICS OF NAMING:
CONSTRUCTING PROSTITUTES AND REGULATING WOMEN
IN VANCOUVER, 1934-1945**

by

Michaela Freund

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NAME	Michaela Freund
DEGREE	MA
TITLE	The Politics of Naming: Constructing Prostitutes and Regulating Women in Vancouver, 1934-1945

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

Chair	Derryl MacLean, Associate Professor
--------------	-------------------------------------

Michael Fellman, Professor

Mark Leier, Assistant Professor

Karlène Faith, Associate Professor, Criminology
Examiner

Date:	20 July 1995
--------------	--------------

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Title of Thesis

**The Politics of Naming: Constructing Prostitutes and Regulating Women in Vancouver,
1934-1945**

Author:

(signature) Michaela Freund

24 July 1995
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ABSTRACT

Drawing on records by city authorities and middle-class reform organizations, reports by medical experts, newspaper articles, and case studies, this thesis examines discourses about prostitution in Vancouver between 1934 and 1945. Such an analysis of the discourses shows how women, whose behavior leaders of Vancouver's middle-class perceived to be outside of their own norms and standards, were constructed as "loose women" and prostitutes. The majority of those women had never worked as prostitutes but rather had transgressed social norms in other ways authorities felt threatened the social order. Through the defining and naming of those women as prostitutes, middle-class reformers tried to regulate the women's behavior, bodies, and sexuality. At the same time, they sent a message to all women, warning them not to leave the path of proper womanhood and not to disobey the boundaries of socially acceptable femininity.

The women, however, contested being named prostitutes and tried to negotiate and sometimes contest these social constructions of themselves. They represented themselves as autonomous women who were free to choose the lifestyle they thought was best for them. Thus, attempts to control the women's bodies and sexualities were somewhat unsuccessful.

Ordering society through naming and representing is a powerful political tool. Power in this sense is not taken primarily as an entity that emanates downward from one group, but as unequally dispersed and negotiated by all parts of society, even those who belong to the most marginalized groups. The approach to historical inquiry and interpretation used here is drawn from poststructuralist and feminist theory.

To my mother, Gisela, and my brother, Alexander

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INTRODUCTION

Before nineteen-year-old Jeanette was sent to Vancouver's Hostel for Prostitutes in 1942¹, she had worked as an elevator girl in a "hotel of ill-repute" that her father managed. Jeanette had been known to city authorities for a year, ever since her concerned brother had reported that she was "becoming debauched by associating with prostitutes." When they suspected that her lover induced her to start working as a prostitute, the police and case workers intervened. "Fortunately for [Jeanette]," according to her social work file, the man was arrested before having carried out his plans. As Jeanette's man friend went to prison, Jeanette entered the "Hostel for Prostitutes" where she "was studied carefully and then taken to a psychiatrist for examination. His diagnosis revealed that there was much in her physical and mental make-up to account for her lapses and certain recommendations as to medical care were made."

The hostel was, as the case worker's report stated, "the nearest to a home, and Mrs. Williams [the matron of the hostel], the nearest to a mother she ever had," since Jeanette had not grown up in a "proper home" but had been raised primarily by her father who had also placed her in foster homes from time to time. Her father "had no insight into her problems," and took Jeanette from the hostel and back to his hotel where she resumed work. He soon discerned early in 1942 that she was "not ready yet" to control herself and so Jeanette returned to the hostel for several months during which, according to her case worker, she "grew in strength of character and in stability." After her next release, Jeanette started to work as an elevator girl in a "respectable hotel." Her

¹ The exact date of Jeanette's committal to the Hostel for Prostitutes is not revealed by the sources but it is clear that it was during the hostel's existence between 1939 and 1945.

case worker and Mrs. Williams concluded that “her case has afforded the hostel committee a good deal of satisfaction, for she literally did not know right from wrong when first admitted, but under the influence of the hostel and matron she learned the value of a home and became self-respecting.”²

According to Vancouver’s middle-class leadership definitions used during the 1930s and 1940s, Jeanette was a prostitute and prostitution was both an individual sin and a social problem. During my search for documents about prostitutes in Depression and wartime Vancouver, I came across several cases such as Jeanettes’: women who had never prostituted themselves were defined -- “named”-- prostitutes.

The goal of my thesis is to understand and explain the origins, workings, and consequences of this naming. Who participated in that process of naming and what does it say about Vancouver society and its relationships of power? What roles did assumptions about gender, class, race, and ethnicity play in the daily negotiations of such naming? What were the goals of those who named and what were the consequences for those who were named?

The first indicator within Vancouver bourgeois values in the thirties and forties that a person might be a prostitute was her gender: according to the law, only women could be prostitutes.³ Other indicators were the woman's clothes, her workplace or the neighborhood in which it was situated, her behavior and manners, her family and educational background, her class status or ethnic background, and the places she visited in her leisure time. In the case of Jeanette, for example, her job in a “hotel of ill-repute,” her association with prostitutes, and her family-background were sufficient for Vancouver’s middle-class reformers to brand her a prostitute.

² City of Vancouver Archives, (hereafter CAV), Social Service Department, Series 449, Subject Files 1928-1971, Loc. 106-A-7, file 5, Five Year Report of the Girls’ Hostel, September 1939-1944, report about Jeanette.

³ The Canadian law defines prostitution as “promiscuous sexual intercourse. One act of illicit connection does not constitute a woman a prostitute. Several such acts with the same man, or even permanently living with him in fornication or adultery does not constitute the woman a prostitute.”

Prostitution has no stable meaning, but is rather volatile. It is constantly defined and redefined, because social values change, and because people contest dominant meanings. Women, both those who are named and those who are not named, as well as men, participate in the discursive reconstructions of prostitution. Power here is not primarily taken as an entity that emanates from one group, such as a police crack-down on bawdy houses, though such episodes did occur, but as the more continuous possibility to order society through naming. Naming is used to deploy political power on a daily basis.

Unlike other students of the history of prostitution, I do not take the classification of prostitute for granted. Radical-feminist, Marxist, Existentialist, and legal approaches have understood the term prostitute as an unproblematic, transparent, somewhat exact, and universal designation of a specific kind of woman or group of women. They have not questioned what happens when one labels a woman a prostitute. I believe that we first have to see how the prostitute is constructed through definition in order to understand the place and significance of prostitution in society. Here, I will briefly discuss theoretical approaches to prostitution and discuss the major Canadian works that have used them before I introduce the post-structuralist approach I have used in my work.

To historians, prostitution and prostitutes have only become a major field of inquiry with the rise of women's history in the late 1960s. Even though there are still few works about prostitution, several important studies have examined the sex trade from various perspectives. So far, there is no nation-wide survey nor any full-scale case study about the history of prostitution in Canada. There are, however, some important regional and local studies that have developed significant insights.

Legal historians have developed the most used approach to writing about prostitution in Canada. By examining sources such as court proceedings, police records, and legislation, these scholars seek to understand how society has regulated prostitutes through law and law enforcement, and how these actions have affected prostitutes.

In her essay, "Nineteenth-Century Canadian Prostitution Law: Reflection of a Discriminatory Society," and her book, *Petticoats and Prejudice: Women and Law in Nineteenth-Century Canada*, Constance Backhouse describes and analyzes the legal regulation of prostitution in an English-Canadian society obsessed with regulating women's bodies. Backhouse delineates three distinct approaches to the "problem of prostitution," in which Victorian society saw a necessary social evil that needed to be controlled through laws. First, Upper and Lower Canada tried to regulate the trade in sexuality through the Contagious Diseases Act of 1865. This Act was designed to protect military men from venereal diseases. Prostitutes who had a venereal disease were forced to obtain treatment in a certified hospital for up to three months. Otherwise, the police were permitted to arrest them. In contrast to prostitutes, soldiers did not have to undergo such medical inspections. However, the Contagious Diseases Act remained inoperative, since governmental authorities did not certify any hospitals as sites for inspection. The act expired in 1870 and was never reenacted. Thus, the approach of attempting to control prostitution through official medical inspection proved unsuccessful.

The second approach was an attempted prohibition of the commercial sale of sex through systematic criminal enactments. In the second half of the nineteenth century, many moral reformers demanded a single standard of sexual morality for men and women. "White slavery" was the term used by reformers to describe how women were forced into prostitution, through, for example, false promises of marriage or emotional dependency. In 1869 the federal government passed "An Act respecting Vagrants," which fined or imprisoned all prostitutes -- night walkers who could not give a satisfactory account of themselves, keepers of brothels and their customers, and persons who did not have a known profession. Moreover, there were additional criminal sanctions against any behavior, such as seduction, that could cause women to become prostitutes. However, when one takes a look at how those laws were put into practice it becomes clear, as Backhouse writes, that, "The predominant pattern throughout the 60 years studied was to

ignore the male customer and at the level of criminal enforcement, the law was primarily directed at women."⁴

The third approach was an attempt to rehabilitate prostitutes by establishing women's prisons, juvenile detention institutions, and asylums like the Toronto Magdalen Asylum, probably the largest and best-known such facility. Social purity advocates tried to save and reform prostitutes and to prevent children from entering this profession. When it became clear that almost all prostitutes did not want to undergo those reform programs the focus shifted to women's prisons where incarcerated prostitutes were forced to participate in special reform programs. All in all, according to Backhouse, none of the approaches were successful.

John McLaren and John Lowman examine the laws related to prostitution in Canada and how they were enforced in practice. They explore how "discourses" on prostitution, such as the moral or public order discourses, influenced and affected the laws and their enforcement. Lowman and McLaren argue that Canadian lawmakers have been committed to the control and even suppression of prostitution, through legislation aimed not only at prostitutes but also to serve "as a form of all-purpose control device to facilitate general ordering of the streets and, in the process, to control other disreputable groups."⁵

As does Constance Backhouse, Deborah Nilsen looks at prostitution and the law in her article "The 'Social Evil': Prostitution in Vancouver, 1900-1920." Her intention is to show why prostitution persisted in Vancouver in spite of increasingly harsh laws. Nilsen employs a Marxist viewpoint, regarding prostitution as a form of female labor, and points out "that prostitution was linked to economic factors that did not respond to legal

⁴ Constance Backhouse, "Nineteenth-Century Canadian Prostitution Law: Reflection of a Discriminatory Society," *Histoire Sociale/Social History*, 18 (1986), 408.

⁵ John McLaren and John Lowman, "Enforcing Canada's Prostitution Laws, 1892 - 1920: Rhetoric and Practice," M.L. Friedland (ed.), *Securing Compliance: Seven Case Studies* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 4.

change or stepped-up police action against vice.”⁶ The economic situation women faced in Vancouver forced them to enter this profession.⁷

Marxist Feminists analyze the suppression of women by capitalism and by patriarchy within one explanatory framework where capital is the primary oppressor of women as workers, and men are only secondary oppressors: prostitution is a class phenomenon. Economic conditions are the reason unemployed or underemployed women sell themselves to men in order to survive. Because women in a capitalist system do not have enough access to the workplace, they turn to prostitution. Sexuality here is understood as a commodity, and women are reduced to their market value. The male-female relations in marriage and prostitution are exploitative in the same way as those in employer-employee relationships. At least some Marxist Feminists see little difference between a wife and a prostitute, since both sell themselves. The prostitute sells her sexual service, and the wife her sexual as well as domestic service to men for their economic livelihoods.⁸

The Marxist Feminist approach seems too narrow to capture a full understanding of women's oppression and the existence of prostitution. Since Marxist Feminists explain women's suppression only by class, they omit gender. But it is doubtful that men are just the secondary oppressors and that with the elimination of capitalism all women would no longer be suppressed. To understand women's oppression more subtly, analysis must also focus on female sexuality.

⁶ Deborah Nilsen, “The ‘Social Evil’: Prostitution in Vancouver, 1900-1920,” in Barbara Latham and Roberta Pardo (eds.), *Not Just Pin Money: Selected Essays on the History of Women's Work in British Columbia* (Victoria: Camosun College, 1984), 205-228, 206.

⁷ An equally strong Marxist viewpoint has taken Lori Rotenberg. “The Wayward Worker: Toronto's Prostitute at the Turn of the Century,” Janice Acton, Penny Goldsmith, Bonnie Shepard (eds.), *Women At Work: Ontario, 1850-1930* (Toronto: Canadian Women's Educational Press, 1974), 33-69, 40. Two other studies on prostitution in Vancouver are by G. Boucher, “The ‘Fallen’ Women at work: Prostitution in Vancouver, 1890-1920,” in *The Ascendant Historian*, (130), 7, 130-153 and CAV, Marjorie C. Moore, “Prostitution in Vancouver: 1930-1940,” Manuscript, Add. MSS 587, 1977.

⁸ Cited in Rosemarie Tong, *Feminist Thought. A Comprehensive Introduction* (Boulder & San Francisco: Westview Press, 1989), 63-64.

In her study of *The Dark Side of Life in Victorian Halifax*, Judith Fingard shows the importance of the concept of ethnicity and race within a Marxist analysis of prostitution. In the 1860s about 40 percent of the prosecuted prostitutes in Halifax were black, even though blacks made up only three percent of all residents.⁹ She explains the predominance of black prostitutes and brothel-keepers by arguing that black women were both marginalized economically, and discriminated against on the grounds of race. While Fingard pays attention to factors other than class, her simple addition of race to class does not sufficiently explain the dynamics between those two concepts and stays within a rather rigid determinism that casts black women as victims and leaves no room for their agency.¹⁰

Against the common belief that women from ethnic minorities worked as prostitutes in disproportionate numbers, Judith Bedford demonstrates that in pre-World War I Calgary “it was the Anglo-Saxon who most often became the prostitute, and it was also her male counterpart who paid for her services.”¹¹ Moreover, as opposed to deterministic models that cast women as victims, Bedford argues that some women did not become prostitutes because of financial necessity. Rather, those women “simply found the call of wealth too strong to resist.”¹² Bedford cannot prove how profitable this profession was. That those prostitutes were able to pay their fines and returned to prostitution after prison sentences seems for her to be proof enough to make such a statement. Bedford assumes that prostitution was a lifestyle choice rather than work, an approach that seems to be based on existentialist philosophy.

Existentialist Feminists such as Simone de Beauvoir speak of two different categories of women: one is the caste of “honest women” and the other the “caste of

⁹ Judith Fingard, *The Dark Side of Life in Victorian Halifax*, 2d ed. (Nova Scotia: Pottersfield Press, 1991), 104.

¹⁰ C.L. Hansen-Brett has also looked at ethnicity in her article “Ladies in Scarlet: An Historical Overview of Prostitution in Victoria, British Columbia 1870-1930,” *British Columbia Historical News*, 19, no. 1 (1986), 21-26.

¹¹ Judith Bedford, “Prostitution in Calgary, 1905-1914,” *Alberta History*, 29, no. 1 (1981), 1-11.

¹² Bedford, 8.

shameless women"; the latter is necessary to allow "honest women" to be treated with the most respect. The prostitute therefore is a scapegoat both used and rejected by men at the same time.¹³ De Beauvoir accepted man as the norm and woman as the Other, as object, as the exploited one. For her, the prostitute was the paradigm for woman as the Other. But prostitutes can also be the exploiter, such as the high-class hetairas who de Beauvoir defines as "all women who treat not only their bodies but their entire personalities as capital to be exploited."¹⁴ The prostitute sells her body not only for economic reasons, but also for male adoration of her otherness. In other words, by the fact of being a woman, the prostitute is already defined as the Other; the prostitute then purposefully uses and exploits this status as the Other to make a living. Not only do they make their own living as do men, but they exist in a circle that is almost exclusively masculine; "free in behavior and conversation, they can attain ... to the rarest intellectual liberty."¹⁵

While the woman cannot escape the confines of her otherness, the prostitute at least makes the best of it. De Beauvoir might have come to a different appraisal of prostitution if she had examined more closely the experiences of those woman who are merely surviving and are forced to sell their bodies for sheer economic necessity. Nevertheless, her thoughts open the door to the notion of agency. Working within the confines of her otherness, the woman is not merely forced into prostitution by a capitalist system or a patriarchal society; rather she chooses prostitution as a way to better her life.¹⁶ Existentialist, Marxist, and radical feminism have set out to find and explain the

¹³ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Knopf, 1957), 555.

¹⁴ de Beauvoir, 567.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 567-568.

¹⁶ Even though radical feminists have not attempted to explain prostitution historically, they have been at the fore of an analysis of prostitution in current society. Radical feminists believe that men value women not as unique individuals, but as members of a class who serve them sexually and reproductively. Within institutions like marriage, law, and prostitution, men control the sexual and reproductive uses of the female body, as if by a natural right. Andrea Dworkin in her book *Pornography. Men Possessing Women* states "that the sexual will of men properly and naturally defines the parameters of a women's sexual being, which is her whole identity. The metaphysics of male sexual domination is that women are whores." Radical Feminists use the "prostitution-surrogacy analogy." They explain that women are socialized to meet male sexual wants and needs as a matter of duty and pride. Prostitutes are not born but made by a society that teaches girls that, if all else fails, they can always gain attention or money by offering their bodies to men.

cause of prostitution and have asked why women have entered prostitution. Their answers are human freedom of choice, capitalism, and patriarchy. These answers are presumed to be valid universally, that is, everywhere and at any time in history.

Recently, post-structuralist feminists have started to examine prostitution from a different angle. Their intention is to look at how prostitution is constructed by society. Based on Joan Scott's thought, I argue that it is important to understand what prostitution means in order to understand how it works, that is, how it functions as a hierarchy. When examining prostitution as a process, we will find many causes that alter over time and place, through changing discourses.¹⁷

Shannon Bell scrutinizes the construction of the prostitute's body through re-reading and deconstructing major texts in five discursive domains, such as ancient Greece and contemporary feminism in North America and France. Bell argues that "the referent, the flesh-and blood female body engaged in some form of sexual interaction in exchange for some kind of payment, has no inherent meaning and is signified differently in different discourses."¹⁸ While I agree that the term prostitute acquires different meanings at different places and times, I disagree with Bell's conviction that the term prostitute is always used only to describe flesh-and-blood women offering their bodies for money. We need to be more critical of how the term prostitute itself is used. Not only women who actually engage in prostitution but other women as well have been designated as prostitutes. Therefore, discourses about prostitution have affected not only *bona fide* prostitutes but all women. Women have been defined and labeled prostitutes at different

This approach can only partly explain why prostitution exists. Radical feminists overlook the two categories of class and race and do not differentiate among women. There is a very ahistoric approach since it does not illuminate how prostitution is constructed and works historically. It seems that women, if not born prostitutes, are socially determined to become prostitutes. In this view women appear to be powerless victims who, "if all else fails," are bound to become prostitutes. It seems that women do not have their own identity, but are defined exclusively by men and through their body, their sexuality.

¹⁷ Joan W. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 4.

¹⁸ Shannon Bell, *Reading, Writing and Rewriting the Prostitute Body* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 2.

places and at different times in order to control and regulate their sexuality, and not merely their sale of self.

How have women been defined as prostitutes without having sold their bodies for money? In her article, "The Love of Finery: Fashion and the Fallen Woman in Nineteenth Century Social Discourse," Mariana Valverde analyzes how the connection between "finery" and the "fallen woman" was constructed in the nineteenth century and how the "love of finery" was central in the political and scientific debates on the causes of prostitution.¹⁹ She shows how in the nineteenth century, people were regulated by diverse means, especially by attaching moral meanings to clothes. The meanings were not universal but dependent on the class and gender of the wearer: "The same dress could be considered elegant and proper on a lady, but showy and dishonest on her maid."²⁰ Even though some young working-class men wore fashionable clothing, they were not accused of turning to prostitution to finance those clothes, as were women of the working-class.

Valverde shows not only how the discourse on finery was negotiated or constantly reshaped; she also demonstrates how it was used by the middle-class leadership to keep the working-class, in this case female servants, "in their place."²¹ In the homes of the wealthy, where women of different classes were working together and working-class women had access to upper-class clothes, it was important for upper-class women to maintain the distance between themselves and their servants. Their maids' love for finery endangered that distance, that class hierarchy. Upper-class hegemony was not only upheld by discussions about servants' dress but was also "neatly intertwined with the sexual discourse on dress and vice." Thus, in the first two decades of the twentieth century, socialists' claim that prostitution was caused by poverty was dismissed by middle-class reformers who blamed working-class women for committing sins of

¹⁹ Mariana Valverde, "The Love of Finery: Fashion and the Fallen Woman in Nineteenth Century Social Discourse," *Victorian Studies*, 32, 2, (Winter 1988), 169-189, 169-170.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 169.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 182.

consumption.²² Valverde shows how the discourse changed over time and links earlier ideas about prostitution and the love of finery with new notions of consumption and working women. Thus, the moral regulation of prostitutes was later expanded to the moral regulation of working women, all of whom “could be perceived as threatening the moral order of the bourgeois city, if only because of their immoral consumption.”²³

Inspired by Mariana Valverde’s article, I will look at the discourses on prostitution by politicians, police officers, middle-class reformers, and medical experts that emerged in Vancouver between 1934 and 1945 and discuss the means by which prostitution was socially constructed. In my three chapters I will examine how prostitution in Vancouver was attacked vigorously in three waves. The three drives or “purges” of 1935, 1939, and 1943 aimed at suppressing prostitution. Each drive had initial or partial success, since prostitutes dispersed throughout the city after brothels had been shut down. But soon they regathered and the bawdy houses reappeared some months after each drive.

The three attacks on vice and immorality, however, were also fought on another front -- the front of naming. Middle-class leaders such as politicians, churches, women's organizations, the police, and medical experts voiced their concerns, plans, demands, and ideology through the local newspapers and pamphlets, and in civic and public meetings and conferences. At the center of each discourse lay a varying notion of what constituted prostitutes and prostitution, and different answers to the social problems they created. I will show how the word prostitution was ascribed different meanings and how those different meanings competed within the short time-period of eleven years, and how in the wake of those changing definitions an increasing number of women were affected by state, social, and moral regulation.

The body of the prostitute became a slate on which prescriptions for respectable and decent womanly behavior could be chalked. Thus, the body of the prostitute raised

²² Ibid., 184-185.

²³ Ibid., 185.

issues of control and opportunity. Medical experts saw disease running rampant, politicians at the municipal or other levels saw political opportunities, religious experts saw opportunities for redemption and salvation, the police saw unrest and crime, and social reformers saw the need for rehabilitation. Each set of lenses informed and constructed an understanding of the prostitute and prostitution and created a different set of solutions to the “problem.” A complex process integrated these often different perspectives into a coherent agenda resulting from the interaction of the competing groups over the body of the prostitute in Vancouver from 1934 to 1945.²⁴

In the first chapter, I examine the means by which politicians, policemen, and judges interwove meanings of the Chinese “race” and Chinatown with those of white women, waitressing, and prostitution in such a way that every white woman who worked in a Chinese restaurant as a waitress came to be defined and labeled as a “loose woman” or a prostitute. Chapter 2 explores the “Drive on Vice” of 1939 that resulted in the establishment of a “Hostel for Prostitutes.” I examine how through the discourses around the hostel middle-class reformers reconstructed the representation of the prostitute. By extension this representation led to the regulation of all single and young women such as the young elevator girl Jeanette whose story appears at the beginning of this introduction. In the third chapter, I explore how police officers, middle-class reformers, and medical experts interwove meanings of prostitution, promiscuity and venereal disease in such a way that the prostitute came to be seen as the cause of venereal disease, and was constructed as a diseased body. At the same time, through the discourses about venereal disease, the definition of who was a prostitute was extended to a large number of young, single woman.

In all three chapters I demonstrate, as much as my sources allow, the actions and beliefs of the young women themselves and how they responded to the attempts to name them debased prostitutes. It would be too simple to cast them only as helpless women

²⁴ I am grateful to Theresa Healy for the discussion which developed this idea.

who were victimized and marginalized by Vancouver's middle-class reformers in the 1930s and 1940s. Rather, they contested the middle-class's politics of naming and made conscious life-choices. They often defended their lifestyle, such as the white waitresses in Chinatown who chose to work in Chinese restaurants because they considered it the most beneficial economic choice for them. Or the young women, sent to the Hostel for Prostitutes, who were not willing to leave their preferred life-style and adjust to middle-class reformers values and beliefs. Whatever the range of their self-images and behaviors, they were fully submitted to the uniform degradation the naming as prostitutes implied. They were at a disadvantage but, often in a rebellious manner, they asserted their womanhood, their humanity.

CHAPTER 1
“NOT FIT AND PROPER PLACES FOR THE
EMPLOYMENT OF WHITE GIRLS:”
WHITE WAITRESSES, CHINATOWN, AND THE
RE-DEFINITION OF THE PROSTITUTE

On 24 September 1937, fifteen women marched to Vancouver's City Hall to protest the city's prohibition of white women's employment in Chinatown's cafes and restaurants. The women were furious. Under pressure from police and politicians, their Chinese bosses had just fired all of them from their waitressing jobs. The women had not only lost their employment and livelihoods but, being named "loose" women and even "prostitutes," they had also lost their reputations. Vancouver's white middle class, in whose name the police and politicians acted, had deemed it inappropriate for white women to work for Chinese in Chinatown. To them the association of Chinese men and white women seemed inherently dangerous. They feared that Chinese employers forced white women into prostitution. The women rejected those allegations. One waitress bluntly characterized the middle-class reformers as "a bunch of fussy old bridge-playing gossips who are self-appointed directors of morals for the girls in Chinatown. They are bound to get us out of [Chinatown], but what will they do for us then[?] We must live and heaven knows if a girl is inclined to go wrong, she can do it just as readily on Granville Street as she can down here."¹ The women, however, were unsuccessful in their

¹ *Vancouver Sun*, 16 September 1937.

attempt to protect their jobs. Only one month later, all remaining white waitresses in Chinatown had been thrown out of employment.

In this chapter, I examine how police officers, judges, and politicians interwove meanings of Chinatown and the Chinese, white women, waitressing, and prostitution in such a way that every white woman who worked in a Chinese restaurant or cafe came to be defined and labeled as a “loose woman” or even “prostitute.” In Depression-time Vancouver, it became clear that if a woman merely waitressed for Chinese men in Chinatown she would risk not only her job but her whole reputation and she would become a constant target of police control.

This discourse of authority concerned not only white waitresses but also the Chinese restaurant owners who were at the same time controlled and regulated by the police. But even though these Chinese men too were harassed by the police and were in danger of losing their licenses if they continued to employ white waitresses, the women themselves were the ones who suffered most directly. A combination of Chinatown’s image as a place of vice and the image of the waitress as “loose” made the white waitress a vulnerable target and created a whole new site to define the category of prostitutes.

In the late 1920s and 1930s, an increasing number of young, white women worked in the Chinese restaurants in Vancouver’s Chinatown. By hiring white women, Chinese restaurateurs, according to Kay Anderson, hoped to attract non-Chinese customers; furthermore, they hoped to save money by paying lower wages to women.² The women saw waitressing as a promising source of income in ever harder economic times.

Vancouver’s middle-class leadership, however, viewed this situation as something other than an economic accommodation. The police, politicians, and middle-class reformers soon identified to their own satisfaction an explosive and threatening mixture of interracial sexuality, exploitation, and moral disorder. For them, white women working for Chinese men contravened all laws of nature, morality, and proper social order. They

² Kay J. Anderson, *Vancouver’s Chinatown. Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875-1980* (Montreal & Kingston, London, Buffalo: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1991), 160.

found their values confirmed when in 1931, a white waitress was killed in Chinatown. Mary Shaw was allegedly murdered by her admirer, Lee Dick, who then apparently shot himself. The coroner's jury demanded that municipal politicians prevent another such incident by enforcing the appropriate laws. In 1933, the Board of Police Commissioner asked Chief Constable Cameron "to pay special attention to white girls in Chinese restaurants."³ However, no action was taken until 1934, with the election of Mayor Gerry McGeer and his newly appointed Chief Constable W.W. Foster. The approach that the police and politicians then adopted to solve the "problem" of Chinese restaurants was to prevent white women from working on Chinese premises.

In 1935, Foster advised three Chinese restaurant owners that they were no longer permitted to employ white women as waitresses, because he and his officers had noticed "irregularities" in their restaurants. Foster made clear that the police were not worried about low wages or long hours of work, but took action against the Chinese restaurants solely "on moral grounds." He added: "The restaurants affected by the ban are situated entirely in the Chinatown district and are patronized exclusively by Chinese with the possible exception of a few low white types." According to Foster,

The white girls employed in these places were generally inexperienced and quite young, usually under 20 years of age, the majority having homes elsewhere than in Vancouver. They were expected to wait upon the Chinese customers and make themselves as agreeable as possible, even to the extent of sitting in the booths with the customers. This association between the girls and Chinese was such that a large number of the girls became intimate with the customers. Procuring took place, and in many cases girls went to live with individual Chinamen, later being induced to prostitute themselves with other Chinese. Investigation revealed that it was the practice of Chinese to contact the girls in the cafes, and, in cases where the girls were already loose, make arrangement for the girls to come to their quarters after working hours, where immorality took place. New girls, who as stated above, were usually quite young and inexperienced, were quickly influenced to become loose. It was also established that the majority of known prostitutes in the City had formerly been employed in Chinatown restaurants, thus indicating they had been started on their careers of vice through their early association with these cafes.⁴

³ Vancouver City Archives (hereafter CAV), Police Board, Series 180, Minutes 1904-1968, Loc. 75-A-2, file 3, 40.

⁴ CAV, Mayor's Papers, Series 483, General correspondence files, 1899-1983, Loc. 33-F-3, White Girls in Chinese Restaurants, Foster to W. King, Dep. Minister of Trade and Industry, Edmonton, 18 July 1938.

Foster's interpretation of the "facts" was based on several assumptions. Whether "inexperienced" or "loose," women who took waitressing jobs in Chinese restaurants inevitably and always also assumed the label of "prostitute." For Vancouver's white middle-class leaders, the combination of Chinese men with white women would always lead to prostitution. For Foster, the facts were clear: the Chinese men were the "bad guys" who victimized and corrupted white, young women. Foster then identified Chinatown as the major source of prostitution. He was apparently only worried about the white women whom he believed had to be saved from "falling." But was it really the women about whom Foster and the middle-class reformers were concerned? The underlying anxiety of Foster and his entourage was white middle-class masculinity and white female sexuality or, more precisely, the dangers of losing control of both.

White, middle-class masculinity was defined by opposing it to the "other," in this case Chinese masculinity and unloosed female sexuality, both of which needed to be considered as different, inferior, and controlled by white men. However, the fact that Chinese men drove white women into prostitution meant that white middle-class men had lost control over both. They had been, in effect, emasculated. Such acts against the natural order of society needed to be penalized. White men achieved this by labeling and then prosecuting Chinese men as criminals and white women as prostitutes cast out from "normal" society and its privileges. Moreover, by penalizing young, white women who refused to be submissive voluntarily, white, middle-class men tried to force them back into submission, thereby regaining control of their sexuality. As I will show later, the attempt to regain control over "their" women's sexuality was, despite the reluctant co-operation of the Chinese restaurateurs, thwarted by the women themselves.

Using the threat of prostitution (or uncontrolled/uncontrollable white female sexuality), politicians enacted laws that established the "properly appointed place" of white women in "European consciousness" and society.⁵ Clearly, this place lay outside

⁵ Anderson, 159.

Chinatown. Only as tourists or customers were white women to be allowed inside Chinatown. Thus, in 1919, an “Act for the Protection of Women and Girls in Certain Cases” was enacted, which forbade white women to work in Oriental restaurants. After protests from Chinese diplomats, the Act was amended in 1923, leaving out the specific reference to Orientals. The Act as revised in 1936 stated:

No person shall employ in any capacity any white woman or girl or any Indian woman or girl in or permit any white woman or girl or any Indian woman or girl to reside or lodge in or to work in or, save as a bona-fide customer in a public apartment thereof only, to frequent any restaurant, laundry, or place of business or amusement where, in the opinion of the Chief of Municipal Police of the municipality or the Inspector of Provincial Police of the police division in which the restaurant, laundry, or place of business or amusement is situate, as evidenced by a certificate in writing signed by him and posted up in his office, it is advisable, in the interest of the morals of such women and girls, that they should not be employed, or reside, or lodge, or work therein, or frequent the same.

City Solicitor A. E. Lord pointed out in a letter to the League of Women’s Voters that there was no by-law that forbade white women to work in Chinese restaurants save this Act of the Provincial Legislature. This Act, however, did not only aim at Chinese restaurants but at any restaurant. In fact, the Act did not target restaurants at all but was in “‘the interest of the morals of *such* women and girls.’ In other words, it is not the restaurant which is aimed at so much as the morals of particular women and girls.”⁶ Even though the waitresses were seen as victims who had to be protected from immoral persons and milieus, official actions were nevertheless always aimed at them and it was they who bore the consequences.

In early 1936, Foster invoked the Women’s and Girls’ Protection Act, forcing eight restaurants where he and his morality squad officers had observed “disgraceful conditions” to fire their white help.⁷ It was, however, extremely difficult to enforce the law. The restaurant owners who did not dismiss their white help were brought before

⁶ CAV, Police Board, Series 183, Correspondence inward 1940-1949, Loc. 75-D-7, file 17, letter from City Solicitor Lord to the League of Women Voters, 1943.

⁷ Patricia E. Roy (ed.), *A History of British Columbia. Selected Readings*. (Toronto, A Longman Company, 1989), 288.

Court. The Court, however, demanded that the name of each individual girl or woman of "questionable character" had to be given in order to convict the restaurant owner. The girls and women of "questionable character," however, were simply dismissed and replaced by new girls before time came for a trial. Thus, the restaurateurs rendered the Act useless. In practice, the Act affected only individual women who lost their jobs and reputations. At the same time, all white women and girls were controlled and regulated since they were discouraged from seeking employment at Chinese restaurants and therefore had one less employment option.

Because the Women's and Girls' Protection Act failed, other laws were enacted. One law which included all restaurants and not only the Chinese, called for the abolition of the closed-curtain booth, the narrow passage-way, and the screen which obstructed the view of the booth.⁸ Restaurants owners, who did not make arrangements according to this by-law before 15 September 1936, had their licenses canceled. This by-law, however, was not taken seriously by many restaurant owners, as the Ministerial Association and the Vancouver Council of Women noticed.⁹ The Council charged that "out of 447 restaurants owners, 156 have not complied with the law, out of that number 28 were only British subjects all others were foreigners."¹⁰ The Council further classified these foreigners as "Greeks, Chinese, Japs, Swedes and from almost every country on the Globe."¹¹ Even though the conditions improved, specific objections remained to white girls working in Chinese restaurants.¹²

Foster claimed that "although the widening of the booths in the restaurants had made some improvement for a while, the behavior of the girls with the Chinese was

⁸ CAV, Mayor's Papers, Loc. 33-F-3, White Girls in Chinese Restaurants, Foster to W. King, Dep. Minister of Trade and Industry, Edmonton, 18 July 1938.

⁹ United Church of Canada B.C. Conference Archives, Vancouver General Ministerial Association, Box 1, Minutes 1936, 227.

¹⁰ University of British Columbia Library, Special Collections and University Archives Division (hereafter UBCSC), Minutes of the Vancouver Council of Women, Box 7, file 7-8, 91.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 100.

¹² CAV, Mayor's Papers, Series 483, General correspondence files, 1899-1983, Loc. 33-D-6, White Girls in Chinese Restaurants, Foster to Mayor Miller, 3 September 1937.

becoming as bad as it had ever been before.” Magistrate Wood supported Foster’s charge when he stated “that the Chinese influence on young white girls was very apparent to him through his work as Judge of the Juvenile Court.” Wood prepared a report on “white girls” who had been brought to Court because of their work at Chinese restaurants.¹³

In early 1937, Vancouver’s new mayor, George C. Miller, police chief Foster, and Alderman H. D. Wilson issued an ultimatum that forbade Chinese owners of restaurants and cafes to employ white waitresses for the next six months. If the proprietors did not respect this regulation their licenses would be canceled.¹⁴ Foster asked License Inspector Urquhart, another official who as Kay Anderson found was “known for his moral discipline,” for help and they decided to grant new licenses for 1937 only if the Chinese would dismiss all of their white waitresses and employ no more any longer.¹⁵ Foster, furthermore, informed Mayor Miller that he would submit a list of names -- a blacklist -- of the women working in these restaurants and that any offense against morality in one of these places would result in the canceling of the license.¹⁶

The actions by the police and the mayor did not go unchallenged by people who saw this procedure as “unfair” and as a “discrimination against a certain race.” Ex-Mayor L. D. Taylor who was mayor of Vancouver previous to McGeer, was one of the opponents. Blaming the Police Commission and the Aldermen for discriminating against the Chinese restaurant and cafe owners, he stated that there was no reason to force the Chinese out of business as long as they kept within the law. It was specific waitresses and the employers about whom Taylor claimed to be concerned. There was no reason, he argued, to force the women out of their jobs. Asking who would provide a living for these women, he claimed that,

¹³ CAV, Police Board, Series 180, Minutes 1904-1968, Loc. 75-A-3, file 1, 101.

¹⁴ *Daily Province*, 10 February 1937.

¹⁵ Anderson, 160.

¹⁶ CAV, Mayor’s Papers, Loc. 33-D-6, White Girls in Chinese Restaurants, Foster to Mayor Miller, 5 February 1937.

One would think that the employing of white girls by Chinese was the step to vice, but this thought is only that of evil minded persons and an insult to those girls who have to earn their living If it is detrimental to society for white girls to work in Chinese restaurants, then it is detrimental for them to work in restaurants managed by men of other nationalities, including white restaurants.

Taylor was convinced that girls and women would be asked out for dates no matter where they worked, whether in a restaurant, department store, or office. "If it is wrong for young white women to work for Chinese, " argued Taylor, "is it not EQUALLY SO for Chinese young men to work for WHITE WOMEN in their homes ?"¹⁷

A compromise was reached whereby the Chinese were allowed to keep their white waitresses, but as soon as they quit their jobs were not permitted to replace them with new white help. Under this regulation, the new licenses for 1937 were granted. Only two weeks later, Foster complained that the women gave wrong names, thus frustrating his attempts to establish a blacklist. Furthermore, the Pacific Cafe on 96 E. Pender Street did not live up to the new regulation when it employed a new white waitress. As a consequence, License Inspector Urquhart issued a serious warning to this cafe.¹⁸ But the Pacific Cafe was not the only one that countered the new regulations. Most of the proprietors, as Foster complained, "treat the matter as a joke," and kept on employing white waitresses. The Gee Kong Cafe added one more white woman, while the Modernized Cafe employed three more white women. Foster demanded that the license of the Modernized Cafe be canceled as a consequence.¹⁹

On 9 April 1937, a meeting took place between Mayor Miller, Superintendent Darling, and lawyer Dennis Murphy who represented the Chinese owners. Miller complained about "certain irregularities "²⁰ in Chinese restaurants and advised Murphy

¹⁷ United Church of Canada B.C. Conference Archives, Vancouver Ministerial Association, Correspondence, Box 1, file 1-7, *The New Deal* edited by L. D. Taylor, 1937.

¹⁸ CAV, Mayor's Papers, Loc. 33-D-6, White Girls in Chinese Restaurants, Foster to Mayor Miller, 27 February 1937.

¹⁹ Ibid., Foster to Mayor Miller, 6 March 1937.

²⁰ CAV, City Clerk's Department, Series 27, Special Committee Files, Loc. 27-C-7, file 17, letter re white waitresses employed in Chinese restaurants, 9 April 1937.

that “drastic action” would be taken if conditions did not improve.²¹ Murphy replied that there had been a “misunderstanding”: the owners had understood that they could re-employ white waitresses as long as they did not increase their original number. Murphy, furthermore, argued that the Chinese owners could not be held responsible for their waitress’s “conduct off-duty.” However, they were willing to co-operate with the police: “The proprietors of the restaurants are prepared to discharge any waitress whom the police believe or suspect is guilty of improper conduct while off duty.” Murphy, however, along with the Chinese restaurant owners demanded that the police permit the owners to keep the present number of waitresses employed and “that there will be no effort on the part of the city or of the police to prevent women seeking legitimate employment in these restaurants.”²²

Only three months later a tentative agreement was reached between authorities and the Chinese restaurant owners, but Chief Constable Foster complained that the situation had not improved. He claimed that white waitresses “become intimate with the Chinese, and in many cases live with individual Chinamen.” This time, the zealous policeman backed up his charges with cases he and his officers had collected. In one, a Chinese men allegedly talked two girls aged fifteen and sixteen, from Kelowna, into working in a Chinese cafe, living with him, and prostituting themselves to Chinese men. This case, Foster urged, showed “that these restaurants are not fit and proper places for the employment of white girls, particularly those without much experience.” He pressed for an amendment to the Women’s and Girl’s Protection Act that would give the police the power to deal with such situations directly. Unless action was taken, Foster warned, “the situation will undoubtedly get worse.”²³

²¹ CAV, Mayor’s Papers, Loc. 33-D-6, White Girls in Chinese Restaurants, Minutes re. White Waitresses employed in Chinese restaurants, 9 April 1937.

²² *Ibid.*, Murphy to Mayor Miller, 6 May 1937.

²³ *Ibid.*, Foster to Mayor Miller, 3 September 1937.

Heeding the Chief Constable's alarm, City Prosecutor Oscar Orr quickly rushed to Foster's support. He advised Foster to use the power to cancel licenses until something better was at hand. Orr believed that

Proceedings for the cancellation of licenses need not be conducted with the same strictness of proof as a criminal prosecution and I do not say this with the idea that we should punish persons without proof but merely that a great many things are perfectly obvious to a License Inspector in making a personal inspection which would be difficult to paint in court.

Orr suggested that a License Inspector might see when visiting such a place "a 'loose conduct,' such as, a white waitress sitting down with a Chinese, no outward crime is being committed but the chances are that procuring is well under way."²⁴

Foster and Urquhart did not need to be told twice. Only one week after Orr's recommendation, they canceled the licenses of the Hong Kong Cafe, the Gee Kong Cafe, and the B.C. Royal Cafe. Even though the Chinese proprietors faced prosecution if they continued to operate their businesses, lawyer Murphy advised them to keep their cafes open.²⁵ Murphy immediately sought an injunction against the city to restrain it from preventing the Chinese proprietors from earning a livelihood.²⁶ Only a day later, the three restaurants owners, Charlie Ting, Harry Lee, and Toy Chew took their cases to the Supreme Court of British Columbia. They believed that their employment of white women was not the only reason for the cancellation of their licenses since their restaurants had been the only ones that had their licenses canceled. Lum Fun Ting, a leading businessman and property owner concluded that "It must be a geographical reason. ... if they are going to keep white girls out of Chinese restaurants, why must they pick on a certain number. If the girls are allowed to work in Oriental cafes uptown, why should they not be allowed to do likewise in Chinatown."²⁷

²⁴ Ibid., Oscar Orr to Foster, 7 September 1937.

²⁵ *Vancouver Sun*, 16 September 1937.

²⁶ *Vancouver Sun*, 17 September 1937.

²⁷ *Vancouver Sun*, 18 September 1937.

The eager constable, however, did not react to Ting's assumption, but presented the court with several incidences of "irregularities," which he had carefully noted down in his diaries. Presenting nine different cases, Foster tried to show that most of the women who worked in Chinese restaurants either lived with or prostituted themselves to Chinese men. Ruth Allen, the policeman claimed, was not only waitressing in Chinatown, but was living with a Chinese man, and she was being treated for venereal disease which implied she was doubtless a prostitute. Kay Martin, who worked at the Hong Kong Cafe, allegedly shared a room with a Chinese man at the Palmer Hotel in June 1936. The New Lion Hotel was the setting of the immoral activities of Jessie Pleasance who supposedly was living with Harry Chin and acting as a prostitute for him. Pleasance married Chin only a short time after. Nevertheless, the keen Chief of Police continued to insist that Jessie Pleasance was a well known prostitute who had also "lived with a colored man named Smith, later with a Chinaman named Jimmy Fong." She had been employed in several Chinese restaurants or, if not employed, spent her time there. In a fourth case, police officers had followed Mary Black from the Muir Lunch to the Japanese rooming house where they had found her in a room with Lee Yen. After gaining entrance to room number seventeen on 222 Keefer Street at eleven o'clock at night on 1 March 1937, the law enforcement men witnessed the Chinese man who was in bed in his underwear and Mary Black who was completely dressed, but "her clothing had the appearance of having been put on in a hurry." After taking a quick look at the wet towel and water on the floor, Foster had no doubt that prostitution was going on. When Yen was questioned by the police officer, he admitted that "he had eaten in the Muir Lunch, where he had a conversation with the girl, who had waited on him, the result being that she had told him she would come to his room for a good time on the payment of \$2.00." Even though Black and Yen were brought to a police station they had to be released because of lack of evidence.²⁸

²⁸ CAV, Mayor's Papers, Loc. 33-D-6, White Girls in Chinese Restaurants, Foster on Chinatown Cafes, 18 September 1937.

The Supreme Court rejected the plea for an injunction. One week later, the three Chinese cafe owners offered to dismiss their white waitresses as soon as the cancellation of their licenses would be revoked and the police court prosecutions withdrawn.²⁹ Shortly later, three other restaurants, the Yin Tong Cafe, the Muir Cafe, and the Modernized Cafe, agreed to discharge their current white waitresses and to discontinue the further employment of white women, although they were advised by lawyer Murphy that the City had no legal power to cancel their licenses. However, as Murphy told Foster, the Chinese owners "wish to co-operate with the City Council and the Police Force in any reasonable manner."³⁰ By 2 October 1937, all restaurants that had been under investigation had disposed of their white waitresses. Nevertheless, the police department continued visiting those restaurants to make sure that they would hold to the regulations.³¹

Vancouver's white middle-class leaders had succeeded. By throwing the women out of employment and thus out of Chinatown, they had shown them their "proper" place in white society and regained the appearance of control over "their" women's sexuality, at least in this one racially charged site.

"We are not compelled to go out with anybody."

The Women's Fight

I agree with Kay Anderson who has argued that the Chinese restaurant owners were racially harassed by the authorities. But while Anderson has analyzed race dynamics in a very thorough way, she has neglected to examine the gender relations involved. The actions by the police in this case affected the women more than the Chinese proprietors. The women depended on their Chinese bosses who found it easier to adjust to the new

²⁹ *Vancouver Sun*, 25 September 1937.

³⁰ CAV, Mayor's Papers, Loc. 33-D-6, White Girls in Chinese Restaurants, letter from 29 September 1937.

³¹ *Ibid.*, Detectives on Chinatown Cafes, 2 October 1937.

regulations. The women, on the other hand, not only lost their jobs but their reputations as well. This becomes quite obvious by the actions the women took in order to keep their jobs. While they supported their employers, their employers offered them to the police as tokens to be dismissed on suspicion of immorality. The women who were fired from Chinatown cafes did not passively accept their fate.

On 24 September 1937, the fifteen waitresses of the Hong Kong Cafe, Gee Kong Cafe, and the B.C. Royal Cafe, who had just been laid off their jobs, marched to City Hall to protest the ban on their employment. In an interview with *Vancouver Sun* reporter, Christy McDevitt, the women voiced their concerns about the treatment they had received from the police and city authorities. McDevitt wrote about the waitresses in a favorable light, describing them as “young, many of them attractive and apparently of decent families.”³²

Not accepting that they should lose their jobs on some official “moral grounds,” the women expressed their “indignation at what they declare is an implied reflection on their reputation” and “deny bitterly that the morals of girls working on Pender Street are in any greater jeopardy than girls working elsewhere.”³³ Kay Martin, one of the seven white waitresses employed at the Hong Kong Cafe, noted that “some of the customers try to date us up at different times but that happens in the best of restaurants. We are not compelled to go out with anybody.”³⁴

Unlike the police, especially Chief Constable Foster, the waitresses were not worried about a “loss of respectability” but were “‘perfectly satisfied’ with their working conditions, wages, treatment at the hands of their employers.” In fact, the women praised their Chinese bosses. “They are not slave drivers like many white restaurant owners. We get \$ 9.50 a week and all our meals. If we are sick and cannot work, our jobs are held for

³² *Vancouver Sun*, 16 September 1937.

³³ *Vancouver Sun*, 25 September 1937.

³⁴ *Vancouver Sun*, 16 September 1937.

us.”³⁵ Kay Martin even stated that “I would much prefer working for a Chinese employer than for some other nationalities.”³⁶ Martin further asked “what the ‘old women’ who are trying to get the girls out of Chinatown would do for them when they lose their jobs.”³⁷

The waitresses feared having to go on relief. “We are fired just at a time when Old Man Winter comes along. Most of the girls have bought winter clothes and are still paying for them. Many of us support families and are right up against it,” explained Margaret West, the spokeswoman of the delegation. The waitresses stated that while unemployed, “they are being fed by their former employers.”³⁸ All parading and protesting was in vain, however, as Mayor Miller denied them an audience. The situation worsened.

In October 1937, all white waitresses were dismissed by their Chinese employers. On 12 October, thirty white waitresses of six Chinese restaurants showed up at a meeting of the civic social services where they asked to be reinstated. This time, Miller and his colleagues could not evade the desperate women. The women were, however, once again unsuccessful since Mayor Miller and all of the Aldermen, with one exception, turned down their plea. Barrister Garfield, who supported the women, stated that the waitresses would lose \$ 25,740 income per year, that six of the women were married, and that all of them had dependents. The waitresses had hoped that Miller would reconsider his decision, but he ignored their protest, declaring mercilessly: “As long as I am mayor, there will be no return to former conditions in those restaurants.”³⁹

While the waitresses had a clear understanding of their situation and their need to make a living, white middle-class authorities certainly did not understand the women’s situation. The women knew that they faced going on relief after losing their jobs. By losing their jobs, they were possibly forced to prostitute themselves in order to make a

³⁵ *Vancouver Sun*, 25 September 1937.

³⁶ *Vancouver Sun*, 16 September 1937.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Vancouver Sun*, 25 September 1937.

³⁹ *Daily Province*, 12 October 1937.

living, the exact result which the middle-class reformers had tried to prevent.

Nevertheless, Mayor Miller ignored the situation of the women and merely told them that “they should not have much trouble in getting other jobs.” Commenting on the group of waitresses who had appeared before him, he noted “that the present group of girls was different from a delegation which came to see him a few months ago.” Miller concluded cynically that “the turnover seems to be very fast in Chinatown. Those other girls must have got jobs by now.”⁴⁰ He could only see a group of prostitutes before him, given his reading of their occupation in their Chinese work sites.

Middle-class reformers in general drew upon the discourses of race, gender, and class which they interwove in such a way that the meaning of a white woman waitressing in Vancouver’s Chinatown in the 1930s was that of a loose woman or a prostitute. They saw Chinatown as a place of vice and crime and had an image of the waitress as an unrespectable woman. Fantasy and imagination ran rampant with white male bureaucrats such as police officers Foster and Rae, Mayor Miller and his aldermen, and prosecutor Orr. Viewing Chinatown as an immoral place, they believed that there white women were sold into slavery as prostitutes to Chinese men.

Scholars such as Kay Anderson, Peter Ward, and Patricia Roy have demonstrated that Chinese immigrants had to endure enormous hostility once they had arrived in British Columbia, the province that was the “centre of intolerance” in Canada since most Chinese settled there.⁴¹ Vancouverites especially were prejudiced against the Chinese, and they particularly detested Chinatown about which they constructed an image based on distinct moral presumptions: “By western standards, Chinatowns were often overcrowded, malodorous, and unclean. Prostitution, gambling, and opium smoking were prominent

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Patricia E. Roy, *The History of Canadian Cities. Vancouver - An Illustrated History* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1980), 28.

features of Chinese social life largely because the community was transient and overwhelmingly male.”⁴²

Prostitution was among the most feared Chinatown vices since it blurred the boundaries between white society and Chinese, with Chinatown “the home of evil and inscrutable men. It was a morally retrograde prostitution base where white women were lured as slaves.”⁴³ White women had to be protected from crossing the border to Chinatown, especially as employees of Chinese men in an inferior and dependable situation. Moreover, white society needed to be protected against potential sexual relations between white women and Chinese men and their results, mixed race bastards. The Vancouver Council of Women among others did not even accept that Chinese should have their own very restricted place next to white society, and pleaded, in 1937, for the “total exclusion of all Oriental immigrants.”⁴⁴

In addition, the image of waitressing as an unrespectable occupation for “proper” women helped to construct this discourse of white waitresses at Chinese restaurants as prostitutes. Before the 1920s, waitressing was seen by many middle-class reformers as an “improper” occupation for women. Waitresses worked in public places where they came frequently in contact with their male customers with whom they might flirt since they were dependent on tips, as Dorothy Sue Cobble concluded in *Dishing It Out: Waitresses and Their Unions in the Twentieth Century*: “the intimacy of food service, the tip exchange, the decided departure of waitresses from middle-class standards of gentility, and perhaps the association - often unconscious - between eating and sex led to the denunciation of waitresses as ‘loose women’ and even as prostitutes.”⁴⁵ Even though waitressing became more respectable during the 1920s and later, especially in

⁴² W. Peter Ward, *White Canada Forever. Popular Attitudes and Public Policy Toward Orientals in British Columbia* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1978), 18.

⁴³ Anderson, 92.

⁴⁴ UBCSC, Minutes of the Vancouver Council of Women, Box 7, file 7-8, 206.

⁴⁵ Dorothy Sue Cobble, *Dishing It Out. Waitresses and Their Unions in the Twentieth Century* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 24.

combination with Chinatown, the notion of the waitress as a “loose woman” still existed in Depression-era Vancouver.

“A trap for the defilement of young girls:”

Foster’s Mission

Even though white waitress were no longer allowed to be employed at Chinese restaurants, Foster detected violations of the agreement. On 19 November 1937, Foster demanded that the licenses of the Gee Kong Cafe and the Hong Kong Cafe be canceled. The Chinese restaurateurs denied vehemently that they employed white women and explained that they had merely “given food in exchange for a few hours work.”⁴⁶ Council decided not to suspend the licenses as Foster was informed through the press. The disappointed police officer replied that “had the Council consulted Police files their attitude would have been a very different one.”⁴⁷ He sent along a statement by a young woman who allegedly had been found in a room with a Chinese just a few days earlier.

Statement of -----, age 20. My home is ----- Vancouver. I obtained employment as waitress at the Hong Kong Cafe, 126 E. Pender Street. I was there about a month, then I quit and about the first week in June, 1937, I obtained work as a waitress at the Gee Kong Cafe, 168 E. Pender Street. I worked at this Cafe until about the middle of September, 1937, when I quit. When I first started at the Hong Kong Cafe I soon found out that the waitresses, or at least some of them, were making money by prostituting themselves with Chinamen. During the time I worked at the Hong Kong Cafe I kept myself clean and did not go out with Chinamen but I think about a month ago or so after I had started to work at the Gee Kong Cafe I started to go to Chinamen’s rooms; the reason was that I knew the other girls were making money that way and buying nice clothes and I wish to get money and have clothes like them. I have been going to the ---- Hotel, and tonight I was there in Room 107 with a Chinaman when the Detectives found me. I have been to see this Chinaman a few times before. I have had sexual intercourse with him and he has paid me \$5 on each occasion. I know if I had not worked in these Chinese Cafes I never would have prostituted myself.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ CAV, City Clerk’s Department, Series 20, Correspondence inward, Loc. 16-F-6, file 4, letter from Foster to City Clerk Fred Howlett, 25 November 1937.

⁴⁸ CAV, City Clerk’s Department, Loc. 16-F-6, file 4, letter from Foster to City Clerk Fred Howlett, 25 November 1937.

There were white waitresses working in Chinese restaurants who engaged with Chinese men in sexual intercourse in exchange for payment. For them this was a way to either increase their meager salaries as waitresses or have some extra "easy money" to spend on "nice clothes" such as this woman. She was not forced by the Chinese man into prostitution but chose to work as a part-time prostitute. The woman probably knew about the "reputation" of Chinatown. Chinatown was not a "neutral" place but was inscribed with meanings. Through discourses, places are ascribed certain social meanings which have regulating effects on people. Thus, as Marie Louise Adams has shown for Toronto of the 1940s, young people's sexuality was regulated by restricting their access to specific places.⁴⁹ For Vancouver, Kay Anderson has shown how Chinatown was constructed by Vancouver's white middle class as an exotic, exciting but also criminal, dangerous, and unhealthy place. The women were probably aware of these meanings and the alleged dangers which surrounded Chinatown. Nevertheless, the women always had to choose their workplace within the limits of their economic circumstances in Depression-time Vancouver.

When caught by the police, however, the woman who claimed that "I know if I had not worked in these Chinese Cafes I never would have prostituted myself," did not justify her actions with dire economic straits or her desire for a better life-style. Rather, she used the dominant discourses of Chinatown and waitressing to play into the notion of white women being tempted into prostitution by the Chinese and constructed herself as a victim. Blaming the Chinese cafes for her "fall," she might have tried to save herself from the consequences such as the payment of a fine. Another explanation could be that the woman indeed believed that her employment in the Chinese cafe had caused her "fall."

⁴⁹ Mary Louise Adams has examined in her essay "Almost anything can happen: A search for sexual discourse in the urban spaces of 1940s Toronto," in *Canadian Journal of Sociology/ Cahiers Canadiens de sociologie* 19(2) 1994, 217-232, how through discourses urban spaces receive certain meanings. Adams argues that "we also need to look at moral regulation as a consequence of more subtle, less direct processes, in this case discursive constructions of specific types of places as 'bad'."

A very detailed study on Chinatown and how it was ascribed different meanings through social discourses is Kay J. Anderson's study *Vancouver's Chinatown. Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875-1980* (Montreal and Kingston, London, Buffalo: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991).

But for whatever reasons the waitress made her statement, for Foster it carried great importance as he used it to put pressure on the City Council. The police chief needed evidence in order to cancel licenses. From this one case, Foster concluded that all white waitresses in Chinatown were prostitutes. He employed a social cliché of one class of prostitutes -- the white waitress in Chinatown -- to define and brand all white women who were employed in Chinese restaurants in Chinatown as prostitutes. This evolving definition of a prostitute had several consequences for women: the waitresses already employed in the Chinese restaurants did not only lose their jobs but also their reputations; women who sought employment in Chinatown were discouraged from doing so; Chief Foster sent a message to all women whereby he made clear that it was not "proper" for women to work in a Chinese restaurant in Chinatown.

In 1938 and 1939, the pressure to re-employ white women grew. In August 1938, the Chinese proprietors spoke out against the ban because their businesses were seriously affected. Foon Sien, Secretary of the Chinese Benevolent Association of Vancouver, explained that "it is impossible to obtain Chinese waitresses. Inability to hire white girls has forced two cafes out of business."⁵⁰

The women took matters into their own hands in 1939. "Certain girls" asked Council for permission to return to their former employers.⁵¹ Trying to prevent the women from returning to Chinatown, Foster bombarded newly elected Mayor Telford with a barrage of evidence of the evils of Chinatown. Again he used a statement by a white girl who allegedly became a prostitute after having worked in a Chinese cafe. By submitting the statement, Foster tried to pressure Telford, who only two months previously had started a major drive against vice in Vancouver. The young woman, who had been arrested in a bawdy house, made the following statement:

⁵⁰*Vancouver Sun*, 16 August 1938.

⁵¹ CAV, Mayor's Papers, Loc. 33-F-3, White Girls in Chinese Restaurants, Foster to Mayor Telford, 9 March 1939.

My home is in Winnipeg, Manitoba, where my parents reside. I came here to Vancouver about September 15th, 1936. I obtained employment as a waitress in the then Carlton Cafe. Afterwards I worked at other downtown cafes. I went back to Winnipeg to see my mother who was sick and I stayed 2 weeks. On my return to Vancouver I was unable to get work in a downtown Cafe and I was more or less desperate to get money to live on, I went to Chinatown where I obtained a job at the Modernized Cafe at 133 East Pender Street. I was there about 3 weeks before the white girls were banned and put out of these cafes. While I was at this cafe, Chinamen used to hang around quite a lot and I got to know a lot of them. The first day I was at this cafe, chinamen [sic] made suggestions for me to go their rooms, offering sums as high as \$10 or \$15. I only went on one occasion and this Chinaman brought a bottle of White Horse Whisky to the Cafe. He persuaded me to drink and I got drunk. I don't remember what took place but I woke up in this Chinaman's room in bed with him. I knew from my condition that he had sexual intercourse with me. He gave me \$25. and a few days afterwards he gave me \$35.00 and told me to buy myself clothes. Since then I have been with this Chinaman about twice a month and we would have sexual intercourse and at the same time he would give me enough money to live on. About two weeks ago I got a job as a prostitute in a house at 343 East Georgia Street and on this date I was arrested by the Police and charged with being found in a Bawdy House. I wish to state that I know for certain that if I had not gone to work in a Chinatown Cafe I would not be a prostitute now. The conditions in these Chinatown Cafes are such that if a girl wants to hold her job she can not be anything else but immoral. I do not know of any white waitresses in Chinatown Cafes who did not do a little prostitution of some kind on the side. All cafe bosses had a girl and chinamen [sic] just keep pestering the life out of a girl until she comes through. For myself, I have fallen and have become a prostitute, but I think that it is the finest thing that has ever been done for the moral welfare of white girls to ban them out of Chinatown Cafes and they should always be kept out.⁵²

Similar to the previous case, this waitress from Winnipeg also blamed her Chinatown job for her "fall." Arguing that she had been made drunk by a Chinese man, who in effect had overwhelmed her while she was insensate, she too cast herself as a victim. This statement seemed to be perfect for Foster's intention, which raises questions of the actual source. Both language and content suggest that this is not the woman's unfiltered voice. Rather, it is likely that Foster manipulated the statement through suggestive questions.

Foster and his colleagues did not shy away from using statements by girls and women who definitely were not prostitutes. In 1940, the head of the Morality Squad, Detective Sergeant Andrew Rae, boosted Foster's mission with a statement by fifteen-

⁵² Ibid., Foster to Mayor Telford, 28 April 1939.

year-old Wanda Woods. Rae had collected information regarding the thirty-seven-year-old Geck Lock and his cafe on 533 Main Street. Lock's home address was 826 Main Street where he also owned a Chinese Herbalist store. Lock had received a license for his cafe at the end of 1939, and Rae charged that the cafe was "a hang-out for young thugs, small time pimps and young white girls of very questionable character." One of those pimps was James Brown, who was arrested and sentenced to nine months in prison. "Brown was taking young white girls to Chinese bunkhouses and in one case to a Hindu for the purpose of prostituting themselves." Sergeant Rae recommended the cancellation of the license of the Geck Lock cafe which he described as "a breeding place for crime and vice, and premises such as these, while they offer employment to girls who may be in need of work, appear to me to be little better than a trap for the defilement of young girls."⁵³

Wanda Woods had worked at the Geck Cafe for one day in August in 1939. On that day, Rae visited the cafe and noticed Woods. He stated that "This girl is a rather pretty blonde and appeared to be the centre of attraction at the time of our visit. Under the circumstances I did not consider it a proper place for this girl to be working and I told her to quit and go home to her parents." Woods told Rae the following story:

I live with my people who are on Relief and who live at 41 South Kamloops Street. About a month or 5 weeks ago I saw an ad in the newspaper for a young girl to work at a lunch counter and house work, apply to 826 Main St. I went there and saw a Chinaman named Geck Lock. He said that he already had a girl for house work. He has a wife and 5 young children at that address. He then told me he had a cafe at 533 Main Street, and that he would give me a job there. He told me to go to the Cafe at 6 p.m. that night. I went there at 6 p.m. and started in to work. I was to get \$1.50 for 8 hours. I was behind the counter. During the evening Chinamen and young white boys and girls came around the place and drank pop and coffee and sat and talked. One of the Chinamen wanted me to go to his room with him. Another one wanted me to go out with him to a Beer Parlor. I did not go. Late that evening Det. Sergt. Rae and a Detective came to the cafe and questioned the girls. He also questioned me and told me to get out of the place and go home. He also warned Geck Lock who was there at the time about me and other girls and they [*sic*] way that the place was run. I quit that night. I have been back once to see one of the girls there. During the evening I worked there Geck Lock when he hired me told me to be at the Cafe at 6 p.m. but as I was down town I went there about 3 p.m. and I

⁵³ Ibid.

spoke to one of the girls named 'Bunny' and I had some coffee. While there she introduced me to a young and well dressed Chinese name Wingor Wayne Hope. He speaks good English. He took me out for a walk. We went to Chinatown and went to the Flying Dragon cafe. Since I worked at the Geck Lock cafe there is a Chinaman who speaks to me on the street. He said that he knows me from working at the Geck Lock cafe and wants me to go and have a beer with him.⁵⁴

Although Wanda Woods never worked as a prostitute, Rae used her statement to convince politicians to criminalize white women's work in Chinatown and to warn white girls and women to stay clear of Chinese restaurants. By showing what would have happened to Woods had he not rescued her from the Chinese cafe, Rae appeared to be her savior when she was on the verge of becoming a prostitute. His order to her to go home and to avoid this place, was not merely to Wanda Woods but to all young women who were looking for employment in Chinatown. Rae's message was that Chinatown was an evil place for women and that inevitably, they would end up as prostitutes if working there. Such messages reinforced societal stereotypes of waitresses as "loose" women who were frequently harassed both inside and outside of their workplace.

The issue of white women employed in Chinese restaurants emerged once more in 1943, when The League of Women Voters raised concern that nothing could be done to forbid Chinese employers to hire white women. As Kay Anderson explained "Such biased conduct was slowly becoming frowned on by society at large."⁵⁵ Nevertheless, white women who worked at these places continued to suffer under the prejudices of white middle-class men who still defined them as prostitutes and found new ways to harass them.

⁵⁴ CAV, Mayor's Papers, Series 483, General correspondence files 1899-1983, Loc. 34-A-7, Police Commission, Statement of Wanda Woods, 1 March 1940.

⁵⁵ Anderson, 160-161.

CHAPTER 2

“SHE MANIFESTED TOO GREAT AN INTEREST IN THE BOYS:” THE HOSTEL FOR PROSTITUTES IN VANCOUVER FROM 1939 TO 1945

In the winter of 1940, seventeen-year-old Louise Smith, born in Hamilton, Ontario, entered the Hostel for Prostitutes in Vancouver, British Columbia. A welter of difficult circumstances had brought her there. Louise had spent all her life with her mother and “various men” with whom her mother had lived, after her father had left them when she was a little girl. Unable either to read or write, she had been a “special class pupil.” Furthermore, according to Mary Nicholson, the case worker who handled Louise’s admission to the hostel, Louise “had been a behavior problem for many years.” It turned out that “she manifested too great an interest in the boys.” In 1938, after Louise’s mental ability was tested, the Juvenile Court ordered her committal to Ward X of the Vancouver General Hospital, because “owing to her lack of control, and interest in the other sex, it was thought commitment to a Mental hospital would be in her best interest.” Louise did not stay in Ward X long, but soon returned home to her mother. Shortly thereafter, her mother again asked the authorities to admit Louise to Ward X because of “incorrigibility.” When Louise turned eighteen, she was allowed to leave Ward X, but she did not go back to her mother. Instead, she left for Mission in the Fraser Valley where she spent a week with a friend. After her return to Vancouver, Louise met a man, Peter Hansen, “when she was out in a boat, fishing, and asked him for a light for her cigarette.” Louise moved in with him a few days later. She then “commenced to prostitute to the Chinese, keeping

herself and Hansen in this manner” for about three weeks, when she was arrested with the charge of “being an Inmate of a Disorderly House”; Hansen was charged with “Living in part off the Avails of Prostitution” and went to prison for half a year. Louise, who said that she loved him, was very worried about his fate, but it seems that she did not receive any satisfactory information. Sergeant Andrew Rae, head of the Vancouver Police Morality Squad, merely told her about “various uncomplimentary remarks” the man allegedly had made about her. Rae then referred Louise to the John Howard Society.

The John Howard Society of British Columbia, which was formed in 1931 by the Vancouver General Ministerial Association, was the first of its kind in Canada. Its main goal was to help prisoners re-establish themselves in society after their release. The Society also provided assistance to the relatives of imprisoned men and women. Other major concerns were the prevention of crime and a more humane treatment of male and female prisoners. The Reverend Joshua Dinnage Hobden, the Society’s first Executive Secretary, was a firm believer in the Social Gospel. Unlike other evangelical Christians of the day, who were social and political conservatives, followers of this movement were religiously committed social activists who were convinced that Christianity demanded a better human society and that every Christian was obliged to help realize this aim. The most radical political position held “that the Christian’s main obligation was not spiritual quests, the conversion of the heathen, or the attainment of other-worldly bliss, but the more mundane and practical task of building the Kingdom of God on earth through collective, structural social change.”¹

Mary Nicholson, also a follower of the Social Gospel, and the social worker of the John Howard Society who took Louise’s case, suggested that she be placed in the hostel for the care and rehabilitation for prostitutes. During her stay in the hostel, Louise had to undergo an examination at the Division of Venereal Disease Control, where she was found not to be infected with venereal disease. In her report, Mary Nicholson stated that

¹ Allen Mills, *Fool for Christ. The Political Thought of J. S. Woodsworth* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 10.

Louise had “behaved better than was expected” and was a pleasant inmate. Mrs. Williams, the matron of the hostel, agreed with Nicholson about Louise’s good nature, although she described her as “lazy and a poor worker with no memory.” While in the hostel, Louise visited her mother on a couple of occasions, after receiving permission from her social worker. As Mrs. Williams suspected, Louise went out drinking on one or two of these visits. Louise’s case was reported to the City Prosecutor, Oscar Orr, who “agreed that she appeared to be unable to care for herself.” He accepted the analysis of the case worker that Louise was “a born victim owing to her low mentality, lack of stability and over interest in the opposite sex.” On Orr’s advice Louise was returned to Ward X for a short period of time and then, with the consent of her mother, who did not want to take care of Louise anymore, was sent to the Provincial Mental Hospital in Essondale.²

This institution, located in the Fraser Valley near Port Coquitlam, consisted of several red brick buildings and a farm where patients produced their own food. Conditions at Essondale were unhealthy: the institution was overcrowded and maintained low standards of hygiene.³ After spending a couple of months at this prison farm, Louise was granted leave during the winter of 1941 and was discharged on probation in spring 1942, when she probably moved back to Vancouver, and out of the case files of the John Howard Society.⁴

Louise’s case was only one of many supervised by case worker Mary Nicholson of the John Howard Society. Though most of the John Howard Society case files concerned male ex-prisoners, they also record the supervision of dozens of young women, some of them placed in the Hostel for Prostitutes. Only a year after the hostel’s opening,

² Simon Fraser University Archives, John Howard Society, the Lower Mainland of British Columbia Papers (hereafter SFUA), Client Files from BR-BX, 1938-1970’s.

In order to ensure anonymity, I have changed Louise Smith’s and Peter Hansen’s names and other personal data.

³ John A Cherrington, *The Fraser Valley - A History* (Madeira Park, British Columbia: Harbour Publishing, 1992), 268-269.

⁴ I did not find any more information about her whereabouts, and I do not know whether she was able to continue a “normal” life afterwards.

the John Howard Society had already referred eight of their female clients to the hostel.⁵ Yet, this incarceration was intended to be but an interim measure, for the caseworker hoped to play a profound role in their clients' lives to assure that they would return to a "proper" lifestyle.

This role of the case workers was central to the moral and social discourse on prostitution in Vancouver between 1934 and 1945. An examination of the "drive against vice" of 1939, that resulted in the establishment of the Hostel for Prostitutes, reveals how the social and moral discourses that shaped the middle-class image of the prostitute led by extension to the regulation of the behavior of all single young women. There were significant divisions among those who dealt with prostitutes, and this inter-elite debate had a significant impact on prostitution. But whether they were more punitive or more reformist in their attitude, middle-class leaders argued over the fate of prostitutes in ways which tended to reduce them to some morally lesser level of humanity. However they originated, these conflicting forms of regulation imposed on the women proved to be largely unsuccessful, as the women often resisted the reformers' attempts to control and regulate their lives, instead turning regulatory mechanisms to their own advantage.

In January 1939 the newly elected mayor and Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) member, Lyle Telford, started "the big drive against vice" in Vancouver. Besides the control of gambling and bootlegging, the drive was aimed at the suppression of prostitution. This was not the first time that Vancouver had tried to crack down on vice. A campaign against prostitution had been in progress for more than four years, and a police drive on venereal disease had been underway since March 1938.

At the beginning of the Depression, morality had been a "very minor election issue" in Vancouver. In 1934, this indifference was challenged by the ambitious politician, Gerry McGeer, who declared that "crime must be stamped out." He warned

⁵ City of Vancouver Archives (hereafter CVA), City Clerk's Records, Series 27, Special Committee Files, Loc. 27-E-1, file 28, letter from the John Howard Society to W. R. Bone, Administrator on the usefulness of the hostel, 17 December 1940.

that Vancouver was in danger of being “handed over to an underworld group that will soon turn this great Canadian city into a bankrupt carbon copy of the City of Chicago in its most evil days.”⁶ First elected in 1934, in large parts as a crime buster, McGeer established himself as a defender of morality and law by enforcing a drive against vice that came to be known as the “McGeer purge.” The mayor suspended several police officers and replaced Police Chief John Cameron with Colonel W. W. Foster. Prostitution figured greatly in this drive since all the fired officers were accused of protecting brothels and receiving bribes in return. In a report to the new Chief of Police, Legal Adviser T. G. McLennan charged that prior to 1934, “Commercialized vice and well organized crime thrived under Police protection.”⁷ Chief Cameron himself had been at the center of corruption since “Joe Celona was known to be on friendly terms with the Chief of Police, has been entertained on the City of Vancouver Police Boat. On one occasion the Ex-Chief of Police and the Deputy spent the night on the Police Boat with Celona, Lombardo and certain women of the underworld.”⁸ Joe Celona was a notorious character of the so-called “underworld” who operated brothels where “white girls were available to orientals [sic].”⁹ In 1941, the Vancouver Council of Women strongly opposed Celona’s early release from prison, arguing that he had “been convicted in our courts for the worst possible crimes.” In a resolution to the Minister of Justice, they insisted that Celona, who had been released after serving only five years of an eleven year sentence, be re-imprisoned for the rest of his sentence at least in part because of the pressure exerted by the Council of Women. The Justice Minister repealed Celona’s parole and sent him back to jail for the remaining six years.¹⁰

⁶ G.G. McGeer, Speech at Hotel Vancouver, 21 November 1934, PABC, McGeer Papers, Vol. 7, cited in: Patricia E. Roy, *Vancouver - An Illustrated History*. (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1980), 123.

⁷ CVA, Mayor’s Papers, Series 483, General correspondence files 1899-1983, Loc. 33-B-5, file 5, report by T. G. McLennan, 18 February 1935, 1.

⁸ CVA, Mayor’s Papers, Loc. 33-B-5, file 5, report by T. G. McLennan, 18 February 1935, 2.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁰ University of British Columbia Library, Special Collections and University Archives Division (hereafter UBCSC), Minutes of the Vancouver Council of Women, Box 8, file 8-4, 45.

But beyond exposing Chief Cameron's alliance with the underworld, and public protection of brothels, McLennan further charged that "Procuring was developed and there are instances on record where young girls not over fifteen years of age have been kidnapped on our city streets, criminally assaulted, and held in bondage in brothels patronized mainly by Chinese."¹¹ He unveiled in part a racist set of fears that all the poor young women of Vancouver were in continual moral peril. Prostitution was an evil imposition from beneath, and had to be eliminated to rescue the virtue of city girls.

While the new Chief of Police, W.W. Foster, successfully eradicated such evils as gambling joints and slot machines, he failed to stamp out prostitution. The police could only repress its most unacceptable public nuisance characteristics such as street-walking, "window-tapping," and well-known brothels about which tax paying citizens complained. However, "though some former occupants of the bawdy houses had to seek welfare, they soon resumed business by scattering throughout the city."¹² More realistically than Gerry McGeer, Foster realized "that this evil cannot be entirely stamped out, and that the efforts of the Police should be directed to stamping out its most objectionable features, with a view to keeping the City as orderly and free from this nuisance as possible."¹³

The discussion about segregation or suppression of prostitution had been going on for many years. Authorities of the City held different viewpoints regarding the control of prostitution. Regulation of prostitution by confining it in "red light districts" or segregated areas such as Dupont Street from 1900 to 1906, and Alexander Street in 1912 and 1913,¹⁴ was clearly favored by the police and the city prosecutor since "...rigid

¹¹ CVA, Mayor's Papers, Loc. 33-B-5, file 5, report by T. G. McLennan, 18 February 1935, 3.

¹² Roy, *Vancouver*, 123

¹³ CAV, Mayor's Papers, Loc. 33-B-5, file 5, Memorandum re Certain Vice Conditions in the City of Vancouver by Police Magistrate H. S. Wood, Col. W. W. Foster, and Oscar Orr, City Prosecutor, 5 September 1935, 3.

¹⁴ Deborah Nilsen, "The 'Social Evil': Prostitution in Vancouver, 1900-1920," in: Barbara Latham and Roberta Pazdro (eds.), *Not Just Pin Money: Selected Essays on the History of Women's Work in British Columbia* (Victoria: Camosun College, 1984), 205-228.

enforcement [of the law] will result in scattering the prostitutes all over the city, so that the police will find increased difficulty in exercising any form of control.”¹⁵ However, in a memorandum concerned with the problem of prostitutes thrown out of employment, Foster stated “that there was no argument here as to the respective merits of segregation and suppression, as segregating was contrary to the law of Canada.”¹⁶ Authorities such as Dr. Donald Williams, director of the Division of Venereal Disease Control, middle-class reformers, and Mayor Telford strongly opposed segregation for health and moral reasons and demanded the rigid enforcement of the law to suppress prostitution entirely.

Lyle Telford had been an active CCF member for Vancouver East and a strong advocate for the suppression of prostitution for several years before his election. In 1937 he claimed that a “hotel in Vancouver is the centre of the white slave traffic in British Columbia.” Telford further alleged that ““an officer who reported conditions in the place (a hotel) to the (Vancouver police) commission lost his job,”” and charged that “police commissions in both Victoria and Vancouver were unsatisfactory,”¹⁷ despite Chief Foster’s denial that “white slavery” had existed in Vancouver for the previous two years.

Whatever Chief Foster believed, in January 1939, only days after his election as mayor, Telford ordered Foster to eradicate prostitution and to crack down on vice, orders which Telford made certain were well reported in the press. In a comparative report on the vice conditions in Vancouver in 1934 and 1938, after the sweep, he claimed that the number of bawdy houses had been cut in half, street walking and soliciting almost had been eliminated, and the grip of a commercialized vice ring completely broken. Many of the pimps and procurers had left Vancouver and the rest were being prosecuted. Both Telford and Foster made it clear that, nevertheless, actions had been insufficient, and that

¹⁵ *Daily Province*, 17 January 1939.

¹⁶ SFUA, John Howard Society Papers, Box 4, file 19, clippings and documents re. prostitution, 1930’s-1970’s, Memorandum of a meeting of representatives of public and private welfare agencies, law enforcement authorities, and certain public bodies, 9 February 1939, 1.

¹⁷ *Daily Province*, 8 December 1937.

they "...can't and won't compromise with the offense."¹⁸ They proclaimed their intent to keep the brothels closed.

Only ten days after the drive against vice had been ordered, the *Vancouver Sun* published an interview with Police Chief Foster which expressed his fears, already pointed out in his confidential letter to the Board of Police Commissioners, that the drive on vice might result in "a large increase in criminal assaults."¹⁹ Vancouver was a port with a big population of seamen and other single seasonal male workers who now had no opportunity to buy sex, and Foster believed they would turn instead to violence. Dr. Donald Williams, however, disagreed with Foster. He stated that the belief of women being in danger of sexual assaults and rape was only a myth and was "empty of factual support in actual experience." By arguing that the suppression of prostitution would only decrease but certainly not increase assaults, Williams was convinced that "every illegally operating bawdy house constitutes a centre of community aphrodisiac influence which builds up to unnatural proportion the desire of males of that community to expose themselves to the diseased products [prostitutes] of the house."²⁰

Mayor Telford also had to face criticism from municipal politicians. Alderman H. D. Wilson asserted that as a consequence of the drive against brothels, prostitutes now worked in residential districts and in high-class tearooms. Alderman Helena Gutteridge, who had fought for female suffrage before 1917 and for better conditions for paid work,²¹ also criticized Telford's actions, arguing that "Provision should first have been made for these girls to earn an honest living. You have put the cart before the horse."²²

¹⁸ *Daily Province*, 12 January 1939.

¹⁹ CAV, Mayor's Papers, Series 483, General correspondence files 1899-1983, Loc. 33-E-6, Police Commission, letter by W. W. Foster to the Chairman and Members, Board of Police Commissioners, 16 January 1939, 2.

²⁰ Donald H. Williams, "The Suppression of Commercialized Prostitution in the City of Vancouver," *Journal of Social Hygiene*, 27, 1941, 366.

²¹ Irene Howard, *The Struggle for Social Justice in British Columbia*.

Helena Gutteridge - *The Unknown Reformer* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1992).

²² *Vancouver Sun*, 31 January 1939.

Dr. Williams only had to add that the “rehabilitation of professional prostitutes is a most discouraging social task. Professional prostitutes are the last to wish for sympathy or rehabilitation.”²³

“It will be your responsibility to help them.”

A Hostel for Prostitutes

On 15 January 1939, Mayor Telford called on the churches and social organizations to enter into the work of “reclaiming” prostitutes who were “turned loose as a result of the drive.” In several large open meetings Mayor Telford warned his fellow citizens that “Women will be turned into the streets when the law is more rigidly enforced” and that “it will be your responsibility to help them.”²⁴ As a result of the drive, some prostitutes, such as the two or three women who sought refuge in Nelson, had in fact left Vancouver for other cities: prostitutes were, then and now, quite mobile and moved elsewhere when the police began to enforce the law more strictly in the city where they worked.²⁵ For whatever reasons, most prostitutes did not plan to change their mode of living. However, Mayor Telford saw the problem of prostitution as a purely economic one and was convinced that “the average man or woman was a fine individual given a decent opportunity to live as they should.”²⁶ And Telford was certain he already knew the solution to the problem of prostitution: “These women must be given work at a sufficient wage to permit them to live as they wish to live.”²⁷ Opposing such an unrealistic and naive assessment, fellow CCF member Laura E. Jamieson argued “...that society is creating prostitutes so rapidly that all the social services and welfare organizations, and

²³ Williams, “The Suppression of Commercialized Prostitution in the City of Vancouver,” 367.

²⁴ *Daily Province*, 16 January 1939.

²⁵ Barbara Meil Hobson, *Uneasy Virtue - The Politics of Prostitution and the American Reform Tradition* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 87.

²⁶ *Daily Province*, 16 January 1939.

²⁷ *Vancouver Sun*, 18 January 1939.

all the churches can not possibly care for them; and supposing they could take them all in and give them useful training, of what use would that be when there are no jobs for them when they come out?"²⁸ But her efforts were in vain, and the middle-class reformers in conjunctions with politicians, the police, and medical experts had decided to provide prostitutes with a hostel of their own, as a school for moral and economic reform.

Laura E. Jamieson's viewpoint of the conditions for women during the Great Depression was quite realistic. Some working-class women seemed to be stuck in a vicious circle. On the one hand, they were cut off relief and expected to support themselves on their own. On the other hand, the only profitable work available for many unskilled women was to prostitute themselves, for which they were then harassed by the same authorities who had deprived them of their alternative means of income. This vicious circle was quite explicit in Vancouver, for at the same time they cracked down on vice, the Social Service Department closed the "Dunromin," a hostel for "certain women relief recipients," in January 1939.²⁹ The Vancouver Council of Women, and especially the members of its committee on unemployment,³⁰ had taken part in setting up this hostel,³¹ which was designed specifically to control "abuse" of relief by women, who, though destitute, were expected to be able to solve their problems through their own efforts, rather than to "retire on cash relief."³²

The Social Service Administrator, W. R. Bone, approached the Social Service Committee, the Council committee responsible for the Social Service Department, asking them for guidance regarding policy, since, "with the knowledge that 'Dunromin' is closing on January 31st, a number of re-applications [for relief] from this type of person

²⁸ *Daily Province*, 30 June 1939.

²⁹ CAV, City Clerk's Records, Series 27, Special Committee Files, Loc. 27-D-5, file 6, report by W.R. Bone to Alderman H.L. Corey, Chair of Social Service Committee, re Use of Hostel for Single Women Relief Recipients, 20 January 1939.

³⁰ Mary Patricia Powell, "A Response to the Depression: The Local Council of Women of Vancouver," in: Barbara Latham and Cathy Kess (ed.) *In Her Own Right. Selected Essays on Women's History in B.C.* (Victoria, BC: Camosun College, 1980), 262.

³¹ Members of the Vancouver Council of Women, for example, contributed furniture.

³² I do not know whether this also represented the opinion of the Vancouver Council of Women.

are being received.”³³ In the same report, Bone pointed out that the problems of prostitutes and the vice situation in Vancouver were also coming to a head. Since applications had been received by women who admitted that they had been former prostitutes and had lost their livelihood because of the drive on vice, Bone asked the Chairman of the Social Service Committee, Alderman H. Corey, for guidance on how to provide single women with relief. Corey made clear “that the City Social Service prefers to give direct shelter and food to prostitutes applying for relief rather than cash.”³⁴ He was aware of the fact that many prostitutes were unwilling to enter such a home. Nevertheless, he was in favor of some kind of “supervised care.” Administrator Bone pointed out that many prostitutes were included in the number of women who relied on cash relief. When cash relief was replaced with vouchers, several alleged prostitutes dropped from the roll. Administrator Bone suggested re-establishing a hostel as an effective control mechanism. Even though he emphasized “that there is no intention of drawing a parallel between these two types of applicants other than that involved in the policy regarding the hostel,”³⁵ the hostel was designed to control the behavior of both prostitutes and impoverished non-prostitutes thought too uncontrollable for parents and foster homes. It is interesting to note that some sexist relief officers told women who qualified for relief assistance that “‘with figures like theirs’ they did not need relief.”³⁶

At the beginning of February 1939, six churchmen, representing the General Ministerial Association, initiated their project for the moral and economic rehabilitation of former prostitutes. As adamant advocates of the suppression rather than the segregation of prostitutes, they supported Mayor Telford’s drive. Together with the Vancouver

³³ CAV, City Clerk’s Records, Loc. 27-D-5, file 6, Use of Hostels for Single Women Relief Recipients, 20 January 1939, 2.

³⁴ SFUA, John Howard Society Papers, Box 4, file 19 clippings and documents re. prostitution, 1930’s-1970’s, Memorandum of a meeting of representatives of public and private welfare agencies, law enforcement authorities, and certain public bodies, 9 February 1939, 2.

³⁵ CAV, City Clerk’s Records, Loc. 27-D-5, file 6, Use of Hostels for Single Women Relief Recipients, 20 January 1939, 1.

³⁶ Alison Prentice et al., *Canadian Women. A History* (Toronto, Orlando, San Diego, London, Sydney: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988), 236.

Council of Social Agencies, they organized a conference of several private and public agencies which were interested in rehabilitating prostitutes.³⁷

On February 9 and March 9, thirty-five representatives of public and private social welfare agencies gathered to discuss the reformation of prostitutes. Included were representatives of the John Howard Society, the Division of Venereal Disease Control, Catholic Charities, the YWCA, City Social Service Department, the United Church Presbytery, Family Welfare Bureau, City Council, Parent-Teacher Federation, United Church Home for Girls, Provincial Welfare Department, and the City Police Department.³⁸ The Vancouver Council of Women, although not directly involved in the conference, supported the idea of caring for prostitutes thrown out of employment.³⁹

In a memorandum to the mayor and council of Vancouver, the organizations recommended the establishment of a Hostel for Prostitutes and the appointment of trained social workers. Even though the committee pointed out that most prostitutes were impoverished women who entered the sex trade during times of unemployment, they did not conclude that prostitution was solely an economic problem. It was rather a moral problem. Emphasizing that the "mere provision of food and housing to the single woman who had entered prostitution to make a living was not enough," they demanded that something had to be done "to raise her moral standards and to render her more capable of maintaining herself. She must be brought into contact with a decent Christian atmosphere, and at the same time trained to earn her own living by development of her individual capabilities."⁴⁰ The John Howard Society in particular made it very clear that not every prostitute was suitable for rehabilitation. The Reverend Hobden believed that there were

³⁷ United Church of Canada B.C. Conference Archives, Vancouver General Ministerial Association, Correspondence, Box 1, file 1-10, letter by the Vancouver Council of Social Agencies, 4 February 1939.

³⁸ SFUA, John Howard Society Papers, Box 4, file 19, clippings and documents re. prostitution, 1930's-1970's, Memorandum of a meeting of representatives of public and private welfare agencies, law enforcement authorities, and certain public bodies, 9 February 1939, 1.

³⁹ UBCSC, Minutes of the Vancouver Council of Women, Box 8, file 8-2, 96.

⁴⁰ United Church of Canada B.C. Conference Archives, General Ministerial Association, Correspondence, Box 1, file 1-10, Report of the Committee appointed after a conference on the care and rehabilitation of prostitutes, 1.

three different kinds of prostitutes: into the first category fell those who did not need any help from the outside, into the second category fell women who were eager to live a "normal" life again, while to the third category belonged the incorrigible women who did not want to give up their way of life.⁴¹ Hobden wished to concentrate mainly on the second category. He was of the opinion "that it is only this type of young girl, not yet debauched and hardened, who offers any hope of reclamation."⁴²

Even though each organization had different motivations for joining this committee, all had organized around a single policy -- the suppression of prostitution, and therefore, the control of all single women who behaved in a way which was socially intolerable in a society based on the patriarchal family, where a women's "proper sphere" was at home. Therefore, not only prostitutes, but single young women leading loose social lives were not acceptable and had to be led back to the right path of decency and proper womanhood.

By 1 September 1939, these organizations had opened a home at 1471 West 11th Avenue for the care and rehabilitation of prostitutes. The house was located in a residential area of Vancouver. It was "tastefully furnished" and had a "cultured and homelike atmosphere."⁴³ Quite intentionally, the hostel was designed to provide more than just food and shelter. The hostel's ambience impressed upon the inmates the moral standards and the Christian values of the middle class.

Up to six women could stay in the hostel at once, supervised by a Mrs. Williams, a doctor's widow and a woman of "high ideals, broadminded and able to gain the confidence of the girls."⁴⁴ She was also "not alarmed by the fact that girls with venereal disease infections are living in the home with her."⁴⁵ In lieu of a regular salary Mrs.

⁴¹ SFUA, Box 4, file 19, clippings and documents re. prostitution, 1930's-1970's, Memorandum of a meeting of representatives of public and private welfare agencies, law enforcement authorities, and certain public bodies, 9 February 1939, 2.

⁴² SFUA, Box 12, file M 210, re. young offenders, 1931-1945, report by the Reverend Hobden, 10.

⁴³ CVA, Social Service Department, Series 449, Subject files 1928-1971, Loc. 106 A 7, file 5, Five Year Report of the Girls' Hostel, September 1939-1944, 1.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ CVA, City Clerk's Records, Loc. 27-E-1, file 28, Report on Hostel for Prostitutes, 25 January 1940, 1.

Williams received eighty dollars per month for operating costs and board for each woman she housed. The City Social Service Department, the Provincial Department of Health and Welfare, and the John Howard Society each paid one third of these monthly expenses. If a woman was ineligible for assistance by the Service Department, her board was to be paid by the public or voluntary social agencies and departments which also were allowed to send their own clients to the Hostel. Donations also came from different women's organizations, churches, and persons who were interested in the fate of these young women.⁴⁶

The hostel was under the supervision of a sub-committee consisting of seven female social workers from the City Social Service Department, the John Howard Society, the YWCA, the venereal disease clinic, and, later on, from the Children's Aid Society and the Family Welfare Bureau. The chairman was a lay person. All of the seven women, except one, were single. The advisory committee was responsible for the admission of the women, their problems, and policies governing the hostel. As a report by Miss Lilian Thompson, the chairman of the advisory committee noted, the Social Service Department was responsible for the intake.⁴⁷ The advisory committee was a sub-committee of the Council's Women's Protection Committee, headed by Mrs. C.W. Mellish. Different women's organizations, social agencies, and churches joined together in the Women's Protection Committee to support protective programs for women of which the hostel was among the most important.⁴⁸

Once a young woman who had been referred to the hostel from a public or voluntary agency was released from the hostel, it was up to these agencies to take further care of them. During their stay in the hostel it was primarily Mrs. Williams's responsibility to oversee the inmates. It is difficult to reconstruct her exact position and

⁴⁶ CVA, Social Service Department, Loc. 106 A 7, file 5, Five Year Report of the Girls' Hostel, September 1939-1944, 6.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 1.

⁴⁸ CAV, Major's Papers, Series 483, General correspondence files 1899-1983, Loc. 34-B-7, Vancouver Welfare Foundation, Vancouver Council of Social Agencies, Twelfth Annual Report, February 1942, 7.

how much control she actually exercised in the hostel. Williams was described as the “matron,” and she seemed to have considerable influence in this role, though what combination of force and moral suasion she used is impossible to discern. One of her main tasks was to ensure that the women kept to the rules established by the committee. The “girls,” as they were termed in the report, had to rise early, since breakfast had to be over by 9:00 A.M. Lunch was served between noon and 1:00 P.M. and dinner between 6:00 and 7:00 P.M. Every time a woman wanted to go out she had to inform Mrs. Williams when she expected to return. Curfew was set at 10:30 P.M. The report did not state on what terms Mrs. Williams granted the women permission to come back later than 10:30 P.M. Lights had to be out by 11:30 P.M.⁴⁹

Since the Hostel’s purpose was not only to provide accommodation and food for the women but to rehabilitate them, each woman had to perform domestic tasks whenever Mrs. Williams requested. Such household duties included, for example, cleaning and cooking. The women also sewed the drapes and spreads of their “new home.” They alternated household tasks and divided the work among themselves. The performance of household duties was only part of the rehabilitative concept the social workers applied to the hostel. One evening each week the women learned handicrafts and on another evening they attended night school. There, they participated in classes where typically female subjects were taught, such as shorthand, typing, and household sciences. This notion of rehabilitation of women centered almost solely on the domestic sphere, with the exception of the classes on shorthand and typing. Thus, the whole program was primarily designed to prepare the young women for what their mentors believed was the proper profession for women: housewife and mother.

None of the professional prostitutes thrown out of employment during the drive on vice, however, had applied to the hostel and the offer of reclamation. The Reverend Hobden of the John Howard Society clearly told the civic social service committee that

⁴⁹ CVA, Social Service Department, Loc. 106 A 7, file 5, Five Year Report of the Girls’ Hostel, September 1939-1944, 2.

Telford's drive had failed. Hobden stated that "These women were not forced out. There is no question that they have gone to other 'low pressure' areas."⁵⁰ Therefore, the moral reformers needed to expand their clientele and they soon turned to a pool of young single women whom the committee described as "girls who were promiscuous and who were in danger of becoming prostitutes." They were young women like Louise who, in the opinion of the moral reformers, led loose social lives and behaved in a way which was not tolerable in a society based on the concept of the patriarchal family, where a women's "proper sphere" was the home. They were not acceptable to the middle-class leadership's understanding of decency and proper womanhood. The moral reformers in effect reconstructed the identity of the prostitute. At first they had tried to secure those women who worked full-time in brothels and on the streets. After this proved unsuccessful they shifted their goal towards prevention and thus expanded the meaning of prostitute. They turned now to the allegedly promiscuous girl and defined her as a potential prostitute who was seen as being "in need of close supervision" or "already in need of rehabilitation."⁵¹ The reformers proudly proclaimed the effect of this re-naming: "In this way it was found that the hostel had a very important place to fill, and since then its doors have been open to young girls who desired to be rehabilitated, and who had not gone too far to make this possible."⁵² This definition of deviance meant that the hostel came to control the behavior of single, young women by naming them promiscuous, and hence on the way to prostitution. Some of these women had never in their lives worked as prostitutes but had behaved and dressed in ways that transgressed approved sexual decorums. This re-definition of prostitute resulted in the blurring of the boundary between prostitute and single, young working-class woman. Thus, very often any young woman who appeared out of control to various authorities was referred to the Hostel for Prostitutes.

⁵⁰ *Vancouver Sun*, 20 March 1939.

⁵¹ CAV, Social Service Department, Loc. 106 A 7, file 5, Five Year Report of the Girls' Hostel, 1945, 5.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 1.

Thirty-six women or their families had contact with the welfare agency before they were admitted to the hostel. It is difficult to say for certain whether most women had entered the hostel voluntarily and on their own request or that of their own families, or were referred to the hostel by a social agency, though it is unlikely that very many chose to enter freely. Even though they were free to leave the hostel at any time, there were strict rules controlling their lives. Essentially they were treated like children unable to care for themselves. Moreover, the committee clearly believed that such women had to be closely supervised since, given their histories, without strict guidance they would not manage to keep themselves out of trouble.

A study of the eighty-five “girls” who had lived in the hostel during the five years of its operation reveals far more about how the women were perceived by the committee than how they saw themselves or the hostel experience. Their profile will reveal exactly what group of women was affected by the middle-class reformers’ construction of the identity of the prostitute.

The hostel did not set a single standard of intended outcome of the stay at the hostel but tailored one to each individual. Once a woman arrived at the hostel, her status “as to conduct, appearance, attitude and the situation she was in at the time she entered the Hostel was established.”⁵³ The report did not exactly say how or by whom this status was established, but almost certainly Mrs. Williams in conjunction with the social workers set the standard. At the end of her reforming stay her “subsequent progress” was then tracked. The report described the results of thirty-three women as “good,” of four as “fair,” and of twenty as a “failure.”⁵⁴

The reformers based their actions regarding “prostitutes” on their belief in the objective knowledge of the prostitute. The identity of the prostitute in Vancouver in the 1930’s and 1940’s was rather vague. All women who were young, poor, and uneducated, and who were allegedly from an unstable family, drug-addicts, alcoholics, or “everything

⁵³ Ibid., 5.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 5.

a proper woman was thought not to be," could be labeled as prostitutes or potential prostitutes. Consequently, these women were treated in a specific way, that is, they were policed, closely supervised, regulated, and acted upon in a reformatory manner both inside and outside of the Hostel for Prostitutes.

The inmates of the hostel included a mix of unmarried mothers-to-be, "feeble-minded" women, psychiatric outpatients, and several for whom no other institution was available. Three of the eighty-five inmates were "feeble-minded" and waiting to be admitted to the Mental Hospital. Six were pregnant and only admitted to the hostel because they were infected with venereal disease and could not be accepted to houses for unmarried mothers. Fourteen women who stayed in the hostel were, as the report noted, "not in need of rehabilitation, but for whom a supervised environment was desired and no other was available."⁵⁵ Most likely they had lost their parents or guardians and were uncontrollable and could not be fit into foster homes or allowed to drift onto the streets. They were the wayward girls -- on the brink either of salvation or perdition.

The case of Rosie reveals what the social workers and Mrs. Williams expected from the women who entered the hostel. When Rosie had first arrived at the hostel she was described as "dirty and unkempt ... She was slow moving, slow thinking, and had the big hands of one accustomed to working in the fields." Rosie, who apparently had grown up on a farm with a young step-mother and a very strict father, had left her home with a farm hand only a couple of months before. Once they had arrived at the west coast, her companion had departed and left Rosie on her own. She was able to find work in a cannery, but the job soon ended and she landed up jobless in Vancouver, when she somehow came to the hostel for a stay of at least a couple of months. During her residence she found work in a factory which allowed her to support herself financially but, in the eyes of the authorities, not morally. Even though "it was an arduous task teaching Rosie how to behave in a manner that was socially acceptable," Rosie was

⁵⁵ Ibid., 5.

allegedly on friendly terms with the social workers and “was anxious to win their approval in dress and grooming.” The report did not state whether Rosie had worked as a prostitute, but when she left Vancouver to find a job, she soon met a man and became pregnant. This led her social worker to the following conclusion: “Rosie’s story, despite its failures, is a success story for the Hostel. Handicapped as she was mentally, she could adjust well and become a self-supporting citizen only in the kind of protective environment that the Hostel could give her.”⁵⁶

There is little if any material reflecting what the inmates themselves felt. Women such as Louise Smith and Rosie left few direct sources. Their voices and opinions were left out from the public discussions. What I found were documents about them, documents written by social reformers, police officers, and medical experts which reflected the definitions and biases of these “experts.” How did the women, who were confined to the Hostel, negotiate the identity constructed and prescribed by politicians, reformers, the police, and religious experts? How did the women negotiate their positioning in society? How did they define themselves?

One cannot assume that the identities created by all those people who took part in the public discussion about prostitutes were identical with those the women had of themselves. Ruth Roach Pierson has convincingly argued against attempts to reconstruct the internal perspectives of oppressed groups solely through documents written by their oppressors.⁵⁷ I therefore did not attempt to reconstruct the feelings and attitudes of the women from these reports. Rather, I used the language of the reports to describe the women’s exterior roles as the social workers perceived them. Each description of an inmate was about one type-written page long and contained information regarding family backgrounds, the stay in the hostel and the outcome of the rehabilitation process. The reports did not state who composed these stories, but one can assume that members of the

⁵⁶ Ibid., report about Rosie.

⁵⁷ Ruth Roach Pierson, “Experience, Difference, Dominance and Voice in the Writing of Canadian Women’s History” in: *Writing Women’s History. International Perspectives* ed. by Karen Offen, Ruth Roach Pierson and Jane Rendall (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991).

advisory committee and the social workers of the different organizations wrote them based on interviews with Mrs. Williams and the women themselves. The profile that emerges is of socially marginal girls as perceived from the top down.

Eighty-five girls lived in the hostel from September 1939 until August 1944. Most of them were born in Canada, with five women from Great Britain, one from the U.S. and one from Russia. Of the Canadian-born women, 43.6 per cent had British parents and 56.4 per cent were of "foreign parentage." Their parents were either Scandinavian, Dutch, Slavic, Jewish, or "Grecian."⁵⁸ The "girls" were between seventeen and thirty-four years old, but the average age was nineteen. Most of the women were single and eighteen were married. As the report stated, "younger girls were better prospects for rehabilitation" and, therefore, probably preferred as inmates.

For fifty-four women there was information available regarding their education. Thirty-seven had received some public school training and seventeen had attended high school. The report furthermore listed the type of occupation of forty-four women.

<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Number</u>
Waitress	15
Domestic	13
Factory Worker	4
Clerical Worker	4
Laundress	2
Cannery Worker	2
Casual Housewife	2
Elevator Operator	1
Dancer	1

The committee concluded that there had to be "some relation between lack of education and the maladjustment of these girls."⁵⁹ But this was not the only conclusion they drew. Family background played a role as well. The committee had divided the

⁵⁸ CAV, Social Service Department, Loc. 106 A 7, file 5, Five Year Report of the Girls' Hostel, 1945, 2.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 3.

homes of the women into “good” or “bad” ones. They based their findings on two main factors: moral standards and the adequate care of the children. Factors that were considered as “detrimental” to a good home were “unadjusted foreign parents, lack of understanding and too strict supervision, on the part of parents, one of the parents not in the home and stepparents.”⁶⁰ According to these factors, twenty-four women came from a “good home,” six had a “fair home” background and thirty-one a “poor” one. Four women had lived in institutions and four were full orphans. Information for the remaining sixteen women was unavailable. The committee, however, admitted that their analysis did not always reflect a “true picture” and that there might have been single-parent homes still distinguished by a good relationship.

Why did the committee categorize the women and try so hard to explain why they had failed? To understand this, we need to look at the make-up of the committee. They were middle-class reformers, well-educated, from supposedly “intact” homes with two “real” or “genuine” parents; they were most likely not only white but usually British or white Canadian-born. The women they described and categorized were the complete opposite: little or no education, from broken homes, and often from foreign, presumably ill-adjusted parents. The middle-class reformers thus viewed their study objects through a specific class-based notion of what constituted a “normal” good upbringing.

The purposes of the hostel were multiple. We cannot readily assume that the hostel only served the purposes of the middle-class reformers who tried to force their standards of conduct and appearance on the “clients.” Even though the reformers had hoped to become an important part of the young women’s lives for a certain period of time, and to influence their modes of living according to their own standards, the reformers were, for the most part, unsuccessful in their efforts. Some women used the hostel for their own purposes and selected only the services they thought were useful for them. There were women who sought refuge from abusive families, men friends, or

⁶⁰ Ibid., 5.

husbands, women who were in need of warm food and a bed, as well as women who, in fact, did want to change their mode of living. Thus, material services were the elements of the hostel most desired by the young women. As the report stated, one of the functions of the hostel was, indeed, to provide women in need with "food and shelter." Another function was to improve the health of the women through "regular hours and good food." The hostel, however, also served as an environment to study these women, to appraise their possibilities, and to give case work treatment and, as a result, to raise their living standards. The ideological help which was part of the extra-material aid the reformers wanted to offer was not as welcomed.

An outstanding illustration of this selective accommodation to hostel socialization is the case of nineteen-year-old Madeline from Toronto, who was referred to the hostel in June 1944 through the Division of Venereal Disease Control. As the report stated, she belonged to the group of so-called "Victory Girls." She did not show up for treatment at the clinic regularly and on nine occasions servicemen charged that she had infected them with venereal disease. Therefore, the clinic workers were "concerned about the outcome of her promiscuity and feared that she was on the verge of becoming a prostitute." It seems, however, that not merely her "promiscuity" but her whole appearance was conspicuous. She was described as "pretty" but with "long, untidy, and tangled" hair that was "tinted red." The amount of make-up she used was "excessive" and her clothes were "shabby and soiled but gay, vivid and modern to the extreme." On arriving in the city a year previously, with the intention of visiting a sister, Madeline had not gone to see her, but "had preferred a free and easy life alone in Vancouver." She had worked in several jobs as a clerk or waitress but did not like them. Her accommodation consisted of a seedy, messy, little room in a run-down hotel; her food usually consisted of a cup of coffee and a hot-dog.

Madeline agreed to go to the hostel, saying that "she realized that she had been slipping badly and would have to keep off the streets and she welcomed the opportunity

of going to bed early, having three meals a day, a bath when she wanted it, and the chance to settle down to suitable work." Although she adjusted to the rules of the hostel for the first two weeks, Madeline refused to help with the housework and became, in the opinion of her case worker, "sulky and difficult." She did not try to find steady work, but only worked occasionally, and spent her money on "unnecessary" clothes instead of paying for her board. Her appearance also remained slovenly. She refused to wear the clothes which were offered to her because "they were not snappy enough."

Instead of staying at home after 10:30 P.M., Madeline went out every evening, claiming that she had to go to work. Madeline was again reported as a source of venereal disease infection. The hostel did not accept her behavior and, after two months, asked her to leave, arguing that "Madeline was showing no improvement and was using the hostel as a convenience. She showed no appreciation of what was being done, no interest in fitting herself for any constructive work and no responsibility for making any contribution to her maintenance."⁶¹

Madeline was interested in the material aid the hostel provided. She took advantage of those services that she found useful for herself but was not in the least interested in adjusting to the kind of "respectable" life the hostel tried to impose on her. The hostel could not accept that some women were merely interested in shelter and food and not in the middle-class ideal of a proper quality of life. Other "girls" may have been less outwardly rebellious than Madeline, while still resisting resocialization. Still others may have been wishing to "reform." The reporting methodology of the authorities could not have discovered verifiable and conclusive "results."

The hostel was closed in December 1945, because of its very limited use, which the reformers attributed to the improved economic conditions and more rapid clinic treatment for venereal diseases. Both drives on vice and the rehabilitation of prostitutes had proved to be unsuccessful. This did not, however, discourage the middle-class

⁶¹ Ibid., report about Madeline.

reformers, politicians, and the police from developing new strategies to suppress prostitution and as a consequence to label and define women as prostitutes in new ways.

CHAPTER 3
“MORE LIKE ANIMALS THAN HUMAN BEINGS:”
WOMEN, VENEREAL DISEASE, AND THE
CONTROL OF FEMALE SEXUALITY

Prostitution, promiscuity, and venereal disease were closely connected in Depression and wartime Vancouver: the discourse on venereal disease became a site on which medical experts, the police, and middle-class reformers re-defined who and what was a prostitute. In this chapter I examine how meanings of prostitution, promiscuity, and venereal disease were interwoven in such a way that the prostitute came to be seen as the cause of venereal disease, and was constructed as the diseased body, at the same time that the definition of who was a prostitute was extended to a large number of young, single women. As Ruth Roach Pierson has argued “... the label ‘amateur prostitute’, like the term ‘pickup’..., emerged to designate any woman who allowed more than one man to have sexual intercourse with her, and thus served to extend the scapegoating of woman for venereal disease considerably beyond professional prostitutes.”¹ To go one step further, these labels were not only attached to women who actually had sexual intercourse with more than one man, but to all women who were *perceived* to have had intercourse with more than one man. Thus, all women who were perceived as “promiscuous” were named “prostitutes” and transmitters of venereal disease and consequently, they became the target of state control and public supervision.

¹Ruth Roach Pierson, *“They’re Still Women After All.” The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood* (Toronto, Ontario: McClelland & Stewart, 1990), 16.

The association of women with prostitution, promiscuity, and venereal disease was heightened by the assumption that women were the “willful spreaders” while men could merely become infected. In other words, women infected men and men were infected by women but not vice versa, in this instance women were taken an action and men were passive. As a consequence, when it came to control the spread of venereal disease, reformers, medical experts, and police officers were convinced that women -- and not men -- needed to be closely supervised and regulated. Indeed, as will become clear in this chapter, middle-class reformers were in the end less concerned with venereal disease than with the control of female sexuality.

In January 1939, the Honourable George M. Weir, provincial secretary and minister of health, claimed “that Vancouver has the worst venereal disease record in the province and that drastic police action against prostitutes is necessary before it can be stamped out.”² This statement is emblematic of how many British Columbians during the Depression and war understood the link between prostitution and venereal disease. This link, signified by a simple “and,” required no further proof or explanation. Prostitutes were “naturally” not only the carriers but also the transmitters of venereal disease. Thus, Weir did not have to explain how “drastic police actions against prostitutes” would “stamp out” venereal disease. The fact that men could also be carriers and spreaders was conveniently excised from this view. On the other hand, by altering and expanding the meanings of “prostitute,” the group of women who could be implicated in the “crime” of venereal disease could be extended arbitrarily. But how was this link between prostitution and venereal disease established? By examining provincial and municipal efforts to reduce venereal disease it becomes clear how prostitution was constructed as the major if not sole cause for the spread of “the secret plague.”

As early as 1936, Weir had asserted that one person in five in the province was infected with venereal disease. Such a high and to many shocking infection rate, which

² *Daily Province*, 13 January 1939.

despite existing public health control measures was on the rise, caused considerable concern among both medical experts and politicians. As a consequence “extraordinary things began to happen in British Columbia.”³ The government, believing that it should play a larger role in its citizens’ health concerns, re-organized its Division of Venereal Disease Control in October 1936. Furthermore, Secretary Weir declared that there would be a province-wide drive to reduce venereal disease. In January 1937 the government of British Columbia started a “five year plan.” By mid-1937 the number of clinics that treated venereal disease had increased from two to eight, now extending beyond Vancouver and Victoria. A campaign to educate the public was also started. But, according to the recent historian of venereal disease, Jay Cassel, “the experience in British Columbia, ..., was something of a letdown.” While in 1937 there was much hopefulness placed on the aggressive anti-venereal disease campaign, in 1938 and 1939 three of the eight clinics were closed. “Nonetheless, the level of activity in British Columbia’s treatment program was much higher than before.”⁴

In Vancouver, at least, actions to reduce venereal disease continued. A police drive on venereal disease began in March 1938. Police actions involved arresting prostitutes and “street walkers of the ‘vagrant’ type” and sending “suspected cases to the clinic prior to being sentenced.”⁵ Those women who were infected were sent to Oakalla prison for up to six months in order to undergo supervised treatment. Thus, by embedding the prosecution of prostitutes within the rhetoric of the anti-venereal disease campaign, legislators, and law enforcement officers established and reinforced the link between venereal disease and the vaguely defined prostitute.

This common-sense opinion was buttressed by medical experts, at the forefront of whom was Dr. Donald Williams, head of the Division of Venereal Disease Control, who

³ Jay Cassel, *The Secret Plague. Venereal Disease in Canada 1838-1939* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 200.

⁴ Cassel, 200-201.

⁵ City of Vancouver Archives, (hereafter CAV), Mayor’s Papers, Series 483, General correspondence files 1899-1983, Loc. 33-E-6, Police Commission, A Report on Morality Offenses in the City of Vancouver, 22 December 1938, 2.

claimed that the war against venereal diseases could only be won if its root -- prostitution -- was extinguished. Such medical experts created fear among the middle class by arguing that while prostitutes could be segregated into red-light districts, venereal disease could not. On 30 January 1939, Williams addressed an enormous, concerned crowd of 4,000 people at the Hotel Vancouver on the control of venereal diseases. The "root and cause" of the spread of venereal disease, Williams was convinced, was prostitution. Williams recognized that prostitutes were often "unfortunate, unhealthy women" who were exploited and -- although directly responsible for the spread of venereal disease -- really not to be blamed for its impact. He rather blamed people such as madams and pimps and their establishments -- bawdy houses, hotels, beer parlors, and dance halls -- which exploited these "diseased products," as Williams preferred to call the women. He argued that the "facilitation rather than prostitution" should be suppressed, but for him "the basic principle behind all action was that of making it as difficult as possible for apparently healthy men to meet potentially infected women."⁶

Williams pushed for medical treatment for every infected person and at the same time for the protection of healthy persons. He demonstrated in a study of 1,175 married couples that most married men were infected before marriage while most women were infected after being married.⁷ This seemed problematic since women were seen as the spreaders of venereal disease. In order to explain this phenomenon, medical practitioners constructed the "innocent victim"; wives who were innocently infected by their husbands. The husbands, in turn, had contracted venereal disease from prostitutes.⁸ Thus, men, in their attempt to relieve themselves of natural sexual urges had fallen prey to promiscuous women who, even though offering apparent relief, had become synonymous with the original cause and genesis of venereal disease.

⁶ Donald Williams, "The Facilitation Process and Venereal Disease Control: A Study of Source Finding and Suppression of Facilitation in the Greater Vancouver Area," *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 34, 8, (September 1943), 401.

⁷ *Daily Province*, 31 January 1939.

⁸ Cassel, 20.

It is difficult to establish how many prostitutes were actually infected with venereal disease. A police report from 1939 states that very often brothel operators made sure that the women working in their establishments were free of venereal disease because they feared police check-ups. Most "landladies," in fact, did not allow the women to work without a certificate of freedom of venereal disease.⁹ Logically it should have followed that most prostitutes were free of venereal disease. The medical profession of British Columbia, however, claimed that there were corrupt doctors, so-called "'moral thugs,'" who handed out certificates to prostitutes stating that they were free of infection when they actually were infected.¹⁰ Williams claimed that 72 per cent of women who were examined between October 1936 and August 1940 were infected even though all of them had presented a medical certificate.¹¹

But Williams had an even more fundamental problem with such medical certificates. By checking up on prostitutes, treating them in clinics, and providing them with medical certificates, Williams thought that doctors legitimized prostitution, as Mayor Telford stated, "'in the position of a provincial licenser for prostitution.'" ¹² Therefore, Williams refused this alternative of handing out certificates to prostitutes since venereal disease and prostitution were not merely medical but moral problems for him, and he did not want to support prostitutes by certifying that they were free of venereal disease and could continue working in brothels. It was Williams' goal not only to suppress venereal disease but to eliminate the whole sex trade, and in effect he erased the boundary between venereal disease and prostitution.

Indeed, Williams was even more adamant about the suppression of prostitution than about the elimination of venereal disease. With the beginning of the drive against vice in January 1939, the police and Williams worked closely together, but the physician

⁹ CAV, Mayor's Papers, Loc. 33-E-6, Police Commission, A Report On Morality Offenses In The City Of Vancouver, 22 December 1938, 2.

¹⁰ *Daily Province*, 13 March 1939.

¹¹ Donald Williams, "Commercialized Prostitution and Venereal-Disease-Control," *Canadian Public Health Journal*, 31, 10 (October, 1940), 467.

¹² *Daily Province*, 16 January 1939.

was not satisfied with the co-operation of the police.¹³ Williams claimed that British Columbia was “thirty years behind the times in the control of social diseases,” even though medicine had already secured remedies for their treatment.¹⁴ He charged that the de facto police policy of permitting brothels to exist in segregated areas “has led to a fraternization between morality squad members and bawdy house operators, and has brought Vancouver’s law enforcement into disrepute throughout Canada and United States.”¹⁵ He supported his claims with statements made by a prostitute who alleged that brothel operators were told by the police to “lay low” until police informed them that they could go on with their trade. The woman further claimed that the same practice had followed the McGeer purge in 1935. Bawdy house operators informed Williams that “Vancouver is the easiest spot on the continent, and that we have nothing to fear from the police here.”¹⁶

Police Chief Foster called these charges “irresponsible in the extreme.” In spite of this dispute, Williams and Foster agreed to a program that included the effective suppression of bawdy houses and the arrest and prosecution of both the prostitutes and the landlords.¹⁷ Foster further assured Williams that he and his staff would be allowed “to interview prostitutes under arrest”¹⁸ and to register each infected woman. Williams was, however, not satisfied with these actions. He was suspicious that prostitutes and taxi drivers would work together and had asked for a “plainclothes man to riding [sic] in taxis and trace the prostitutes.”¹⁹

Despite the quarrel, Williams admitted that the drive on vice had brought some satisfactory results. In a study of 1,105 new male patients with gonorrhoea admitted to the Vancouver Clinic, the number of men who claimed to have been infected by a

¹³ *Daily Province*, 12 January 1939.

¹⁴ A very detailed account on how venereal diseases were treated gives Jay Cassel.

¹⁵ *Daily Province*, 10 February 1939.

¹⁶ *Daily Province*, 10 February 1939.

¹⁷ *Vancouver Sun*, 14 February 1939.

¹⁸ *Daily Province*, 14 February 1939.

¹⁹ *Vancouver Sun*, 14 February 1939.

professional prostitute declined from 24.6 per cent to 7.5 per cent after the drive on vice.²⁰ Once an infected man named the source of his infection, health authorities tried to track down the woman and would then force her to have an examination.

We have to consider, however, that the information given by the patients was not always correct. It was quite easy to name a prostitute as the source since she was inextricably linked with venereal disease. Jay Cassel has noted that “there were instances in which a woman was put through the process of detention and inspection only to discover that she was not infected, leading officials to believe that the man had given the name of an innocent woman.”²¹

Even if, as Williams concluded, “Epidemiological follow-up substantiated most of these allegations,” there were still a large number of unexplained cases of venereal disease infection in his statistics. There were still 92.5 per cent of the men who named a source other than the professional prostitute. This number had to be accounted for somehow, and both Williams and Sergeant Andrew Rae, head of the police morality squad, tried to find an explanation.

Although Williams had recognized the success of the drive on vice, he continued to attack and blame the Vancouver police for not enforcing the law more rigidly. Rae, in turn, felt compelled to defend the actions taken by his Squad, and argued that venereal disease was not spread by professional prostitutes but “due to the loose, immoral conduct of persons in the ‘non-prostitution’ category.”²² He defined this “non-prostitution” category as “immoral, promiscuous women and girls. None of them has any conception of moral decency and restraint. They conduct themselves more like animals than human beings. Some lack the mental stability to carry them through life; others just don’t care

²⁰ Donald Williams, “The Suppression of Commercialized Prostitution in the City of Vancouver,” *Journal of Social Hygiene*, 27 (1941), 371.

²¹ Cassel, 142.

²² CAV, Police Board, Series 183, Correspondence inward 1940-1949, Loc., 75-E-1, file 22, Report on Control of Venereal Disease in Vancouver, 22 September 1945, 1.

and are out for what is popularly known as a 'good time'." ²³ By introducing the vaguely defined category of the non-prostitute, Rae enlarged the group of women responsible for the spread of venereal disease, without implicating men as transmitters.

Through this maneuver of re-naming, Rae shifted responsibility from the police department to the health department and Donald Williams. Rae admitted that he had the existing legislation to suppress prostitution, and therefore, to control venereal disease whenever it was spread by professional prostitutes. In his report he gave evidence that the police department had enforced the law, for example, by canceling the licenses of hotels and rooming houses which allowed prostitutes on their premises. The head of the Morality Squad believed that because of these actions "prostitution has been reduced to the lowest point in the history of Vancouver, with a consequent reduction in venereal disease infection spread through this source." ²⁴ The police had, however, only limited power in the control of venereal disease spread by the non-prostitute group, especially when a woman was over eighteen years old. Here regulation had little effect. The police could not "legally interfere in, or control, the private morals of citizens," since sexual intercourse was not considered a crime under the law. By "citizens" Rae meant women over the age of eighteen. The only official measure the police could exercise was to warn women regarding their behavior and the risk of their spreading venereal disease, although this warning may have been accompanied by threats, brow-beating and, perhaps, physical abuse.

The police did have the legal means to control the behavior of women under the age of eighteen. Under the Juvenile Delinquents Act, the police had the authority to charge young women who were "guilty of sexual immorality, or who are incorrigible, and whose conduct is therefore likely to result in spreading venereal disease." They had only limited power since both prostitution and the infection with venereal disease were not

²³ CAV, Police Board, Loc. 75-E-1, file 22, Report on Control of Venereal Disease in Vancouver, 22 September 1945, 2.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

criminal in themselves. The police could only intervene when somebody willfully or negligently infected another person with venereal disease.²⁵ "Somebody" meant the prostitute or promiscuous woman, and not, for example, the husband who infected his wife and as a consequence his baby.

Rae then went on to blame the Venereal Disease Control Division of the Provincial Board of Health for the increase of venereal disease since they had the power to control venereal disease under the B.C. "Venereal Diseases Suppression Act" which had been enacted in 1919. The Act obliged a person known or suspected of being infected to seek treatment. If someone refused to co-operate, health authorities were allowed to force this person to have an examination. Penalties for non-compliance and infection of other people could be as high as \$ 500 or up to twelve months in prison. Moreover, arrested and detained persons did not have to be brought before a court. Health authorities, furthermore, could ask their patients to name the source of infection and then to compel the people who were allegedly responsible for the infection to be examined at the clinic.²⁶ This examination included a complete physical exam, urethral, cervical smears, and cultures for the detection of gonorrhoea.²⁷

Even though the Venereal Disease Act was theoretically intended to control the sexual behavior of both men and women, in practice it aimed at the prostitute and "loose woman." Thus, Rae believed that this act should be used for infected women who were "known to be infected in a communicable form, and who are promiscuous in their conduct." Those women, vaguely defined as "immoral, promiscuous women and girls," should be incarcerated until they were free of the disease. This far-reaching and vague definition allowed them to control a large number of girls and women and not just prostitutes.

²⁵ Ibid., 2.

²⁶ Venereal Disease Suppression Act.

²⁷ Williams, "Commercialized Prostitution and Venereal Disease Control," 467.

To British Columbians during the Depression, the theory that prostitutes caused venereal disease failed to explain the statistics. Therefore, the group of women who were seen as the transmitters of venereal disease had to be enlarged to those women who "behaved more like animals than human beings." Thus were the links between prostitution, venereal disease, and promiscuous women firmly established. Especially during the war all women who were seen as promiscuous were labeled prostitutes and therefore spreaders of venereal disease and vice versa.

"We Must Not Neglect the Enemies Within:"

Wartime Campaign Against Venereal Disease and Women

With Canada's entry into the war, authorities expressed fear that venereal diseases would not only affect civilians but all those footloose soldiers even more. In 1941, commanders of the armed forces in British Columbia, concerned about the prevailing condition of venereal disease among members of the services, asserted that the situation "is 'seriously interfering with the war effort.'" They pressed the police to enforce the law even more vigorously.²⁸ At the same time, national educational and advertising campaigns commenced. By 1943 a Canada-wide campaign of prevention and control was coordinated by the government and the provinces. Donald Williams, now a Lieutenant-Colonel, was chosen as the head of the Division of Venereal Disease Control at the National Defense Headquarters within the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps. In the course of these campaigns, the links between prostitutes, venereal disease, and promiscuity were enforced. Moreover, the lines between "professional prostitute," "prostitute," "amateur-prostitute," "loose woman," "easy woman," and even "woman" became increasingly blurred. Soon, every woman, who stepped into the public place and outside of the rigid confines of femininity and proper womanly behavior, became labeled

²⁸ *Daily Province*, 11 January 1941.

a source of venereal disease and prostitute. And as a large range of young women were “stepping out” sexually the new panic among authorities led to an attack on the freedom of young women in general.

Some scholars have argued that the new panic was not unfounded. The public and middle-class reformers were concerned about child labor, a climbing divorce rate, illegitimacy, and especially about an increase in juvenile delinquency during wartime.²⁹ The problem of juvenile delinquency was widespread and throughout the U.S. arrests of teenagers were up.³⁰ The rate of juvenile delinquency increased faster for girls than for boys.³¹ While boys were arrested for acts of stealing or vandalism, girls were far more often picked up for sexual delinquency. In the United States, “more than twice as many girls under the age of twenty-one were arrested for sexual offenses other than prostitution or commercial vice in 1942 as in the preceding year.”³² D’Ann Campbell has argued that “Sexual mores were generally looser during the war. Many a teenage girl was told that having intercourse with a soldier before he was shipped out, perhaps never to return, was a way to contribute to the war effort.” Those girls were, however, not prostitutes but so-called “pick-up girls” or “amateur prostitutes,” who would not take money in exchange of the sexual services they provided for the soldiers. As a consequence, about one third of all married soldiers had affairs outside their marriages compared to one sixth of civilian men.³³

Even though most scholars have argued that there was an actual increase in juvenile sexual delinquency, other historians are more skeptical about this “fact.” One of them, Lucy Bland, has explored the panic over promiscuity and venereal disease in Great Britain during World War One. She states that “I am not arguing that there was

²⁹ Susan M. Hartmann, *The Homefront and Beyond. American Women in the 1940s* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982), 24-25.

³⁰ John Costello, *Love, Sex and War. Changing Values 1939-45* (London: Collins, 1985), 280.

³¹ D’Ann Campbell, *Women at War with America. Private Lives in a Patriotic Era* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1984), 203.

³² Richard Polenberg, *War and Society. The United States, 1941-1945* (Philadelphia, New York, Toronto: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1972), 150.

³³ Campbell, 208.

necessarily an enormous increase in young women seeking sex; the important point here is that there was widely *believed* to be such an increase.”³⁴

The Canadian Army and Navy, alarmed by increasing numbers of venereal disease-infected soldiers, named the girls promiscuous or even prostitutes and declared them a significant enemy on the home front. As the originators and spreaders of venereal disease, they disabled healthy young soldiers who then could no longer defend the nation. Williams was adamant that the nation could only be saved if the “common foe -- Syphilis the killer, gonorrhoea the sterilizer,” were destroyed. He argued:

For Canada the outcome of the present conflict is largely dependent upon the strength of body, wholesomeness of mind and steadfastness of purpose. ... To fight, Canada must be fit. To win the war, Canada must be strong. While we are engaged resolutely in waging battle against the enemies without, we must not neglect the enemies within. Of all those insidious influences which from within may corrode and undermine our efficiency to fight, disease is the most serious, and of all disease enemies the venereal diseases, syphilis and gonorrhoea, are the ones which can wreak the most havoc. ... We have at hand all the means necessary to hold at bay these master saboteurs of war effort and national health. ... The will to banish this 'Fifth Column' from our midst must encompass a concerted attack.³⁵

Because prostitutes and promiscuous women were so inevitably linked with syphilis and gonorrhoea, Williams's militaristic rhetoric against venereal disease attacked that ill-defined and broad group of women. Thus, those women became the “enemies within,” “these master saboteurs of war effort and national health.” This identity of women and venereal disease was most obvious in posters, pamphlets, and brochures distributed by the Departments of National Health and National Defense to the men and women of the armed forces.

Pamphlets warned serviceman that “Wine, women and -- V. D. is a common association”³⁶ and portrayed disease in the form of young women in short skirts, waiting

³⁴ Lucy Bland cited in Pierson, 16.

³⁵ Donald Williams, “Canada's National Health and Venereal Disease Control,” *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 34 (June 1943), 261.

³⁶ United Church of Canada B.C. Conference Archives, Rev. Hugh Dobson Papers, Section B: 1926-1951, Box 6, file M, Victory over Disease, prepared under the Department of Pensions and National Health, Canada, Ottawa.

under a street light and casting an evil shadow. Another poster entitled "A Menace" showed young, cigarette-smoking women.³⁷ A booklet titled "Three Queens but I'll pass. The story of a couple of gals who'd love to meet you!" published in the fall of 1944 and "distributed generally," warned soldiers about the "VD-Sisters." The two diseases were personified as two young, attractive but slightly sleazy looking women. "Gonnie" ("She'll fix you up any time!") and "Syph" ("Boy! is she a killer!") were clad in skimpy skirts and high-heel shoes, wore exaggerated make-up and smoked cigarettes. The soldier was informed that "Where you find one of these babies you'll usually find the other ... They're the VD sisters, chum. Venereal Disease Sisters (if you want it spelled out.)" And how would the soldier know that he had met them? He was advised that "Gonnie and Syph travel around arm-in-arm with 'Easy' Women." This booklet blatantly warned soldiers to not seek companionship with prostitutes or, more generally, "loose" women. As Pierson has said "It is the identification of gonorrhoea and syphilis as human females that makes the booklet so pernicious."³⁸ By a few strokes the connections between prostitution, promiscuity, and venereal disease became clear to everybody. The consequences for women were far reaching and profound.

It was difficult for the military authorities to ensure the respectability of servicewomen since a majority of the public was convinced that these women too were promiscuous. Furthermore, there was a belief that some of them had actually worked as prostitutes before they had enlisted in the army. As a consequence, servicewomen who had contracted venereal disease were more likely to be discharged from military service than their male counterparts.³⁹ The assumption that venereal disease was only spread by women was, as I have shown above, not only a military perspective. "It was a male

³⁷ Pierson, 198, 205.

³⁸ Pierson, 206-208.

³⁹ Alison Prentice et al., *Canadian Women. A History*. (Toronto, Orlando, San Diego, London, Sydney: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988), 303.

perspective that equally dominated the VD control program in civilian society.”⁴⁰ A double standard of sexual behavior existed in both military and civilian.

Controlling and Regulating the “Unescorted” Woman in Vancouver

At the end of 1943 fifteen Vancouver organizations formed a committee to fight prostitution and to support the army’s fight against venereal disease. Included in this committee were groups such as the Health Division of the Council of Social Agencies, the Women’s Protective Division, and the Junior Board of Trade. The Women’s Christian Temperance Union and the Local Council of Women were also represented. Shocked by Williams’s charges that “white slavery of a vicious type is in progress ‘within a stone’s throw of the Vancouver Police Station’” and that prostitution was going on in beer parlors, steam baths, and massage parlors,⁴¹ they demanded the strict enforcement of the law. Concerned particularly with bawdy houses, they believed that most venereal infections occurred there, and that prostitutes were the ones who spread venereal disease.

The moral reformers supported their claim with statements made by male patients at the venereal disease clinic who named prostitutes as the source of their infections. They further believed that prostitutes were found not only inside brothels but also out on the streets. As Mrs. Mellish, chairman of the Women’s Protective Division of the Vancouver Council of Social Agencies, concluded: “‘A man in uniform is not allowed through the doors, but infection comes to him by other channels. The infected man infects a street girl, who in turn infects a man in uniform.’”⁴² Unlike their male colleagues, the female reformer named the infected man and not the infected woman as the first link in the chain of events. Nevertheless, they thought that actions should only be taken against women, because they considered women as “guardians” of morality while they viewed men as

⁴⁰ Pierson, 207.

⁴¹ *Vancouver Sun*, 8 September 1943.

⁴² *Daily Province*, 8 December 1943.

“naturally” unable to control their sexuality. Thus, the term “street girl” does not make clear who was meant exactly, though it implies that professional prostitutes were not the only spreaders of venereal disease. The moral reformers were convinced that so many women took part in spreading disease that action had to be taken. One measure already in place was the Hostel for Prostitutes founded in 1939; each woman who had been referred to the hostel had to undergo a venereal disease examination .

Fifty-three of the eighty-five girls living in the hostel between 1939 and 1944 were allegedly infected with venereal disease, eleven were not infected, and there was no information available for the remaining twenty-one.⁴³ To take one example, Madeline, one of the infected women, was reported nine times as a source of venereal disease by men of the armed forces.⁴⁴ She was, however, not considered a professional prostitute but one of the group of women seen to be on the verge of becoming one, -- one of the so-called “Victory Girls.” According to the historian John Costello, these “V-girls were often branded as semi-prostitutes, but few sought sexual relationships with the cold commercialism of women who made their livelihood in the world’s oldest profession [*sic*].” They were described as women “who swarmed round military installations chasing men in uniform.”⁴⁵

In order to control the spread of venereal disease by women such as Madeline, middle-class reformers took concrete measures to prevent the spread of venereal disease. Looking at the actions they initiated, it becomes clear that they were aimed not only at prostitutes but at all young and single women. The Vancouver Council of Women especially, was involved in the campaign, since they were convinced that promiscuous sexuality and venereal disease brought social disorder and threatened the home and

⁴³ CAV, Social Service Department, Series 449, Subject Files 1928-1971, Loc. 106 A 7, file 5, Five Year Report of the Girls’ Hostel, 1945, 4.

⁴⁴ CAV, Social Service Department, Loc. 106 A 7, file 5, Five Year Report of the Girls’ Hostel, 1945, report on Madeline.

⁴⁵ John Costello, *Love, Sex and War, 1939-1945* , 2d ed. (London: Pan Books, 1986), .281.

family life. Therefore, the Council argued for stricter social control, on the assumption that only women spread venereal disease.

Female reformers, many of whom had long been involved in the prohibition movement, often linked alcohol consumption to increased sexual activity among young women.⁴⁶ They concluded that "mixed drinking in licensed premises has been a big factor in producing drunken girls, unfaithful wives, delinquent children and a considerable amount of V.D."⁴⁷ The Vancouver Council of Women did not blame men for spreading venereal disease because they saw drinking and sexual promiscuity as a male prerogative. Women reformers scapegoated women in part because they strongly believed that "women are the keepers of moral [*sic*] in our country."⁴⁸ Therefore, the Vancouver Council of Women supported extended police supervision of women in the public sphere.⁴⁹ They argued for more policewomen, the cancellation of licenses of beer parlors and hotels of ill-repute, and the segregation of men and women in places where liquor was served. Furthermore, they argued for stricter curfew laws and a beefed-up Women's Protective Division of the police force.

A strengthened Women's Protective Division was one of the main goals of the Vancouver Council of Women during wartime. The Division had existed since 1912, when two policewomen were added to the police force, and had grown since then. It reached its peak in 1929 when there were one woman inspector, three policewomen, and five matrons on the staff of the Vancouver police. In 1932, the Division was reduced to only one policewoman and five matrons due to economic circumstances, but it was not completely disbanded.⁵⁰ Its main task was preventive work and home visiting.⁵¹ With

⁴⁶ Ramona M. Rose, "'Keepers of Morale': The Vancouver Council of Women, 1939 - 1945" (M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1990), 39.

⁴⁷ University of British Columbia Library, Special Collections and University Archives Division (hereafter UBCSC), Minutes of the Vancouver Council of Women, Box 8, file 8-7, 130.

⁴⁸ UBCSC, Minutes of the Vancouver Council of Women, Box 8, file 8-5, 105.

⁴⁹ Ramona, 36.

⁵⁰ UBCSC, Minutes of the Vancouver Council of Women, Box 7, file 7-8, 83.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 69.

Canada's entry into the war, the Vancouver Council of Women tried to increase the strength of the Women's Protective Division and lobbied the police to that end. In 1942, groups such as the Vancouver Council of Social Agencies, the John Howard Society, and the Housewives League of B.C. put significant pressure on the Board of Police Commissioners to bolster the Women's Protective Division. They felt that there was a great need for such a strong division to assist girls before they slipped into the category of offenders.⁵² The Vancouver Council of Social Agencies was particularly concerned with the supervision of "half-breeds" who were in danger of entering prostitution because of wartime conditions.⁵³ In 1943, the Vancouver Council succeeded; the police hired two more policewomen, but still the Council complained that this was not a "definite division."⁵⁴

In 1944, the police and the Local Council of Women began to worry about the increase in the number of so-called "juvenile amateur prostitutes," those young women who -- according to Inspector Rae of the Morality Department -- were spreading venereal diseases.⁵⁵ The Local Council of Women together with the Vancouver Labour Council demanded the stricter enforcement of curfew laws, and consequently the police did make an effort to curb juvenile delinquency. An officer was added to the staff of the Chief Probation Officer of the Juvenile Court with the sole task of controlling unchaperoned juveniles found on the streets late at night.⁵⁶

Many working-class women enjoyed dancing very much, especially when they were young and still single.⁵⁷ Dance-hall owners often encouraged young and single

⁵² CAV, Police Board, Series 180, Minutes 1904-1968, Loc. 75-A-3, file 2, 30.

⁵³ CAV, Police Board, Series 183, Correspondence inward 1940-1949, Loc. 75-D-7, file 14, Memorandum by the Vancouver Council of Social Agencies re A Women's Protective Division for the Vancouver Police Department, June 1942.

⁵⁴ UBCSC, Minutes of the Vancouver Council of Women, Box 8, file 8-7, 18.

⁵⁵ CAV, Police Board, Loc. 75-A-3, file 2, 160.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 250.

⁵⁷ Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements. Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 88-89.

women to enter their premises by charging them less money for a ticket than men.⁵⁸

Whereas dancing was a recreational activity for these women, middle-class reformers looked with suspicion on dance halls, which to them were immoral and promiscuous places, especially during wartimes. Because dance halls were perceived as facilitators of prostitution, it became difficult for these reformers to distinguish between "respectable" working-class women out for a good time and prostitutes.

Williams alleged that almost all sexual facilitation took place in one dance hall in Vancouver. There "healthy males" were infected by "as a rule unescorted women." The Vancouver Council of Women urged action, arguing that "Dance Halls (public) should be attended by [a] hostess."⁵⁹ They demanded further that "owing to the fact that many young girls are on the street late at night intoxicated in the vicinity of Dance Halls, we ask that more policewomen be on duty in this district late at night and further that Municipal authorities and Police Commissions be asked to enforce laws and bylaws which apparently have been lax in enforcement."⁶⁰ The police reacted by asking the proprietors of the dance-halls to co-operate with them in keeping unaccompanied girls off their premises. Furthermore, a matron employed by the dance-hall operators controlled the women and visited the rest rooms.⁶¹ Also, under pressure from Williams, the management of the dance hall that Williams had charged with facilitating prostitution and the spread of venereal disease, decided to deny entry to all unescorted women. The annual number of infections from this dance hall dropped from 22.5 to 6.0 per cent, a reduction of 73.3 per cent.⁶²

The strict supervision, constant check-ups, intrusion on privacy, and exclusion and banning of all "unescorted women" constituted a dramatic new set of controls on young,

⁵⁸ Peiss, 97.

⁵⁹ UBCSC, Minutes of Vancouver Council of Women, Box 8, file 8-7, 134.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 66.

⁶¹ CAV, Police Board, Loc. 75-E-1, file 22, Report on Control of Venereal Disease in Vancouver, 22 September 1945, 3.

⁶² Williams, "The Facilitation Process and Venereal Disease Control: A Study of Source Finding and Suppression of Facilitation in the Greater Vancouver Area", 402.

single working-class women. They were only allowed to have fun when they were accompanied by a man, which would leave no doubt to their integrity as “respectable women.” If unescorted, women ran the risk of being treated as prostitutes. The escort policy sent a message to all young and single middle-class women: if they wanted to keep their privileges and good reputation, they needed to shun dance halls and everything that was associated with them. Consequently, for both working-class and middle-class women, the public sphere in which they could walk safely was sharply constrained, and they were in fact more strongly confined to the private sphere.

Another major concern for middle-class reformers in Vancouver had always been women soliciting in saloons. The beer parlour was not simply a public place where people went to drink beer, but a place with sexually sinful meanings. “The beer parlour was not allowed to serve food, to provide entertainment, or to even have windows, lest the innocent be tempted inside.”⁶³ In Vancouver, about one quarter of customers were women, who were often taken as an attraction by male customers.

As early as 1933, the Board of Police Commissioners expressed concerns but could not do anything since women were allowed to enter beer parlors.⁶⁴ During the drive on vice of 1939, the provincial secretary and minister of health, claimed “that there are very few beer parlors in Vancouver which do not have girls working from a floor above, and that mixed beer parlors are an unmitigated curse as far as the venereal disease problem is concerned.”⁶⁵ This assertion was strongly opposed by the secretary of British Columbia Hotels Association, I.J. Kahn, as “absolutely ridiculous,” since “beer parlours in Vancouver are under constant supervision, and due to their own efforts, as represented by this association, they have increased the standing of their premises until they are second to none in Canada.”⁶⁶

⁶³ John Herd Thompson with Allen Seager, *Canada 1922 - 1939. Decades of Discord* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985), 68.

⁶⁴ CAV, Police Board, Series 180, Minutes 1904-1968, Loc. 75-A-2, file 3, 7.

⁶⁵ *Daily Province*, 14 January 1939.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

Nevertheless, action regarding this perceived problem was taken as soon as 1938, when the police canceled licenses of those beer parlors that allowed women to solicit on their premises.⁶⁷ Williams claimed, however, that between 1938 and 1941, only one beer parlour license was canceled by the British Columbia Liquor Board. As a further measure to curb women's soliciting in beer parlours, it was made compulsory for all parlours to have two sections, one which admitted men only, and the other, women or women escorted by men.⁶⁸

This measure satisfied even the obsessive Williams, who admitted, "certain beer parlours which were literally the anterooms of brothels have been forced to close. The remainder have partitions, so that tired war-industry workers late in the day going in to cash a wage cheque are not confronted brazenly by venereally-infected women at adjacent tables."⁶⁹ The Vancouver Council of Women was, however, not satisfied with these results. They demanded more rigid measures, even advocating the closure of beer parlors during the war.⁷⁰

Thus, in depression and wartime Vancouver, it was sufficient for a woman to enter a beer parlour on her own to be considered a prostitute. Ruth Roach Pierson has noted ironically that "the female war worker was presumably not expected to want a beer at the end of the day."⁷¹ The beer parlour was, therefore, designed as a place for men of the working class and anathematized as a place for women. If a woman decided to enter a beer parlour on her own, she ran the risk of being seen as a prostitute who wanted to solicit men. Such assumptions about men, women, liquor, and promiscuity fueled a rhetoric that resulted in the closure of a further part of public space to women.

In depression and wartime Vancouver, both federal and provincial authorities as well as middle-class reformers were apparently concerned with the spread of venereal

⁶⁷ CAV, Police Board; Series 180, Minutes 1904-1968, Loc. 75-A-3, file 1, 227.

⁶⁸ Williams, "The Facilitation Process," 402.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 399.

⁷⁰ UBCSC, Minutes of the Vancouver Council of Women, Box 8, file 8-6, 17

⁷¹ Pierson, 210.

disease among the male civil population and even more among the soldiers. Taking a second look, however, the evidence shows that the middle class was mainly concerned with the spread of a different and even more threatening disease: potentially uncontrolled female sexual activity. To the moral reformers, ever more women seemed to behave like prostitutes. Their first reform efforts were accompanied by a rhetoric which labeled those women “easy women,” “loose women,” “amateur prostitutes,” or even “animals.” Thus, as Carol Smart has argued, “the term prostitute always already confirms association between class, immorality and disease and the need for police and public health intervention.”⁷²

A direct product of the discourse about venereal disease was the effort to make it clear to working- and middle-class women how to behave in “respectable” and “proper” ways. Those who did not conform, but transgressed the prescribed boundaries of sexuality and femininity, were exposed to an increasing number of measures of social supervision, control, and exclusion. Men, who were not seen as perpetrators, were not subjected to such regulation because active sexuality was presumed to be part of their nature. Women could be chaste, if they acted on their true nature, and therefore it was they who were attacked for deviance. The origins of their sinfulness were unclear, but it was assumed that women, being morally superior by nature, ought to be able to choose the right path. Thus it was they who could be cleansed and had to be punished to that end.

The discourse on venereal disease sent a message to working-class and middle-class men at the same time: they were told that sexual activity and alcohol consumption were allowed as long as they ensured that they would not get infected. If they did get infected, they were obliged to seek treatment as soon as possible and to report the woman believed to be the malignant spreader of venereal disease.

In the middle-class leaders’ minds, age-old notions of the double nature of woman (i.e. as the Virgin Mary and the Whore) constituted the ideological basis for their actions.

⁷² Carol Smart, *Regulating Womanhood. Historical Essays on Marriage, Motherhood and Sexuality* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 31.

To them, women were, underneath their supposed access to a higher morality, diseased temptresses who led men to their doom. It was as if this whole late Victorian effort of suppression was doomed by the fearful, sub-conscious knowledge that chaos underlay order -- the young women might well be lost, and with them, civilization.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has examined how young single women were defined and named “loose women” or prostitutes by Vancouver’s middle-class leadership such as police officers, medical experts, politicians, and reformers, between 1934 and 1945. The majority of those women had never in their lives worked as prostitutes but many of them had transgressed other social norms in ways the leaders felt were threatening to the social order. All of the women had left the private sphere and had gone into the public, either as working women in fairly menial jobs, or as women looking for entertainment. Both men and women leaders reacted by naming those women prostitutes and representing them as outcasts and deviants in need of rehabilitation. Through such regulation, middle-class reformers and others tried to lead the women back to the proper path of womanhood. But the reformers’ message was directed not only at the women who had transgressed gender boundaries, but also served as a warning to all young women to stay on the path of proper womanhood and not to disobey the boundaries of socially acceptable femininity.

While such an interpretation might not seem to have allowed for much agency on the working-class women’s part, their contestation of being named a prostitute was not only existent but often visible. These women challenged the leaders’ assumptions of working-class girls and women as corruptible and dangerous, for example, by marching down to city-hall or by not giving up their chosen way of life. The fact that the leaders concerted effort to suppress or even eradicate prostitution and other unacceptable behavior failed indicates that power did not merely emanate from the top, but was,

however unequally, dispersed and negotiated by even those who were branded prostitutes and sexual deviants.

Though these young women belonged to the most marginalized and victimized groups of society, they were still able to negotiate social constructions and representations of themselves. The white waitresses challenged being named prostitutes and represented themselves as working women who needed to make a living instead of meekly submitting to police harassment; as adult human beings who could make their own decisions; and as people who did not need or want any "help" from middle-class reformers. The women who were referred to the hostel did not give up their preferred lives, but used the hostel to their own advantage, particularly for their material and economic welfare, while often rejecting the offer of moral rehabilitation. And despite often vicious campaigns against working-class women in the public sphere as transmitters of disease and "the fifth column," -- the enemy on the homefront during the war -- women continued to have various sexual relationships with men, continued to dress and act in ways they themselves found acceptable and appropriate, and continued to frequent beer and dance halls and other public places. They represented themselves as sexually and otherwise autonomous persons who could make choices they thought were best for them. They thus undermined the leaders' attempts to regain control over their bodies and sexualities.

Although my final point goes beyond the norms of an historical essay such as this, it is clear that negative labeling by social authorities toward women continues to some extent. In this context, it is important to ask, what can women learn from their mothers and grandmothers who fought demeaning representations of themselves? "Given that labels are culturally invested with ideological significances, and applied with prejudice," Karlene Faith has argued, "it is best to avoid them."¹ I agree. Because labels are prejudiced they are often dangerous and can have severe consequences for the people who have to live with them. It is therefore important that working-class women take control of

¹ Karlene Faith, *Unruly Women. The Politics of Confinement and Resistance* (Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1993), 59.

representations of themselves. Thus, women need positive role models as well as more access to the media and educational institutions where they can represent themselves in ways which make them feel positive about themselves. Women need to be able to name themselves and not be named.

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