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Prostitution: An Independent Business or a Societal Downfall?

By:

Jaclyn Toop

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Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for  
Honors in the Department of Sociology

UNION COLLEGE  
June, 2012

## Abstract

Toop, Jaclyn. Prostitution: An Independent Business or a Social Downfall? Department of Sociology, March 2011.

Advisor: Linda Relyea

This thesis breaks down the subject of prostitution to be examined by four smaller categories: the history of prostitution, the pros and cons of current legislation surrounding prostitution, the effects of the media's portrayal on society, and a comparison of abortion as a similar issue. While society may have a current notion of prostitution, this thesis would like to examine the idea of prostitution as an independently run business under government regulation in hopes of recognizing the positive effects it would have upon sex workers.

Through the use of surveys distributed to a number of students at a small liberal arts college, I was able to gain insight as to how prostitution is acknowledged by young adults, aging from eighteen to twenty three years old. The survey also asked students to identify their feelings on businesses run by women, as well as a woman's right to her body as determine in *Roe V. Wade*. By comparing the results of questions asked on prostitution to questions asked on similar subjects, I am hoping to identify whether society is ready to have prostitution regulated under the government, as well as whether or not society believes organized prostitution has a shot at becoming a safe, independent business.

## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b> .....	2
<b>Chapter One: Literature Review</b> .....	4
Introduction .....	4
A History of Prostitution.....	4
Pros v. Cons in Legislation.....	10
The Media’s Portrayal.....	18
Abortion: A Similar Issue.....	21
Summary.....	25
<b>Chapter Two: Research Methods</b> .....	27
Population and Sample.....	28
Surveys.....	30
Data Analysis.....	33
<b>Chapter Three: Survey Analysis</b> .....	34
Table 1.....	34
Table 2.....	36
Table 3.....	37
Table 4.....	38
Table 5.....	40
Table 6.....	42
Table 7.....	43
Table 8.....	45
Table 9.....	46
<b>Chapter Four: Conclusion</b> .....	48
Final Remarks.....	51
<b>References</b> .....	53
<b>Appendices</b>	
Appendix A: Informed Consent Form.....	55
Appendix B: Survey Questions.....	56

## **Chapter One: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

Prostitution has been argued to be the world's oldest profession, but has been continually rejected by society throughout generations. Current laws enforce punishment for women who receive payment for sexual acts, but this paper considers how society would function if prostitution were made legal under the law. This paper will also examine the potential prostitution has as an independent business for women. Note, there is a huge distinction between an independent business and sexual trafficking; if prostitution were made into an independent business, the woman would control when, where, and who she conducts business with. When an individual is being forced into sexual acts or does not control the situation – such as in sexual trafficking or child prostitution - it should never be legalized, and any legislature acknowledging prostitution under the law should clearly make this distinction. This literature review is divided into four sections: history of prostitution, pros and cons of the current legislation regarding prostitution, cinematic influence of prostitution, and a woman's right to abortion as a similar comparison.

### **A History of Prostitution**

The history of prostitution shows that the profession has had an ambiguous definition since the beginning of its emergence. Medieval England emphasized 'indiscriminate availability' rather than the 'exchange of sex for pay' when referencing prostitution, placing more emphasis on the willingness of a woman to have sex than the act of sex itself (Cocks, 2006:209). The mid nineteenth century saw the countries of France, England and Germany define the profession as

exchanging sex for money, though some courts would still have women incriminated even if no money was exchanged at all (Cocks, 2006).

In the 1800s, prostitution more commonly emerged as a means of supporting one's self or family. Women's wages were significantly lower than male wages – a man could make \$600 per year to support his family, but a seamstress averaged roughly only \$90 – and prostitution was a solution when money ran out (Cocks, 2006). Prostitution provided a solution to women dealing with an ill child or a deceased or unemployed husband, but it also provided a way for women to buy themselves into the higher class if that was their main inclination (Cocks, 2006). Habits such as dancing and drinking, or buying fancy clothes could be supported through prostitution, while the income of their other labor went towards their basic needs.

However, the personal gain women were making through prostitution was not deemed appropriate in the eyes of the law, and the profession was publically denounced. Laws were made to help enforce the guidelines of prostitution; Victorian England passed the Contagious Disease Act in the mid eighteenth century in an effort to regulate sexual services near military concentrations. Prostitutes were blamed for the spread of venereal disease within the military, and therefore this act took any working-class woman found near a military camp into imprisonment as an effort to save the troops from bad health (Cocks, 2006). 1834 saw the founding of the Female Moral Reform Society in New York by a group of middle-class women. This was an effort to “convert New York's prostitutes to evangelical Protestantism,” as well as to shut-down the brothels throughout the city (Cocks, 2006:217). However, after extensive visiting and speaking with the women, many converters began to realize the double standard

held by men who lust for sexual acts and then punish women for seeking the same sexual acts, and many of these women's groups retracted their initial dismissive statements (Cocks, 2006)

A few years later though, New York tried monitoring the profession once again with the 1886 Wayward Minor Law in 1886, which allowed for girls "found in a reputed house of prostitution" and "in danger of becoming morally depraved" to be placed under arrest (Cocks, 2006:209). This period saw moral depravity as having sexual activity before marriage, and to examine this law against present day it would cause most female high school students in America to be arrested. This was just one more law signifying that while prostitution was becoming defined as monetary exchange for sexual favors, the legal system still tried to restrict females from any sexual activity outside of marriage, paid or not. This law was carried out in the 1900s, with seventeen year old Gail Lewis being jailed at the request of her own parents in 1923 after breaking her curfew. At the fear of their daughter displaying "potential future inappropriate behavior," the couple felt jail time would be the best way to keep the girl from displaying any other "morally depraved" actions, and therefore filed a complaint for their daughter's violation of the Wayward Minor Law (Hicks, 2003:1). Nearly forty years after its passing, the law still upheld the idea that women out at night were tampering with "female disobedience" and "sexual delinquency," and was thought to be the best way to protect these women at a young age from a promiscuous future (Hicks, 2003:1).

Prostitutes throughout history have often shown that they gain more social freedom than women who were born into a higher class (Tisdale, 1994). Vern Bullough, a longtime researcher on the history of prostitution stated that "For a woman to enter male society, even

at the level of an unequal, she had to lose her status as a proper woman; For all that the whore is always held by men to be below a lady, she has often been above the servant class” (Tisdale, 1994: 174). Women could achieve considerably higher social status as a prostitute than the class into which they were born due to the access of books, ideas, conversation and intimacy that men provided for them during their sexual encounters (Tisdale, 1994). These sexual encounters began to be spoken about more openly during the 1970s Western feminist movement. It was during this time that women involved in prostitution and other sexual industries, such as stripping and pornography, began openly arguing that “sex work did not have to involve coercion, violence and degradation;” it was simply an “alternative” to other “women’s work,” such as secretary jobs or other female-dominated businesses (Cocks, 2006:208). Former prostitute Margot St. James was quoted in an interview denouncing the “ludicrous stigma” being shown for this profession. James scoffed that it’s “perfectly legal” for a woman to have sex with any man she wants, but once money is exchanged she is then a “whore” and “goes to jail” (ProCon, 2008:1). Another prostitute defends her line of work by comparing it to every other female dominated profession:

“Learning to serve, please and appease men is something that binds all women together. It’s why secretaries, nurses, waitresses, wives, sales clerks, etc are on the low paying end of the stick. To separate our experiences too much, or to believe that the ways we get by in this woman-hating world are so different, is a mistake.” (Cocks, 2006:208)

By the 1990s, prostitutes had established even more unions. COYOTE (Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics) is the oldest prostitutes’ union in the United States, currently run by counselor



Norma Jean Almodovar in Los Angeles (Bayswan, 2012). As of 2008, COYOTE works “to educate sex workers, their clients and the general public about safe sex,” as well as works to try and break the stereotypes of the profession through statistics and discussion with prostitutes (ProCon, 2008:1). One such stereotype of prostitution in society is that it is very open to being conducted in public places, whereas most prostitutes actually enjoy working privately and independently, far outside the view of the public. COYOTE’s statistics also go against the idea that many prostitutes enter the business in their teenage years, and indicate a woman’s twenties and thirties is the most common age to enter into the profession. Still, the most rejected stereotype of this profession by the prostitutes themselves and the counselors in the Union who support them is the belief that they don’t really want to be prostitutes, when in reality they do (Tisdale, 1994). As defended by a working prostitute in this Union, “The working reality of prostitution is far outside the stereotypes most people have, except for this one: Most prostitutes are in the business for the money, which is often quite good and sometimes shockingly so” (Tisdale, 1994:176). “My belief, and this is really a hard one for people to take, is that given economic equality for women – all things equal – there would still be women who would choose to do sex work, to call themselves prostitutes, to sell sex for money, however you want to say it” (Tisdale, 1994:173).

While it is true that some women are found to be at the “extreme ends of coercive prostitution,” cases such as those, involving sexual trafficking or forced sexual activities, would not be recognized as independent businesses. Former prostitutes such as Carol Leigh – also founder of the Bay Area Sex Workers Advocacy Network – realize that forced sex trafficking and legalized prostitution are two different issues. Leigh points out that “If prostitution were not an

underground activity it would allow us to much more effectively address the serious problems of forced prostitution that operates completely in the shadows” (ProCon, 2008:1).

Independent sex workers have the right to refuse any potential customer for whatever reason, and should be protected under the law if a customer acts in a threatening or forceful manner that is harmful to the worker. They can be considered “independent contractors” who are not “beaten out of their money,” as described by Wade Lieseke, Nye County Sheriff, Nevada (ProCon, 2009:2).

COYOTE blames part of the reasoning behind negative views on prostitution by the way the profession is depicted within the media. One of the most popular movies on modern prostitutes’ lives is *Pretty Woman*, and many prostitutes express their offense by the movie. The most offensive aspect of the movie is Richard Gere’s line “I never treated you like a prostitute,” but prostitutes are at a loss to find what that exactly means. “How do you treat prostitutes? What demands would he make on her if he were to treat her like a prostitute? What is it in the nature of being a prostitute that allows another standard to be made? ” Miller questions (Tisdale, 1994:173). There is an idea that a woman who will perform sex or sexual acts on a man puts her beneath women who won’t, and so she is viewed differently in society. Miller responds that it is the mindset of how sex acts are viewed in society that should be changed, not the women who are willing to perform: “People say ‘Giving all those blowjobs is damaging, it’s degrading.’ I think society’s attitude towards blowjobs is what’s degrading. Not the actual act” (Tisdale, 1994:173).

### Pros v. Cons in Legislation

With the exception of Nevada and Rhode Island, prostitution is illegal in all other states and is normally classified as a misdemeanor offense for disrupting the order of a community (Hayes-Smith, 2010). Within the past year, the United States has been found to view and judge prostitution based on four categories : Category one being criminalization, stating that all parties involved in the prostitution trade are found guilty; category two being an abolitionist approach that punishes third parties but not the prostitutes themselves; category three being decriminalization that treats prostitution as an independent business and not a criminal offense; and the fourth category is legalization, wanting the state to license and regulate prostitution (Hayes-Smith, 2010). Reconstructing prostitution under legalization has a chance to be beneficial to society because of the potential to “protect society, protect prostitutes and protect social order” by solving the “practical problems of sexually transmitted disease and violence against a vulnerable population” (Hayes-Smith, 2010:2). By making prostitution legal, issues such as these will not be kept closeted and can be more closely examined and monitored by law since prostitutes will not be afraid of legal consequences if they report these occurrences. However, some feel that by making prostitution legalized the sanctity of marriage will be at stake. Those against prostitution feel that the business makes a mockery of the idea of “the union for life of one man and one woman in the holy estate of matrimony” (ProCon, 2011:3). Dave Quist, Executive Director of Focus on the Family's Institute of Marriage and Family Canada, gave this opinion about legalizing prostitution in a 2006 online interview:

“The concept that ‘mom’s job’ is having sex with strangers sets the wrong tone for family life. It hurts the woman, it hurts the children; that is an

exploitative situation. If prostitution is legal it affords men the 'excuse' to go find sex outside of marriage, when things in the marriage are difficult. That does nothing to enhance the relationship between a man and a woman. Prostitution runs opposite to what relationships are supposed to be. Intimacy and love are not involved; it's just a purely physical act. It lowers both people to the lowest common denominator (ProCon, 2011:3).

A second assumption of prostitution that keeps it illegal in the United States is that the profession is a public health risk due to the sexually transmitted diseases it can spread throughout a community. Prior to the nineteenth century, health professionals required licensed prostitutes to receive medical examinations on behalf of public safety (Hayes-Smith, 2010). Though it may be an attempt to protect society from a spread of STDs, prostitution is not the only reason these are spread throughout society. Whether sex is bought or given for free, there is always the risk that a partner is not being honest or taking appropriate safety measures.

A third assumption about prostitution laws is that sexual acts for money disrupt the order within a community. The 'structural violence' that is linked to prostitution is a threat to "orderly civic life," and it is easier to keep a city "respectable" and "orderly" if prostitution is not there to hinder the community (Hayes-Smith, 2010:4). There is a need to protect children from such explicit behaviors, and there has been an expressed concern in some communities that used condoms and wrappers will be littered throughout the streets if prostitution were to be legalized. There is also the want to keep police out of the community as much as possible, and prostitution may have a huge impact of cops constantly patrolling the neighborhoods.

A final assumption that leads to the prohibition of prostitution is “prostitutes are more vulnerable to crime and other victimizations than the average female because of their social and exploited position” (Hayes-Smith, 2010:3). While it is true prostitutes are exposing themselves to greater risks of violence through their line of work, it is based on an idea started by reformers in the first feminist movement: that all prostitutes are “helpless victims” and “therefore need protection” (Hayes-Smith, 2010:3). It is seen that the only way to protect these prostitutes, then, is to make their work illegal in the first place. Yet this assumption ignores that prostitutes are at a higher threat for violence by keeping prostitution illegal than if prostitution were legalized in the first place. A customer does not need to comply with a prostitute’s wishes if both are aware the acts taking place are illegal; she has a minimal chance of going to the police to report the assault if she knows she may incriminate herself in the process (Hayes-Smith, 2010). However, there are individuals who speak-out against the notion that legalizing prostitution would minimize the risk of violence against prostitutes. Esohe Aghatise, PhD, wrote an article in 2004 stating this argument is “deceptive,” and “prostitution itself is a form of violence against women” by negating women’s human rights (ProCon, 2011:4). Aghatise cites a study performed in 2002 that showed that women engaging in any type of prostitution regardless of the location have all been exposed to physical violence. Prostitution in one location is no safer than any other location, even under the law.

A study conducted by the Seattle Women’s Commission showed that out of 1210 arrests of prostitutes and 228 arrests of johns, 8% of men were convicted while 12% of women were convicted (Hayes-Smith, 2010). Such statistics show that prostitutes are arrested nearly six times more often than the men who buy their services, as well as more likely to be convicted of

charges. By keeping prostitution illegal, it makes it harder for women to come forward from a traumatic rape or assault while on the job, and allows for such victimization to keep under the radar. A study conducted in 2004 showed that legalizing prostitution would drop the rape rate in the United States by 25% - or by 25,000 rapes every year – since it would give a prostitute the opportunity to call the police and press charges against her assailant instead of letting the assault go unpunished (Hayes-Smith, 2010). Even police officers advocate for legitimacy of prostitution in honor of the increase in safety; former police chief of Seattle, Norm Stamper, stated “the logical solution is to take it indoors and get it off the streets; on the whole it is safer” (ProCon, 2009:1).

Violence is not the only problem prostitutes face by keeping prostitution illegal. Police harassment and sexually transmitted diseases could also be substantially lowered through legalizing prostitution. While sexually transmitted diseases are a primary concern associated with prostitutes, there have been published studies that show diseases are more likely to be transmitted when prostitution is kept undercover. Reviewed studies done in 2007 during the Bush administration’s Anti-Prostitution Pledge show women who prostitute are not as likely to take safer, preventative measures if they know they do not have the law on their side (Hayes-Smith, 2010). This particular Pledge was part of an Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief which “eradicated funding to developing countries with AIDS epidemics if they had legalized or decriminalized prostitution,” and marginalized prostitutes for being the main reason AIDS is spread, even though research has found countries with legalized prostitution have lower risks of sexually transmitted diseases (Hayes-Smith, 2010:6). In Brazil, where prostitution is not criminalized, sex workers were interviewed and found to have a 100% rate of condom use, with

only 16.5% ever having contracted a sexual disease (Hayes-Smith, 2010). Despite the fact that these women practiced safe sex on a regular basis, the United States pulled their funding for Brazil simply for having legalized prostitution in the first place.

In an additional study conducted earlier in the late 1990s by the University of California Berkeley, the health of legalized Nevada brothel workers were compared to Nevada street prostitutes who were already sentenced in jail (Hayes-Smith, 2010). None of the legalized brothel prostitutes were found to have AIDS, while 6% of the street prostitutes did. In-depth interviews led to the discovery that more controlled environments were less likely to expose the women working there to HIV, compared to the women who were working on the streets (Hayes-Smith, 2010). Those involved in the medical community have also given the positives of legalizing prostitution, stating sex workers would feel more included in health and social care policies (ProCon, 2008).

One of the most controversial arguments against legalizing prostitution, however, is that despite whether or not a woman is voluntarily giving herself up for sex, she is still exploiting and degrading herself, encouraging violence. For some feminists with this neo-abolitionist approach to dissuading prostitution, they see no difference between “forced” and “voluntary” prostitution (Chuang, 2010:1664). It is the view of these individuals that “choice” and “consent” are discredited due to the male dominance that prostitution depends on, and that any woman who believes she gives sexual favors of her own choice suffers from “false consciousness,” and are in denial of their own oppression (Chuang, 2010:1665). Yet it is the women who share a neo-abolitionist mindset on prostitution that are also in a state of denial; a state of denial that prostitution could ever offer women “sexual self-determination and

equality” (Chuang, 2010:1665). They believe prostitution to be better regulated if legal than to be left “to the market.” Both prostitutes and counselors of COYOTE believe prostitution should be a woman’s choice. One prostitute who was tired of hiding her profession from the public stated as follows:

“I think it’s totally ridiculous that it’s illegal.  
 Totally ridiculous that it be regulated at all.  
 Adults have bodies and some of us have money,  
 and if we want to negotiate to use what we’ve  
 got – I just don’t understand why anything  
 between consenting adults should be illegal.  
 What business is it of the government? It’s  
 somebody pushing their morals on me, based  
 on their belief system, which is totally different  
 from mine. That is ridiculous.” (Tisdale, 1994:181)

Though prostitutes find their line of work legitimate, others in society still find prostitution upsetting. Virada Somswasdi, President of the Foundation for Women, Law and Rural Development addressed prostitution as “not about women enjoying rights over their own bodies,” but instead as the “expression of men's control over women's sexuality” (ProCon, 2011:4). “It is the hiring out of one's body for the purposes of sexual intercourse, abuse and manifestations of male lust,” Somswaski argues. There is also the argument that the sex is not consensual as long as one is buying and one is selling.

Prostitutes, as reported from a 2008 interview from COYOTE, recognize that they would not have a business in the first place without men supporting them. It is assumed that men buying women is an age-old practice, but there are no exact statistics to show what percentage of the male population engages in the business; it is all speculation (Bennetts, 2011). The director of Prostitution Research and Education, Melissa Farley, claims “Ninety-nine percent of the research in this field has been done on prostitutes, and one percent has been done on



johns” (Bennetts, 2011:1). Farley conducted a study released to NEWSWEEK in 2011, “Comparing Sex Buyers With Men Who Don’t Buy Sex,” and had to revise their search standards multiple times in order to find men who do not pay for some type of sexual service at some point in their lives (Bennetts, 2011). While the viewing of pornography, phone sex, erotic massages, strip clubs and lap dances are so readily available to the public, prostitution is still not accepted publically and therefore kept illegal.

If a dominant part of the male population is willing to pay money for sexual favors, there is reason to believe that legalized prostitution would make a woman a legitimate independent business, with the sexual acts being the line of work and the woman being in control of where and who she does business with. As previously discussed, putting prostitution under the law’s guidance would significantly lower the number of rape cases per year, as well as increase preventative measures against sexually transmitted disease. If safety measures would be shown to increase by making prostitution legal, the moral debate is what keeps the law and society hesitant to accept the practice. In 2006, President of Britain’s General Union Sex Workers Branch, Ana Lopes, remarked that “Sex workers should enjoy the same labour rights as other workers and the same human rights as other people” (ProCon, 2009:1). Lopes advocates that like every other business one is employed in, a worker has a social life and then a business career. Lopes also stated that prostitutes “can only gain the same rights as other workers when the debate is moved from a moral framework and placed in the framework of labour rights” (ProCon, 2009:1). No work place stands a definite chance of never encountering corruption, drugs or violence, and women such as Lopes and those who work with groups such as COYOTE

are aware that it is the mentality about prostitutes that keeps the business from being legally permitted, and not business or employment laws.

John Turley-Ewart, the Deputy Comment Editor for the *National Post*, also wrote that “Prostitution is like any other industry. Make it illegal, and you give criminals a monopoly. Legalize it, and you give law-abiding enterprises a chance to compete” (ProCon, 2009:2). Ewart featured this in his editorial “Lessons from a German Brothel” in 2006 to help show what our legal system and business world could learn from what is going on in other cultures. Ewart also added “Moreover, regulated brothels now are operated as legitimate businesses, and so attract professional managers -- as opposed to underworld thugs,” showing that if prostitution is to be regulated seriously and more respectfully, it will be taken more seriously and respected (ProCon, 2009:2).

Despite the potential benefits of legalizing prostitution, the US law is reluctant to change its policies on the profession due to several assumptions, the first being that people will be less likely to buy a prostitute knowing it is illegal. This “deterrence argument” may follow the social exchange theory – that individuals will terminate relationships if the costs outweigh the benefits -but is difficult to test to see how valid the argument is (Hayes-Smith, 2010:3). Yet not everyone believes prostitution to be a potential legitimate business option for women. There are some, such as former chairperson of Christian Democrats Bodil Kornbek, who see no distinction between prostitution and human trafficking at all, and believes it “wrong to promote the fact that one person buying another person is legitimate” (ProCon, 2011:1). Others, such as Endowed Chairs of Women’s Studies at the University of Rhode Island Eleanor M. Carlson and Oscar M. Carlson and Professor Donna M. Hughes, who believe that prostitution is “an extreme

form of gender discrimination,” and that it designates women as “second class citizens” as long as men are permitted to buy sexual acts from them (ProCon, 2011:1). Those that oppose legalizing prostitution not only focus on the devaluing of women in society, but on the psychological states of women as well. In a study conducted in 2003, 68% of prostitutes surveyed throughout nine countries displayed symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder, including anxiety, depression, emotional numbing, flashbacks and hyperalertness, with disassociation and depression being the most common (ProCon, 2011:2).

While there is some reason within these several assumptions that explains why prostitution be kept illegal, there are also disadvantages surrounding them as well. One of which is that some of these policies are governing an entire population by moral standards that are only shared by some. Some believe sexual acts are only to be performed between two married individuals for the primary function of reproduction, and therefore keeping prostitution illegal overrides the view of others that sex in exchange for money is personal business between two individuals. It is a law that honors those that think prostitution is “morally reprehensible,” but pays no mind to those who do not share that same view on the act (Hayes-Smith, 2010:4).

### **The Media’s Portrayal**

The media influences the opinions of many individuals on controversial subjects, and prostitution is no exception. The cinema has used its fascination with this age old profession throughout generations, featuring actresses such as Bette Davis, Sophia Loren and Julia Roberts to portray hookers in every scenario. Audiences have watched their favorite actresses on the big screen falling victims to pimps, struggle with alcohol and drugs and at times fall in love with

their customers. Jean Harlow in *Red Dust* (1932), Melina Mercouri in *Never on Sunday* (1960), Shirley MacLaine in *Irma La Douce* (1963) and Jodie Foster in *Taxi Driver* (1976) are just a few of the performances that have planted an image of prostitution in the minds of individuals throughout the decades (Black. 2010:563).

Yet it could be these performances that set the basis for how society treats prostitutes in real life. In his book "Marked Women: Prostitutes and Prostitution in Cinema," Russell Campbell believes that prostitutes are given "types" in cinema, including "Happy Hookers," "Sirens," and "Junkies," to name a few (Campbell, 2006). By assigning prostitutes these different types, we are also assigning society specific ways of viewing them. If an audience is exposed to the "junky" prostitute, there is the risk that they will begin to associate prostitution with drugs strictly from a film's depiction. Similarly, if a prostitute is portrayed as a "siren," audiences walk away stereotyping all prostitutes as women who are so sexually irresistible, all men fall in love with them and eventually self-destruct under their influence. Yet aside from being a "type" of prostitute, Campbell's book also pointed out that women in film are often divided into two categories: a prostitute or a housewife (Porton, 2007). When examining this concept it is also interesting to examine the parallel between women fighting against each other for either of these roles and women fighting against each other in these roles in real life. As previously mentioned, it is the housewives that are against the idea of prostitution since it is their husbands they are worried about becoming affected by the temptation. Cinemas give the image that a woman can be one of two roles: Family oriented, or sexually deviant, but it is rare that a role allows for both, and such may be the stem of the problem with the acceptance of prostitution. Audiences have not been led to believe prostitutes can have families or keep

clean of substance abuse since we have not grown-up watching that portrayal on screen. Audiences have also seen performances where the prostitute falls desperately in love with one of her customers and they allude to spending the rest of their lives together at the end of the film. There is a popular need to either romanticize prostitution or save prostitutes from themselves in films, but perhaps society needs to be introduced to the scenario of a prostitute who is not suffering from addiction, yearning for love or coming from a broken home. Society may become more accepting of the idea if people realize a woman is capable of using her sexuality as a form of business, feeling in control and not having her world fall apart in the meantime as so many movie portrayals often show (Porton, 2007).

Perhaps one of the best examples, *The Girlfriend Experience* uses hard-core porn actress Sasha Grey in a mainstream movie, a leap by porn actresses that is normally not seen. Grey remarks her character in the movie resembles that of what she does in real life: “trying to keep her dignity while selling intimacy” (Johnson, 2009:1). One commentator on the movie stated it was the “façade” of relationship witnessed by the audience between Grey’s character and her clients: there were dinner dates prior to the sexual encounters, complete with conversation about current affairs and confiding personal information (Johnson, 2009:1). Grey’s character set the tone for their meetings as professional; she was not meeting her customers in back alleys or loading up on illicit substances beforehand. This idea of prostitution could help give audiences the idea that prostitution is capable of functioning on a higher level than the pimps and streetwalkers that are so commonly stereotyped in movies. Grey commented in an interview while doing production on the film that “If you can’t say no, then you shouldn’t be in this business,” which could help to begin a more positive view – as well as a new mentality –

regarding this profession (Johnson, 2009:1). Whenever one feels they do not have a choice regarding a sexual encounter, there is nothing lawful about that experience. This also helps to show the distinction between independently run prostitution and human trafficking; the sex worker should be calling the terms, not the other way around.

### **Abortion: A Similar Issue**

Prostitution is not the only controversial issue surrounding a woman's right to her own body, or the only social issue that divides society based on morals; abortion has been the subject of societal debate for years, and like prostitution, has been given both positives and negatives for its legality. Abortion calls for a woman to rid herself of a pregnancy whether it is in the interest of her best health or in the interest of avoiding the experience of carrying and giving birth to a child that is not wanted or welcomed into her life. In February of 2011, President Obama gave a speech celebrating the thirty-eighth anniversary of *Roe V. Wade*. The president stated that "government should not intrude on private family matters," such as "reproductive freedom" (Forsythe, 2011:1). However, the fight for this reproductive freedom has had its high and low points throughout history.

Much like with the start of prostitution, abortion has been a subject that has been around for centuries. Abortion was first criminalized in 1821 in the state of Connecticut, when abortion-inducing poisons were prohibited from being sold to women (ProCon, 2011). It was not until over twenty years later, in 1845, that legal consequences were sought throughout the state of New York for women who continued to terminate their pregnancies. By the early 1900s abortion had become a dominant issue in society, but all states did not outlaw the procedure until 1965.

A year before, in the January 1964 issue of the ABA Journal, Zad Leavy and Jerome Kummer published "Criminal Abortion: A Failure of the Law," in which they argued that the US abortion laws do intend to keep the prospective mother safe (First Things, 2003). However, the authors stressed that the severity of these abortion laws may create more problems by forcing these desperate potential mothers to undergo abortions through extreme measures and unskilled operations (First Things, 2003). States at the time saw to it abortions would be prohibited if not "necessary to preserve her life or health and done for that purpose" (Issues, 2007). Leavy and Kummer estimated that this time in the US saw one million or more illegal abortions in the US each year, resulting in five thousand to ten thousand deaths every year as a direct consequence (First Things, 2003). These deaths are what brought prosecution to become involved in these underground abortion schemes; before the death toll increased, the problem of underground abortions went unnoticed; the law would only become involved if an "abortion gone wrong," left a woman in the hospital (First Things, 2003:1). Much like with prostitution, investigation of the subject does not occur until death of the women involved occur.

Prostitutes are also more likely, as shown by previous statistics, to undergo violent experiences if their protection is not openly enforced by law. This is similar to the women who sacrificed themselves to an unskilled abortionist when the law would not recognize their best interests.

In 1973, the landmark case of *Roe v. Wade* came to verdict. *Roe v. Wade* was the Supreme Court decision that found abortion to be legal under the U.S. Constitution, as well as deeming any state restrictions on the access to abortion to be unconstitutional. While some parts of society embraced this ruling and the easier access for abortion should a woman choose to have the operation, others ridiculed the ruling. Much like on the subject of legalizing

prostitution, society became divided over the issue. The idea that women may suffer harm from abortion, such as emotional damage and impaired relationships, is a strong factor against the abortion campaign (Forsythe, 2005). Much like the argument against prostitution, some individuals in society believe women are not psychologically in control, even if they are physically in control of what is happening with their bodies. There is a concern that abortion, like prostitution, can result in drug and alcohol abuse, emotional and physical tolls, and even depression (Forsythe, 2005). Such introduces the same question for abortion as is brought on by prostitution: do they cause more harm than good for society? There is a debate for both subjects about whether or not they are individual-based acts or social policies. As with prostitution, however, women who are determined to have control of their own bodies are going to resort to whatever means necessary if desperate enough, and that by keeping abortion legal will help to maintain safety and support for these women (ProCon, 2011).

Abortion has also featured multiple groups supporting its efforts over the years, including Planned Parenthood, The American Civil Liberties Union, the National Organization for Women and the National Abortion Federation (ProCon, 2011). These organizations, much like the Unions surrounding prostitution, offer support to women who choose to undergo abortion, as well as teach the importance of safety and professionalism in these procedures and denounce the efforts that weaken a woman's right to choose

Professor Mary Ann Glendon wrote "The Women of *Roe v. Wade*" in 2003, and examined the historical and legal contexts of what influenced the decision at the time. In her article, Glendon refers to both *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton* and comments how "it is surprising to see how little [the decisions] have to say about protecting women and how much



they have to do with protecting doctors". Glendon suggests that the verdicts to overrule abortion laws were instated to insure the doctors who were performing these originally illegal abortions could keep their practice.

Just as with the subject of prostitution, however, there are drawbacks to every argument in its favor. While abortion may help to aid a woman in determining the course of her future, it could also aid in future health issues as well. General complications to arise for women who undergo an abortion include blocked fallopian tubes, a weakened cervix, uterine scarring, and damage to the woman's reproductive system (Buzzle, 2011). Problems that are less common but that can still arise include hysterectomies, miscarriages, both stillbirths and premature births, and even the threat of uterine and cervical cancers (Buzzle, 2011). Whereas abortion gives a woman the right to choose one aspect of her life, it could take away several aspects of both her health and her option for pregnancy in the future.

This health also refers to a woman's mental health; a 2002 peer-reviewed study featured in the Southern Medical Journal identified women who underwent abortion were 154% more likely to commit suicide than those who carried out their pregnancies (ProCon, 2011). Groups such as the National Right to Life Committee, Pro-Life Action League, Operation Rescue and the Catholic Church work to make women aware of these mental and physical dangers that abortion induces, as well as argue the lack of morality associated with the procedure.

Babies are believed to be "innocent human beings" from the point of conception, and therefore are entitled to the protection of their right to life (ProCon, 2011:1); such is the ideology behind the moral standpoint against abortion. Religious advocates against abortion

cite the Sixth Amendment, “Thou Shalt Not Kill,” as reason enough to keep women out of clinics (ProCon, 2011:1). In a Gallup Poll conducted in 2009, 51% of Americans viewed themselves as pro-life, the first time since the poll started in 1995 that the majority ruled against abortion (ProCon, 2011:2). The previously mentioned anti-abortion organizations work every day to keep increasing the number of Americans who believe in the right to life, and their demands for protection of the fetus have been acknowledged in the courtroom as well. On April 13, 2010, Governor Dave Heineman of Nebraska signed off on a law that “banned abortion at or after 20 weeks gestation,” basing his decision off of the idea that a fetus “can feel pain by that point in pregnancy” (ProCon, 2011:2). This law was the first ever to restrict abortions based on the pain of the fetus, but it was followed shortly after by Oklahoma legislature on April 27, 2010 that women seeking an abortion must first watch an ultrasound and listen closely to the heartbeat of the fetus (ProCon, 2011). Nearly one year later in 2011, the state of Arizona criminalized abortions that were rooted in sex or race discrimination against the fetus (ProCon, 2011).

### **Summary**

After investigating opinions both for and against prostitution, as well as examining the media’s portrayal of prostitution and the laws that justify keeping prostitution illegal, there has been one main question that arises: could prostitution be successful as an organized, independent business for women? This paper has looked at the different forms of prostitution, pointing out that prostitution involving minors or sexual trafficking without consent or under a pimp should not be considered for legality. However, an independent business – similar to what is touched upon by escort services and media portrayals such as *The Girlfriend Experience* – would allow for a woman to set up her own standards of business and give her more control

than what is normally associated with prostitution. There would not be the stereotypical image of women scantily clothed standing on street corners; it would be replaced by women who dressed as any other working women would dress.

Besides the stipulations of how the business is conducted, one of the biggest surrounding concerns for an individualized prostitution business would be the morality involved. This paper examines attitudes both for and against prostitution, and sees that society is divided between believing a woman has the choice to use her body in whatever way she wants and believing a woman is not respecting herself if she performs sexual acts for money. Like many other issues, however, society may never reach a universal acceptance over prostitution, and it must be considered whether it is fair to disallow women from engaging in this potential business based on the opinions of some individuals. As shown with the comparison to abortion, women who make decisions regarding their bodies have the risk of suffering from their actions – mentally or physically – or making their lives better. We saw in this paper that some women who underwent abortion were more likely to go through psychological stress disorders than women who did not have an abortion performed. Yet we also saw that women who were not emotionally or financially supported enough to have a baby were able to avoid further problems by terminating the pregnancy. The same positives and negatives surrounding an issue such as abortion are also found in an issue such as prostitution; where one woman may find that sexual acts in exchange for money is not emotionally acceptable for herself, another woman may find that she is perfectly comfortable with such a business and profit from the exchanges.

I plan to investigate the opinions over the potential business of prostitution by uncovering how college students feel about the idea. I would like to conduct a survey that establishes opinions about women and the work place in general. Questions that evaluate whether there is a bias for male employees in the business world over women and whether women are thought to be held as competent as men are in the working force will be included, in order to determine an overall opinion of women in the business world. I would also like to include in this survey questions that target attitudes of the respondents on the subject of prostitution. These questions will ask personal opinions on the subject, including whether they believe it is moral, whether they believe it should be legalized, and whether they place more blame on the men who buy prostitutes or the prostitutes themselves. I am looking to find a comparison between how individuals view women both in the business world and as prostitutes, and see if there is a consideration that the two worlds could ever successfully intertwine.

## **Chapter Two: Research Methods**

Upon approaching my thesis topic of prostitution, I was interested in uncovering why this subject is so taboo in our society. In my literature review, I addressed the specific laws surrounding prostitution, as well as identified the opinions of both sex workers themselves as well as other members of society. So far, this thesis has examined whether legalizing prostitution into an independent business would be capable of success. Both sides of the argument have been examined; on one side, some find legalizing prostitution to be a great mistake for society that would greatly encourage both violence and disrespect against women.

On the other side of the argument, some believe legalizing prostitution would actually clean-up misconstrued images of drug-addicted, beaten sex workers and turn the profession into a stable and successful business. After familiarizing myself with prostitution, I wanted to find how other people felt about the subject as well. I drafted a survey to distribute to one hundred students at a small private college in New York State, asking those who take the survey a total of twelve questions - in addition to their age, sex, and major - with the intentions of comparing results and drawing conclusions on the moral and legal views of prostitution.

### **Population and Sample**

For the distribution of my one hundred surveys, I thought the responses that would be most interesting to examine would be from fellow students at a New York college. Being a private liberal arts school of approximately 2,200 students, the college is made up of many different political views as well as educational majors. I believe the findings of the survey will be interesting to compare, since these students are in the same age group but all hold individual opinions on issues as controversial as prostitution. A copy of the survey can be found in Appendix B.

The type of sampling used will be a convenience sampling. I will be distributing these samples to students throughout the campus, and am looking to get as many different majors as possible, since I am especially interested in comparing the responses of those who are sociology majors and those who are not. I live in a sorority house and am surrounded by women who have many of the different majors I am looking for, so some of my surveys will be distributed there. Since I do not want to limit myself to only female responses, I believe taking my survey into neighboring fraternity houses, as well as to my male employers and cast mates, will also

give me various opinions and a greater chance at having a greater number of male and female responses to analyze. I believe that analyzing the responses by major and sex will help make the distinction – if any – of what groups find prostitution to be more moral or immoral than others, as well as identify if there are any particular groups that strongly favor or oppose prostitution being legalized. I also believe the results of the survey have to be analyzed based on the comparison of one question to another; for example, do students find a greater or lesser morality with abortion compared to the morality of prostitution? Are many of the students who took the survey willing to suspend their own beliefs for what might best benefit society by law?

I will be performing a quantitative analysis on the results of these surveys. This analysis will best be shown through cross-tabulation, and will pay specific attention to portraying the percentages of each question. What I would first like to look for in the results is to see whether there is an overwhelming majority that leans either way; either to legalize prostitution or to keep it illegal, or see if it is a subject the student body is divided over. I am especially anxious to find if there is a strong correlation between finding prostitution immoral and wanting to keep it illegal, since some regard the law in terms of their personal morals and not for what may be best for the rest of society. I also think there might be an interesting correlation – if any – between how young adults view prostitution beyond what is presented for them on television. The breakdown by percentages as shown by cross-tabulation can be found on Appendix C.

## Surveys

To administer the surveys, I chose to conduct convenience sampling. I handed surveys to the women in my own sorority house, my fellow cast members from a current school production, my fellow employees at a campus job, and some of the members of two fraternity houses. I decided convenience sampling would be better than asking professors to let me distribute surveys to their classes because I do not know many professors outside of the sociology, theater and English departments, and wanted to gauge the opinions from students who had many different majors, rather than risk having too many from one particular major. I knew by reaching out to Greek houses, as well as a cast and a place of employment, I would run into students with different majors and opinions that would give me more to analyze in the results of my surveys. It was important to me to reach out to different majors, especially majors other than sociology, because I wanted the opinions of students whose areas of academic interest do not entail discussing society or laws all of the time. I was hoping to catch students off guard with some of the questions, since certain questions, such as discussing the difference of opinion between the morality of abortion and prostitution in comparison to the legality of abortion and prostitution are not questions students think about every day. While many of the respondents were in the twenty to twenty one year old age range, I was able to find a few subjects who were a year or two younger or older. I understand that the students surveyed represent only their own beliefs and opinions, and do not represent the beliefs or opinions of either the College as a whole or their age demographic as a whole.

Before handing out my survey, the Human Subjects Review Board checked the questions and deemed it appropriate to distribute throughout campus. In addition to filling out the survey, students were also asked to sign and date a consent form that briefed them on the content of the survey they would be taking, as well as explaining that their participation is entirely voluntary, and that they could stop completing the survey at any time or omit any questions that made them uncomfortable. A copy of this consent form can be found in Appendix A. All students taking the survey were given as much time as needed to answer every question, and the results of the survey were then placed in a folder, along with their consent forms, to be analyzed at a later time. I made the students aware in my consent form that even though some answers might be traced back to an individual, in no way will I be disclosing the information to anyone else, professor or student. I wanted to ensure that I had every participant's trust, as well as help make them feel comfortable in giving their honest answers.

The first three questions were meant to establish the background of those taking the survey, asking them their sex, age and major. The next questions that followed on the survey were based on the Likert Scale: 1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=neutral, 4=disagree, or 5=strongly disagree. The only exception was the last question, where students were asked to rate their political beliefs as conservative, moderately conservative, neutral, moderately liberal, or liberal. I structured the survey so that each question would build up to the central question of how my peers viewed the legalization of prostitution. I began by asking two questions about independent business in general: whether the participant believed men ran more successful independent businesses than females, and whether women have proved themselves capable



through time of running a successful business. I thought these two questions would be appropriate to start off with because it got people thinking about women and business.

The next set of questions gauged the participant's opinions on abortion, starting with a question to see how many of the participants agreed with the decision in *Roe v. Wade*. The next two questions would be extremely important in the analysis of this survey, and that is to see how many of the participants believe abortion to be immoral, but still believe it should be legalized regardless of their personal feelings. I think it is important to see if individuals can put their own feelings aside for what could potentially be the most beneficial for society, or if they believe societal laws should be a direct reflection of their personal beliefs. By inquiring about *Roe v. Wade* and personal feelings about abortion, I was hoping the participant would then start thinking about a woman's right to her own body, which would lead into the next set of questions surrounding the subject of prostitution.

To introduce the participant to the subject of prostitution, I began by asking whether or not the dangers and statistics of prostitution are influenced by the media. I then asked a similar question to dissect whether movies and television has a direct effect on what the participant knows about prostitution. I thought these questions would be important to incorporate into my study since I included a section in my literature review about the media's effects on how society acknowledges prostitution. The next question that I asked is what I find to be the most stimulating question on the entire survey. It asks the participant whether or not they hold women who are paid for sex in lower regards than the men who pay them for the sexual favors. I am hoping that by asking this question it will force participants to really consider both parties

involved in prostitution: the women who are paid and the men who are willing to pay them. Many times the disdain for prostitution is only placed on the sex workers themselves, and I thought it would be interesting to see how many participants take the “Johns” into consideration as well.

The next set of questions follows the same format as the questions regarding abortion. First I asked if the subjects found prostitution immoral. However, before I asked if the participants still thought prostitution should be legalized despite their personal beliefs, I asked their opinions on whether or not legalizing prostitution would provide greater safety for the sex workers and better stability through tax revenues. By asking this question, I was hoping to introduce to the participant the idea of a safer, more organized execution of prostitution that they might otherwise not have considered. Finally, I asked the participant to put which category that they believed best represented his or her political beliefs. I was interested in seeing how many participants ruled against the legalization of abortion and prostitution, but might still consider themselves to be more liberal than conservative.

### **Data Analysis**

The next chapter provides an in-depth look at the results of the survey. Cross-tabulations and frequency charts are used to show the overall attitude of the Union College students sampled.

### Chapter Three: Survey Analysis

Out of one hundred surveys that were distributed, fifty six were completed. Nineteen of those completed surveys were from male respondents, while the remaining thirty seven were from female respondents. Of the forty four refusals, forty of them were male, while the remaining four were female. A total of thirty three different majors were included in the findings of this study. The most common of the majors was Psychology, with a total of six respondents identifying it as their major. With five respondents each, economics and biology were tied for second. An exact telling of the percentages that each major played in the results is shown in Table 1:

**Table 1: Majors of Respondents**

	Frequency	Valid Percent
American Studies	1	1.8%
Anthropology	1	1.8%
Art and English ID	1	1.8%
Asian Studies	1	1.8%
Biochemistry	1	1.8%
Biology	5	1.8%
Biology and Classics	1	8.9%
Biology and Music	1	1.8%
Biology and Music	1	1.8%
Biology and Women & Gender Studies	1	1.8%

Economics	5	8.9%
Electrical Engineering	1	1.8%
English	2	3.6%
English and Math	1	1.8%
English Literature	1	1.8%
French	1	1.8%
French and English	1	1.8%
French and Philosophy ID	1	1.8%
History	2	3.6%
Math	3	5.4%
Math and Biology	1	1.8%
Math and Psych ID	1	1.8%
Neuroscience	2	3.6%
Organizing Theme	1	1.8%
Philosophy	1	1.8%
Political Science	4	7.1%
Psychology	6	10.7%
Religious Studies	1	1.8%
Sociology	2	3.6%
Theater	1	1.8%
Theater and English	2	3.6%

Theater and Math	1	1.8%
Theater and Psychology	1	1.8%
Total	56	100.0%

To begin my cross-tabulations, I first wanted to examine any correlations between the sexes of the respondents with their answers on the first two questions. The first questioned whether the participants thought men ran more successful businesses than women, and the second was whether the participants thought women were capable of running successful businesses at all. The results of the cross-tabulation are as follows:

**Table 2: Men Run More Successful Businesses than Women**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Male	3 5.4%	0 0%	9 16.1%	6 10.7%	1 1.8%	19 33.9%
Female	9 16.1%	15 26.8%	7 12.5%	6 10.7%	0 0%	37 66.1%
Total	12 21.4%	15 26.8%	16 28.6%	12 21.4%	1 1.8%	56 100.0%

Pearson Chi-Square: Value: 15.016, df: 4, Asymp. Sig: .005

**Table 3: Women Are Capable of Running Successful Businesses**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Male	0 0%	0 0%	2 3.6%	6 10.7%	11 19.6%	19 33.9%
Female	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	9 16.1%	28 50%	37 66.1%
Total	0 0%	0 0%	2 3.6%	15 26.8%	39 69.6%	56 100.0%

Pearson Chi-Square: Value: 4.711, df: 2, Asymp. Sig: .095.

When the charts are broken down, we see that according to Chi-Square, the results of the first chart seem to be statistically significant, but the results of the second chart are not. The first chart has a Chi-Square of .005, which is under .05 and therefore appears to be statistically significant, while the second chart has a Chi-Square of .095, clearly over .05, and therefore not appearing to be statistically significant. With the first chart, we see that sex does play a factor in the responses; of the nineteen male respondents, one strongly agreed (1.8%), six agreed (10.7%), nine took a neutral stance (16.1%), zero disagreed, and three others (5.4%) strongly disagreed that men run more successful businesses than women. Of the thirty seven female respondents, zero strongly agreed, six agreed (10.7%), seven took a neutral stance (12.5%), fifteen disagreed (26.8%) and nine (16.1%) strongly disagreed that men run more successful businesses than women do. Overall, sixteen respondents took a neutral stance, while thirteen respondents indicated to some degree that men are more capable than women in running a successful business, while twenty seven respondents indicated to some degree that men showed no more capability of running a successful business than women do.

In the second chart, the results were not as skewed. Out of the fifty six respondents, none of them either disagreed or strongly disagreed that women are capable of running successful businesses. A total of two participants (3.6%) took a neutral stance on the question, both being male, with six (10.7%) other male respondents agreeing, and eleven more (19.6%) strongly agreeing that women are capable of running successful businesses. Of the female participants, nine (16.1%) agreed women are capable of running successful businesses, with twenty eight (50%) others strongly agreeing.

For the cross-tabulation of the two questions involving the morality of prostitution v. legalizing prostitution, the following chart breaks down the results of the survey. Morality is indicated by the top Likert scale, while legalization is indicated by the Likert scale on the left:

**Table 4: Prostitution Is Immoral v. Prostitution Should Be Legal**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Strongly Disagree	0 0%	1 1.8%	0 0%	2 3.6%	4 7.1%	7 12.5%
Disagree	0 0%	2 3.6%	7 12.5%	6 10.7%	0 0%	15 26.8%
Neutral	1 1.8%	2 3.6%	9 16.1%	6 10.7%	0 0%	18 32.1%
Agree	1 1.8%	6 10.7%	4 7.1%	3 5.4%	0 0%	14 25.0%
Strongly Agree	0 0%	1 1.8%	0 0%	0 0%	1 1.8%	2 3.6%
Total	2 3.6%	12 21.4%	20 35.7%	17 30.4%	5 8.9%	56 100.0%

Pearson's Chi-Square: Value: 39.478, df: 16, Asymp. Sig: .001

Seven students (or 12.5% overall) strongly disagreed that prostitution should be legalized. Of those seven, one disagreed with prostitution being immoral, two agreed that

prostitution is immoral, and one strongly agreed that prostitution is immoral. Fifteen other participants (26.8%) disagreed that prostitution should be legalized, with two students disagreeing with the immorality of prostitution, seven students taking a neutral stance on the immorality of prostitution, and six students agreeing that prostitution is immoral. Another eighteen participants (32.1%) took a neutral stance on whether or not prostitution should be legalized, with one of those students strongly disagreeing with the immorality of prostitution, two students disagreeing with the immorality of prostitution, nine students taking a neutral stance, and six students agreeing that prostitution is immoral. Fourteen other participants (25.0%) agreed that prostitution should be legalized, with one strongly disagreeing with the immorality of prostitution, six disagreeing with the immorality of prostitution, four taking a neutral stance, and three agreeing that prostitution is immoral. Lastly, two students (3.6%) strongly agreed that prostitution should be legalized, with one disagreeing in the immorality of prostitution and one strongly agreeing that prostitution is immoral. Since Pearson's Chi-Square is labeled at .001, which is under .05, it appears that all of these results are statistically significant.

I was a bit confused that three respondents did not find prostitution immoral, yet two of them still disagreed that prostitution should be made legal. One of the three even marked that they strongly disagree with making prostitution legal. Personally, I would expect that if someone finds something to be moral, then he or she would also find it to be legal. On a similar note, I was also surprised in a much more positive way that one of the respondents strongly agreed that prostitution was immoral, yet still strongly agreed that prostitution should be legalized. This says to me that even though the majority was not willing to put aside their



personal beliefs, there is still hope that some people can look past their own morals and consider what might be best for the rest of society, even if they do not personally agree with it.

After identifying how many respondents thought prostitution should be legal despite their personal beliefs, I wanted to see if the question on whether government regulation would make prostitution safer had any effect on respondents believing prostitution should be legal.

The following cross-tabulation shows the results, with the top Likert scale referring to government regulation, and the Likert scale on the left referring to prostitution being legalized:

**Table 5: The Legalization of Prostitution Would Provide Greater Safety Through Government Regulation and Tax Revenues v. Prostitution Should Be Legal**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Strongly Disagree	3 5.4%	3 5.4%	1 1.8%	0 0%	0 0%	7 12.5%
Disagree	1 1.8%	5 8.9%	4 7.1%	5 8.9%	0 0%	15 26.8%
Neutral	1 1.8%	0 0%	9 16.1%	8 14.3%	0 0%	18 32.2%
Agree	0 0%	0 0%	3 5.4%	8 14.3%	3 5.4%	14 25.0%
Strongly Agree	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	2 3.6%	2 3.6%
Total	5 8.9%	8 14.3%	17 30.4%	21 37.6%	5 8.9%	56 100.0%

Pearson Chi-Square: Value: 57.077, df: 16, Asymp. Sig: .000

According to the Chi-Square value of .000, the results appear to be statistically significant. A closer look at the table shows that seventeen of the respondents (30.4%) took neutral standpoints on whether the legalization of prostitution would provide greater safety through government regulation and tax revenues, while twenty six respondents (46.5%) agreed to some degree and thirteen respondents (23.2%) disagreed to some degree. Five of the

respondents (8.9%) indicated that the legalization of prostitution would provide great safety through government regulation and tax revenues, but still disagreed that prostitution should be legalized, whereas nine respondents (16.1%) took a neutral on both questions.

There were five respondents who agreed that the legalization of prostitution would provide greater safety through government regulation and tax revenues, yet still disagreed that prostitution should be kept illegal. It was interesting to me that respondents could consider the benefits of making prostitution legal, but still refuse to do so. The same went for the eight respondents who agreed with government regulation, but still marked neutral as their response for whether or not prostitution should be legalized. I would rather see the respondents mark neutral over disagree or strongly disagree, however, because at least neutral means they are considering both sides, even if they are not making a distinct decision. The same goes for the one respondent who indicated strongly disagree on their survey for government regulation, but still marked neutral for whether or not it should be legalized. Again, they are looking at both sides of the issue.

After running a cross-tabulation on government regulation v. legalizing prostitution, I wanted to run another that compares the influence of movies and television on the respondent's view of prostitution, against whether or not they believe prostitution should be legal. The results are as follows, with the top Likert scale indicating the respondent's opinions on the influence of television and movies, and the left Likert scale indicating whether or not the respondent believes prostitution should be legal:

**Table 6: How I View Prostitution Is Influenced by How it is Shown to Me in Movies and Television v. Prostitution Should Be Legal**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Strongly Disagree	2 5.4%	0 0%	1 1.8%	3 5.4%	0 0%	7 12.5%
Disagree	0 0%	3 5.4%	1 1.8%	10 17.9%	1 1.8%	15 26.8%
Neutral	1 1.8%	3 5.4%	3 5.4%	9 16.1%	2 3.6%	18 32.1%
Agree	0 0%	5 8.9%	5 8.9%	4 7.1%	0 0%	14 25.0%
Strongly Agree	1 1.8%	1 1.8%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	2 3.6%
Total	5 8.9%	12 21.4%	10 17.9%	26 46.4%	3 5.4%	56 100%

Pearson Chi-Square: Value: 29.070, df: 16, Asymp. Sig: .023

Based on the cross-tabulation, seven total respondents (12.5%) strongly disagreed with the legalization of prostitution, with two of those participants strongly disagreeing that how they view prostitution is influenced by how it is shown to them in movies and television shows, one respondent taking a neutral standpoint on the influence of movies and television shows, and three respondents agreeing that how movies and television portray prostitution does influence their views. A total of fifteen respondents (26.8%) disagree that prostitution should be legalized, with three of them disagreeing that their views on prostitution are influenced by movies and television shows, one taking a neutral stance, ten respondents agreeing that their views are influenced by television and movies, and one respondent strongly agreeing that his or her views are influenced. Eighteen respondents (32.1%) took a neutral stance on whether or not prostitution should be legalized, with one respondent strongly disagreeing, three participants disagreeing, another three participants taking a neutral stance, nine participants

agreeing and two respondents strongly agreeing that how they view prostitution is influenced by how it is shown to them in movies and television shows. Fourteen participants (25.0%) believed prostitution should be legalized, with five participants disagreeing, five other participants taking a neutral stance, and an additional four agreeing that their views are influenced. Lastly, only two respondents (3.6%) strongly agreed that prostitution should be legalized, with one disagreeing and one strongly disagreeing that how they view prostitution is influenced by movies and television shows. Based on the Chi-Square Value of .023, the results again appear to be statistically significant.

The following frequency table evaluates the results of a question based on the sex of the respondents. The results for the question “I hold women who are paid for sex in lower regards than the men who pay them,” are as follows:

**Table 7: I Hold Women Who Are Paid For Sex in Lower Regards Than the Men Who Pay Them**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Male	5 8.9%	7 12.5%	3 5.4%	2 3.6%	2 3.6%	19 33.9%
Female	14 25.0%	15 26.8%	5 8.9%	3 5.4%	0 0%	37 66.1%
Total	19 33.9%	22 39.3%	8 14.3%	5 8.9%	2 3.6%	56 100.0%

Pearson Chi-Square: Value: 4.557, df: 4, Asymp. Sig: .336

While the Chi-Square Value of .336 indicates that the results are not statistically significant, just briefly looking over the table itself shows that there is no correlation between the sex of the correspondent and who they place more blame on. The majority of the participants, forty one (73.8%), disagreed to some extent that prostitutes are held in lower

regards than the men who buy them, while a total of seven participants (12.5%) believed to some degree that the prostitutes should be held in lower regards than the men who paid for them. Eight respondents (32.1%) chose neutral for their answer.

This was what I thought was the most controversial question on the survey, and what I also found to have the most surprising results. While forty one respondents, at a total of 73.2%, either disagreed or strongly disagreed that prostitutes should be held in lower regards than their “Johns,” and a total of 14.3%, or eight respondents, took a neutral stance on the issue, there was still a total of 12.5%, or seven respondents, who agreed to some extent that prostitutes are more at fault than those that buy them. While I would rather see a smaller majority favor the “Johns” than a larger majority, I was still disappointed when I saw that three of those respondents were females. Women are prone to judging one another on a daily basis, but when a woman is faced with trying to support herself through a means such as prostitution, I would hope other women would be more willing to give them their support than their judgment. I expected more men to side with the “Johns” than what was shown from the survey, which is encouraging, but I thought all females who took the survey would be more defensive of prostitutes over the “Johns.”

I had asked the respondents to identify with a specific political party in hopes of identifying how liberal or conservative the respondents viewed themselves, while at the same time analyzing their responses to whether or not prostitution should be legalized. The results are shown as follows:

**Table 8: Prostitution Should Be Legal v. Political Affiliation**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Conservative	1 1.8%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	1 1.8%
Moderately Conservative	2 3.6%	2 3.6%	4 7.1%	2 3.6%	0 0%	10 17.9%
Neutral	2 3.6%	1 1.8%	3 5.4%	2 3.6%	1 1.8%	9 16.1%
Moderately Liberal	1 1.8%	6 10.7%	9 16.1%	6 10.7%	0 0%	22 39.3%
Liberal	1 1.8%	6 10.7%	2 3.6%	4 7.1%	1 1.8%	14 25.0%
Total	7 12.5%	15 26.8%	18 32.1%	14 25.0%	2 3.6%	56 100.0%

Pearson Chi-Square: Value: 17.346, df: 16, Asymp. Sig: .364

The Chi-Square value of .364 does not support that the results of the table are statistically significant. In the table itself, one of the respondents (1.8%) strongly disagreed with the legalizing of prostitution, while identifying as conservative. Two more respondents (3.6%) identified themselves as moderately conservative while also strongly disagreeing with the legalization of prostitution. Two other respondents (another 3.6%) who also identified with being moderately conservative while indicating that they disagreed with legalizing prostitution, with another four moderately conservatives (7.1%) taking a neutral stance on the issue, and two more (3.6%) moderately conservatives agreeing that prostitution should be legalized. There were nine respondents who left their political party as neutral, with two of those respondents (3.6%) strongly disagreeing, one (1.8%) disagreeing, three (5.4%) remaining neutral on the issue, two (3.6%) agreeing, and one respondent (1.8%) strongly agreeing that prostitution should be legalized. Of the twenty two respondents who identified themselves as moderately liberal, one (1.8%) strongly disagreed, six (10.7%) disagreed, nine (16.1%) remained

neutral, and another six (10.7%) agreed when asked whether or not they believe prostitution should be legalized, regardless of their personal beliefs on the subject. For the last political affiliation, liberal, one respondent (1.8%) strongly disagreed, six (10.7%) disagreed, two (3.6%) remained neutral, four (7.1%) agreed, and one (1.8%) strongly agreed on the subject of legalizing prostitution.

The last cross-tabulation I ran was on the two questions regarding the immorality of abortion v. belief abortion should be legal, despite personal feelings. This was used as a basis of comparison for my question on the immorality of prostitution compared to whether or not it should be legalized. Whether or not abortion should be legal is indicated by the Likert scale on the left, while the top Likert scale indicates the respondent's feelings on the immorality of abortion. The following are the results from the respondents:

**Table 9: Abortion is Immoral v. Abortion Should be Legal**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Strongly Disagree	0 0%	0 0%	1 1.8%	0 0%	0 0%	1 1.8%
Disagree	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	2 3.6%	1 1.8%	3 5.4%
Neutral	0 0%	0 0%	2 3.6%	2 3.6%	0 0%	4 7.1%
Agree	1 1.8%	6 10.7%	5 8.9%	0 0%	0 0%	12 21.4%
Strongly Agree	19 33.9%	14 25.0%	2 3.6%	0 0%	1 1.8%	36 64.3%
Total	20 35.7%	20 35.7%	10 17.9%	4 7.1%	2 3.6%	56 100.0%

Pearson Chi-Square: Value: 62.222, df: 16, Asymp. Sig: .000

Based on the results of the cross-tabulation, participants are much more accepting of abortion than they were of prostitution. As indicated by the chart, one participant (1.8%) chose a neutral stance on the immorality of abortion, while strongly disagreeing that abortion should be legal. Three participants (5.4%) disagreed that abortion should be legal, with two agreeing it is immoral and one strongly agreeing it is immoral. Four other participants (7.1%) took a neutral stance on whether abortion should be legal, with two taking a neutral stance on its immorality, and two agreeing it is immoral. A total of twelve participants agreed that abortion should be legal, with one strongly disagreeing in its immorality, six disagreeing it is immoral, and five taking a neutral stance. The majority of the participants, (64.3%) believed abortion should be kept legal. Of these thirty six respondents, nineteen (33.9%) strongly disagreed that abortion is immoral, fourteen (25.0%) disagreed that abortion is immoral, two (3.6%) took a neutral stance, and one strongly agreed that it is immoral. As it was with the previous cross-tabulation, the Chi-Square has a significance of .000. Since it is under .05, the results once again appear to be statistically significant.

#### **Chapter Four: Conclusion**

My main goal behind distributing the surveys was twofold; first I wanted to get an idea of how legalizing prostitution would be received by a sample representation of society based on the results of the surveys themselves. Second, I wanted to get the respondents to start thinking of prostitution in terms of an organized business, rather than a careless, dirty profession that it is so often viewed as.



While many of the results of my surveys appear to be statistically significant based on Pearson's Chi Square, I am also aware that the response rate was very low compared to what I originally wanted. When I sent out one hundred surveys, I was hoping to have nearly all of them answered. By having a response rate of just 56%, I understand that this significantly decreases the relevancy of the Chi Square, despite what values are shown. However, despite the low response rate or the invalidity of the Chi Square test, I still believe the results of my surveys correlate with information from my literature review, starting with the first question regarding men v. women in the business world. Thirteen respondents believed men run more successful businesses than women, but the overwhelming majority of the respondents believed that women were still capable of running successful businesses. I was actually expecting that a higher number would believe that men are more capable than women. Women have more to live up to in the business world, and some of those expectations are out of their immediate control. A woman's physicality is commonly used against her, either negatively or positively; if she is not aware of her appearance, she is disregarded, but if she comes off too high maintenance in her appearance, she is not taken seriously. I believe this is partly to blame for the way women are portrayed in television shows and movies. As addressed in my literature review, books such as Russell Campbell's (2006) "Marked Women: Prostitutes and Prostitution in Cinema," point out that women are often portrayed as either a housewife or a prostitute, and not smart, successful business women. By sending the message through cinema that women belong either at home or on the streets, we subconsciously leave women with little ability to impress us in the corporate world. The roles of a housewife and prostitute are often surrounded with the notions of love and sex, and neither of these are appropriate in the work

place; therefore it makes sense that when compared to men, women are not always viewed as successful in business.

The influence of television and movies over society became apparent once again when looking at the cross-tabulation of how prostitution is viewed, compared with whether respondents believe prostitution should be legal. There were only four respondents who agreed that movies and television influenced their views on prostitution and that they believed in making prostitution legal. There were a total of twenty five respondents who agreed that how they view prostitution is influenced by movies and television shows, and who also chose neutral, disagree or strongly disagree that prostitution should not be legalized. This once again supports research from my literature review that argues how prostitution is often belittled or portrayed in extreme negative ways. In noting that television shows and movies have such a strong influence over how prostitution is viewed over the public, it would be a step in the right direction to start producing more storylines where prostitution is not so negatively stigmatized.

In my two questions comparing the morality and legal status of both abortion and prostitution, there was a significant difference between how many respondents are more receptive of abortion than how many were receptive to prostitution. I believe students are more likely to favor the morality and legality of abortion over prostitution because it is more likely to directly involve them. College students at a small, private, liberal arts college do not worry about entering prostitution because as of right now, they are all on their way to earning degrees and starting career paths. College students have more reason to worry about abortion, however, since many students are sexually active, and accidents are liable to happen even when birth control is being used. I also believe students have come to be more accepting of

abortion compared to prostitution, because they have grown up in a generation where abortion had already started becoming accepted. *Roe v. Wade* was before our time, and therefore growing up, we were raised knowing abortion was already legal, whereas our parents were the ones who had a harder time accepting the issue. I believe the same pattern could be shown with prostitution; if prostitution were to be made legal within the next few years, and this survey was passed out to the next generation, I suspect that the responses would be much more likely to favor prostitution being moral, as well as favor prostitution being made legal. Whereas this generation might have a hard time accepting new laws legalizing prostitution, the generation after us will enter society with these laws already being instated, and therefore accept them as part of the norm.

I was looking forward to noting a correlation between the political affiliations that the respondents identified themselves with, compared to how strongly they felt about the legalization of prostitution. While thirty six respondents identified themselves as some degree as liberal, only sixteen respondents indicated that they either agree or strongly agree with legalizing prostitution. Personally, when I think of liberal, I think of openness and room for change. Yet twenty liberals would not agree that prostitution should be legalized. I was even more surprised by the results when I saw that two respondents who labeled themselves as moderately conservative agreed with legalizing prostitution, whereas beforehand I would not think that anyone who identified with a conservative party would vote in that way. I expected there to be more statistical significance, with the number of responses that did not favor prostitution to reflect how many respondents identified with being conservative. This was not the case, and it makes me think that legalizing prostitution into a private business is farther off

than I originally thought when I first started research on the subject. If those who consider themselves open-minded are not ready to include prostitution under the law, prostitution is viewed by the rest of society as a much more extreme issue than I originally thought. As mentioned under the Pros v. Cons of Legislation section in my literature review, there is a strongly supported idea by society that prostitution weakens the values of love and marriage. Whereas marriage is based on intimacy and emotion, prostitution focuses primarily on physicality, and I believe that the fear of weakening the sanctity of marriage by legalizing prostitution could make even the most open minded individuals hesitate before consenting to the legality of prostitution. I also believe that besides marriage, communal harmony is very important to society. If prostitution is still associated with disease and violence, and could be a risk for disrupting order within a community, there will be a resistance to the idea of making prostitution legal -no matter how liberal respondents believe themselves to be. Whereas I have previously discussed statistics that show regulating prostitution under the law can be less dangerous than keeping prostitution illegal, these are statistics that are not commonly known in society. Part of the motivation for choosing this topic was to introduce prostitution in a more positive light that perhaps had not been shed on society beforehand.

### **Final Remarks**

Upon beginning this senior thesis project, I was at a loss to find a topic that interested me enough that I would devote two terms to researching, writing, and interviewing others on their thoughts about the same topic. I chose prostitution as my final subject after browsing different articles related to how women are represented in court, and realized that prostitutes

face a bias not just in the court room, but in society as well. After reading about different organizations and unions formed by and for prostitutes, I have come to believe that they are capable of turning this profession into a safe, government regulated, independently run business. It is my hope that the presentation of prostitution as an organized independent business for women will erase the negative stereotypes that have been associated with prostitution for so long. Perhaps society will suspend the vision of drug addicts desperately selling themselves for extra cash, and replace it with two adults negotiating business in a manner similar to other organized companies. While society might not currently be ready to accept prostitution as a legal practice, as indicated by the survey responses, by continuing to introduce legalizing prostitution as a positive action, the rest of the society might start to support the idea. Prostitution will not continue to be viewed as filth and desperation if the government helps by monitoring the way the prostitutes are treated, as well as offer them tax revenues and support. While women may not aspire to be prostitutes when they are little, females will turn to prostitution as a way of financial support when all other resources are exhausted. Society should make prostitution as safe as possible for these women by opening their minds to the idea of it being run as a monitored independent business, and by passing laws that will make prostitution legal.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A

#### INFORMED CONSENT FORM

My name is Jaclyn Toop, and I am a student at Union College. I am inviting you to participate in a research survey on behalf of my sociology senior thesis. Involvement in this survey is voluntary, so you may choose to participate or not. A description of the survey is written below.

I am interested in learning more about the attitudes of fellow students on the subject of legalizing prostitution. You will be asked to fill out a brief twelve question survey that helps me gauge opinions on current issues revolving around a woman and her body. This survey will take approximately ten minutes. All information will be kept confidential, but please note that participation is voluntary and that you may skip any questions that you may find to be invasive or uncomfortable. If you no longer wish to continue at all, you have the right to withdraw from the survey, without penalty, at any time.

All of my questions have been answered and I wish to participate in this research survey.

---

Signature of participant

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Date

---

Print name of participant

---

Name of investigator

---

Date



## Appendix B

Sex \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_

Major \_\_\_\_\_

**I believe independent businesses run by men are more successful than independent businesses run by women:**

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

**I believe women have proved themselves capable of running successful businesses:**

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

**Women have the right, as supported by *Roe v. Wade*, to have control over their own bodies:**

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

**I believe abortion to be immoral:**

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

**Regardless of my personal feelings, I believe abortion should still be legal:**

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

**I know very little about the dangers and statistics of prostitution other than what is shown to me in the media:**

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

**How I view prostitution is influenced by how it is shown to me in movies and television shows:**

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

**I hold women who are paid for sex in lower regards than the men who pay them:**

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

**I believe prostitution is immoral:**

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

**The legalization of prostitution would provide greater safety through government regulation and tax revenues:**

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

**Regardless of my personal feelings, I believe prostitution should be legalized:**

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

**I consider my political beliefs to be:**

Conservative   
  Moderately Conservative   
  Neutral   
  Moderately Liberal  
 Liberal