The Social Consequences of Unchastity

Gail Pheterson

The prostitute is the prototype of the stigmatized woman. She is both named and dishonored by the word "whore." The word "whore" does not, however, refer only to prostitutes. It is also a label which can be applied to any woman. As an adjective, "whore" is defined as "unchaste." Significantly, unchastity in a man does not make him a whore although it may determine his status in other ways. The whore stigma is specifically a female gender stigma which can be defined as "a mark of shame or disease on an unchaste woman." This article provides a framework for understanding that stigma along two socially critical dimensions of unchastity, namely impurity and defilement. Those dimensions have been chosen because they expose social justifications for racial, ethnic, and class oppression (grounded in notions of impure identity) as well as for physical and sexual violence (grounded in notions of defilement through experience). Each dimension will be explored for both women and men with the help of research and interview citations. Since one function of the whore stigma is to silence and degrade those it targets, this article is self-consciously committed to giving voice and respect to persons traditionally such legitimacy.

Impurity

One definition of unchaste is impure. Impure is defined as "dirty, mixed with foreign matter, adulterated, mixed with another colour." Unmistakably, such a definition activates associations of racial and ethnic diversity wherein only white, non-foreign people are chaste. People of color, foreigners (people of different origin than the ethnic norm), and Jewish people become the unchaste ones, the dirty ones. Pure is defined as "clean, white, and unadulterated." Often clean is
used in the sense of clean hands; clean hands belong not only to white people but particularly to white middle- and upper-class people. Servants, workers, and childrearers “dirty their hands.” An analysis of the impurity dimension of unchastity brings us directly to the links between the whore stigma and racism, anti-Semitism, and classism.

Women of color, Jewish women, and working-class women are vulnerable to the whore stigma as women with a denigrated status. Men who deviate from the white heterosexual male norm are also vulnerable, not to the whore stigma but to racial, sexual, or class stigmas. In fact, no one is immune to accusations of unchastity; it appears that no one can fit all norms and that “the dynamics of shameful difference are . . . a general feature of social life.”

Racism and the Whore Stigma
Whores and blacks have traditionally been treated as slaves and criminals. They are considered the unclean ones. They are considered the sexy ones. Black women are often assumed to be whores. One black woman who is not a prostitute said, “When I stand waiting for a bus, especially in a white neighborhood, men passing assume that I’m working. My color means ‘whore’ to them.” Black men are often assumed to be pimps. A white woman said, “Since I’ve had a black boyfriend, people look at me suspiciously, as if I was a whore and he was my pimp. One white man actually asked if my boyfriend was my (smirk) boss, although it sure seemed obvious to me that we were a couple. He even had the nerve to ask if I needed help to get away!” Black women are assumed to be sexually available; they must prove their honor. Black men are assumed to be sexually predatory; they must prove their worthiness. White men traditionally accuse black men of raping white women, an accusation which has historically led to the murder of black men. White men also traditionally rape black women, a transgression which is blamed on the sexual nature of black women. Both sex and race are seen as dark, mysterious, and dirty. Both are judged unchaste and thereby unfit for public life. Accusations of impurity are used to deny visibility, voice, and power to the “sexy ones” and to the “dark ones.” Symbolically, sexy and dark have intertwined into one alluring taboo. People of color are considered mistresses (women) and monsters (men) regardless of their sexual behavior. In essence, the whore stigma together with the racial stigma dehumanizes people of color and transforms human sexuality into a beastial force.

Prostitutes are considered shady women regardless of their color. A black street prostitute, when asked about differences between black and white whores, said, “We’re all standing on the same corner. We’re all sucking on the same dick. Sure, some white men won’t take me, a black lady, into a hotel because they’re afraid of being conspicuous, but in private or on the street a whore is a whore.” It is true that in some countries (such as the United States), a higher percentage of black women than of white women are sent to jail for prostitution. And, in many countries (such as the Netherlands, France, and Germany) third world women are more likely to be exploited in prostitution than native white women. Such racist mechanisms compound the stigmatization of whores of color but they do not minimize the “dark mark” branded on any prostitute.

Racial impurity is put forth as a justification for prohibition and segregation.7 Prohibition refers to restrictions in particular about what enters the body. Segregation is an attempt to separate the chaste from bodily temptation and contamination. The impurity assigned to race is glued to the shame assigned to sex. Divisions into the pure and the impure, the madonna and the whore, the wife and the prostitute, or the white and the black mirror divisions of conscience from pleasure, belief from act, or segregation from sisterhood. Laws are made, cities are planned, and children are raised to ensure those divisions either officially or unofficially.

Although unchastity stigmatizes only women as whores, it does stigmatize certain groups of men in other ways. Like men who affiliate with prostitutes, homosexual men and men of color are deemed unworthy. Homosexual men are targeted with a gay or faggot stigma because they are regarded in dominant society as female men; men of color are targeted with a pimp stigma because they are regarded in dominant society as violent and irresponsible men. Stigmatization effectively denies heterosexual white male privilege to gays and men of color and, at the same time, absolves heterosexual white men of identification with sexual variations or of responsibility for sexual violations. One prostitute in Italy said, “Lots of married men prefer pre-operative transsexual prostitutes (men in the process of becoming women who have both breasts and a penis); they want gay sex without forfeiting heterosexual identity.”

Anti-Semitism and the Whore Stigma
Jews, too, have been identified as unchaste. However, whereas black unchastity is primarily attached to mythologies about black women’s sexual mysteries and black men’s physical violence, Jewish unchastity is primarily attached to mythologies about Jewish women’s sexual victimization and Jewish men’s financial conspiracies. ‘The ‘beautiful Jewess’ is she whom the Cossacks under the czars
dragged by her hair through the street of her burning village." Or, perhaps closer to modern associations, the Jewess is she who underwent sexual experiments in Nazi concentration camps. One Dutch woman whose parents both survived Nazi camps said, "I don't know if it's because of my thick black hair which stands out in Holland (racial difference) or my parent's camp background (history of abuse), but my Gentile boyfriends always talk about their excitement in being with a Jewish lover and about feeling protective toward me and about my being different from other Dutch women. It sort of makes me feel like an orphan whore." On the male side, the Jewish man is he who wants money and has intelligence, both of which incite him "to do evil, not good." One Jewish man said, "They wanted my ideas but, as soon as I profited from them, they accused me of taking over."

Frequently in contemporary societies, stereotypes about Jews are not specified by gender and both Jewish women and Jewish men are seen as victims and connivers. Jewish victimization is stigmatized as unchaste because of supposed racial impurity (used to justify persecution) and defilement (the condition of having been spoiled by abuse). Jewish intelligence is stigmatized as unchaste because it is supposedly deviant, manipulative, and financially self-serving. A portrait of the Jewess as whore and the Jewish man as pimp emerges with little reference to sexuality. That portrait is ambiguous. Victimization and intelligence are stereotypes which elicit contradictory feelings of compassion, blame, resentment, guilt, respect, and jealousy. Unchastity in the case of Jews is therefore both enviable and suspect: Jews are, at least, acknowledged as sufferers and validated as survivors. On the other side, they are suspected both for their history of persecution and for their history of survival. "Why were they persecuted?" "How did they survive?" Those questions glare suspiciously at Jews. The historical link of Jewish survival to oppressive interests, be they tax collection in the past or Western imperialism in the present, is used to stain Jewish credibility. Anti-Semitism is essentially the blaming of Jews for society's ills and injustices. Jews are thereby accused of unchastity not only by the ruling class, but also and most painfully by other oppressed peoples.

Jewish oppression and prostitution oppression have many parallels. Like Jews, prostitutes are unchaste both according to conservative ideologies (for their sexual license) and according to radical ideologies (for their transactions with sexist and capitalist men). Both Jews and prostitutes are denigrated and idealized and blamed for basic social problems. Furthermore, the reality of their persecution and daily abuse is frequently doubted or denied. Both Jews and whores are stigmatized for their past experiences, their non-conforming intelligence, their assumed quest for money, and their assumed sexuality. Historically, they have both been legally forced to identify (and isolate) themselves publicly by wearing certain clothes or symbols such as a strange hat or particular color. They both have had to hide or "pass" or migrate in order to survive. And, they both are perceived as simultaneously passive victims and guilty agents (Jews for communism-capitalism, whores for disease-ocular disorder).

Whether or not particular Jews are stigmatized as whores or as pimps, they are subject as Jews to the paradoxes of the whore stigma. One Jewish prostitute said, "Sex and money stigmas are nothing new for me and I learned about leading a double life from being a Jew in a community of Gentiles. I also learned as a Jew that it's good and necessary to build your own life regardless of what other people think of you. Besides, I know that people will respect exactly the same things in me that they envy or reject, so it's impossible to please. I've got no choice but to live my own life."

Classism and the Whore Stigma

Whereas a person of color is portrayed as bad and a Jew is portrayed as different, a working-class person is portrayed as a nobody. It follows that dominant societies have set out to tame the colored, expel or exterminate the Jew, and ignore the worker. Chastity for the worker means invisible subservience. Working-class people include, of course, people of color and Jews; however, in relation to white Gentile co-workers or certainly white Gentile bosses, people of color and Jews are urged to "know their place" and to "pass" as nobodies, or anybody. Their position may be different from that of white Gentile workers, but in essence class oppression is a dynamic whereby all workers are pressured into conformity and obedience. Women fall under the same requirements as men within the public labor force; in addition, any woman without a maid to clean or a governess to care for children (the large majority, thus) becomes a worker in the private labor force. There, too, her chastity is measured by the invisibility of her labor.

The labor process is associated with dirt, money, feces, noise, muscle, sweat, tears, pain, and repetition. Workers are expected to dirty themselves in the interest of human reproduction and production. They are considered the work horses of society; as such, their own humanity is denied. They are relegated to the back room or the
basement or the "bad side of town". They are excluded from opportunities, culture, public debate, and power. Classically, male workers are hired for their brawn not their brains and female workers are hired for their appearance not their performance. Essentially, the male worker's muscle and the female worker's smile are prostituted to middle- and upper-class demands.

The impurity attributed to women workers leads to sexual assumptions and requirements. A man on a beach in Chicago yelled to a woman: "If you weren't so rich, you'd be a whore!" He was crudely expressing the common assumption that poor women are whores and rich women would be whores if they needed money. In other words, women who work for money are called whores. It is true that the more access a woman has to money and privilege, the freer she is likely to be from selling her labor, especially labor sold at the cost of legitimacy. If a woman can separate herself from images of unchastity, then she can hope to gain immunity from the whore stigma. Even then, however, she remains a nobody. At best, the traditional woman can hope to take on the identity of her husband.

In former times, every woman who worked in a public job was "working-class." And, all working women were treated as prostitutes by higher-class men. Women workers in professions of different classes are presently still in a battle against male sexual presumptions and harassments. However, the struggle amongst women workers for rights is usually articulated as a struggle against being treated like whores, rather than as a struggle against the treatment of whores. Prostitutes serve as models of the stigmatized working woman. Women who work, regardless of their class, are vulnerable to the whore stigma. Especially in countries where cultural values weigh against public labor for women, such as the Netherlands, the whore stigma is firmly attached to the work needs and wishes of women.

Race oppression, Jewish oppression, and class oppression are distinct mechanisms of subordination and control. Impurities of blood, history, and status are attributed to the targeted group and used to justify social ostracism, physical mistreatment or persecution, denial of rights, and sexual abuse of women. Oppressed men are assumed to be mean or greedy or inhuman. Oppressed women are assumed to be whores or whorish unless they prove otherwise; there is, however, no proof of chastity for a self-identified or life-experienced woman. Even white skin, Gentile ancestry, and middle-class status are no guarantee of stigma immunity for women.

Defilement

Whereas unchastity as impurity refers to identity, unchastity as defilement refers to experience. Female virginity is commonly considered the opposite of defilement: the virgin is unspoiled and the defiled girl (or woman) is "spoiled." Non-virginity refers specifically to sexual experience: defilement refers to physical as well as sexual pollution or violation. Boys and men are not stigmatized by (heterosexual) non-virginity or defilement. In fact, the lost innocence which devalues girls is apt to raise the status of boys. Sex and violence dishonor women and honor men. Women are stigmatized with The Scarlet Letter; men are rewarded with The Red Badge of Courage. Her shame is his honor.

Most traditionally, a girl is supposed to remain a virgin until she marries at which time her husband "takes her." If she should engage in sexual relations before marriage, then she becomes unchaste and, in some cultures, ineligible for a marriage of standing. Whether the sex was voluntary or imposed is irrelevant to the social damage incurred through the loss of virginity. If the sex was imposed then, on the one hand, the girl can at least claim passivity; on the other hand, imposition implies the double damage of sex and abuse. In either case, girls are stigmatized as whores once they have been exposed to sex, by force or by choice. The anxiety with which parents protect their girls from sexual temptation or violation reflects their awareness of the whore stigma. Because the stigma is so devastating for the future of a girl, parents are socialized to protect their daughter's reputation even at the expense of her safety, development, or physical integrity. Such a distortion of values has led some fathers to pathologically "protect" their daughters from other men by interrogating them, beating them, and/or by sexually claiming them for themselves. One woman told: "I was daddy's little girl. When I hit high school, around age fifteen, I started screwing around a lot ... As soon as my father found out, he would find an excuse to beat the crap out of me. It happened whenever I had a new boyfriend." Another woman recounted: "My father didn't physically violate me, although I remember I didn't want to wash dishes because then he would slobber all over me with 'affection,' but he held an inquisition every Sunday morning over exactly what I had done the night before. He also competed with my boyfriends, coming into the room where they were and showing off his muscles. He also told me: 1) he would find me a boyfriend when the time came; 2) I would end up walking the streets; 3) no man would marry a nonvirgin; and 4) if I got pregnant, I would not have to run away from home." Another woman said,
“My father used me sexually since I was five. And then, when I started going on dates with boys, he would accuse me of being a whore. I asked him why I suddenly became a whore once I had a boyfriend of my age when he’d been fucking me for years! He said that with him it was different because he loved me and it was in the family."

Child sexual abuse is the most classic scenario for the shaming of girls. Accusations of girlhood unchastity are then used to justify and pardon male sexual violation. In one striking example, a judge pronounced in a child molestation case: “I am satisfied we have an unusually sexually promiscuous young lady (a 5-year-old child). And he (the defendant) did not know enough to refuse. No way do I believe (the defendant) initiated sexual contact.” In the same vein, a lawyer said of a 14-year-old incest victim, “I can understand her father; she is a beautiful girl.” Female beauty, also of a young girl, was thereby offered as a justification for sexual intrusion.

Unlike fathers, mothers rarely abuse their daughters sexually. However, they are socialized to guard their daughter’s chastity, be it with warnings, accusations, or denials. Mothers are commonly known to worry if their daughter develops early physically or if she develops a conspicuously female body. One mother said to her daughter when she saw her modelling a new bathing suit: “You can’t go out in that! Some man will rape you!” Implicitly, the girl is held responsible for preventing male sexual assault. And, if she should nonetheless fall victim to abuse, she may be blamed for having been provocative or her mother may blame herself for having given her daughter too much freedom. In other cases, the girl is not blamed for the abuse, but she is expected to act “as if nothing happened.” One woman recalled complaining to her mother about “Uncle’s messy kisses”: “I thought she’d tell off my uncle but instead she slapped me across the face!” The tendency of mothers to suppress their daughter’s sexuality and of fathers to possess their daughter’s sexuality is a part of the gender socialization of women and men. Unintentionally, the “protections” of both parents can function more to stigmatize than to safeguard girl children.

Also therapists classically collude in blaming girls for sexual abuse. A male therapist responded in the following way to an incest victim: “From some of the details which she related of her relationship with her father, it was obvious that she was not all that innocent. But she was unable emotionally to accept her own sexual involvement with him.” Other therapists, especially of the classical Freudian tradition, are apt to deny the reality of sexual contact between father and daughter altogether. In that case, sexual abuse is not attributed to the girl’s seductiveness but to her wishful fantasies. Indeed, the first response to a child’s disclosure of incest has often been to accuse the child of lying. Girls are thereby taught to hide their experiences of abuse and to silence their pain.

Once stigmatized as unchaste, girls may become sexually more active and may begin to identify more with harlot than housewife models of femininity. One woman who became a prostitute said, “I was already labelled a whore as a teenager so why not get paid for it?” Another young woman who had been carefully “saving herself” for marriage said, “I was the perfect ‘good girl’ and then I got raped. It never had been so great saving myself and, once it had happened, I started doing it a lot.” And another woman declared, “I was born a whore. My father used to take me around and all his friends would say, ‘Hey, who’s your pretty date — give me a hug, honey...’ Since I was young, I identified with harlot images in movies. I liked the glamor.” Another woman who was sexually abused by her father said, “My father would call me all sorts of names and would storm around saying, ‘You’re no goddam good. You’re a whore. You’re a nothing. You’re this and you’re that. You’re bad through and through.’ They (father and mother) would turn even the most innocent relationship (with a man) into a really dirty thing... they’re constantly calling me a whore — so therefore I am. So therefore I can go to bed with anybody. It’s a vicious circle.”

The sexualization and vilification and molestation of girls constitute obvious violations of girlhood integrity. It is a cultural shock to realize the pervasive, even normative, occurrence of such adult invasion and abuse of children in society. One woman who never suffered such violations said, “I was aghast to hear my father list the fact that he had never molested me as one of his accomplishments as a father.” Apparently, respect for his daughter’s sexual integrity did not come naturally. Unlike her father, the girl was not congratulated for her virginity. Only unchastity is significant for women, and then as a stigma rather than as an accomplishment.

The relation between sexual abuse and the whore stigma is especially important now that the incidence and effects of incest are being exposed (see footnote 20). Given the stigmatizing equation of whore with sexual unchastity with abuse with badness, the abused girl is
forced to either bury her experience or relinquish legitimacy. Identifying abuse with female unchastity rather than with female oppression maintains the illusions which surround violence against women. One illusion is that female behavior causes male sexual violence. Another illusion is that male sexual violence causes irreparable damage to female personality. Women are thereby not only violated, but also blamed and stigmatized. They are expected to repent rather than to recover. One woman said, “People make all sorts of assumptions about me when they hear about my past. I had an awful childhood of beatings and rapes. Thank God it’s over. But the burden goes on in people’s judgment of me. It’s as if I became a bad person by being treated badly.”

For adult women, the criteria of chastity is not virginity, but monogamous marriage (or religious life). And, the keeper of female sexuality is not the father, but the husband (or God). Like children, adult women are shamed and blamed for abuse. It is interesting to note that sexuality and abuse brand girls as (unchaste) women and brand women as (bad) girls.

Within marriage, sexual and physical abuse of wives by husbands is even more acceptable than abuse of daughters by fathers within the nuclear family. One prosecutor in England referred to husband abuse of wives as “reasonable assault” in certain cases, in particular cases of sexual infidelity. Indeed, sexual infidelity is commonly used by husbands as a justification to exercise control, domination, and/or physical abuse. Even close friends and family members are apt to excuse male violence within marriage. One woman repeated a conversation with her mother: “Mom, Chuck (her husband) has beaten me bloody. He has held a gun to my head and... he has forced me to have sex with women and other men. He is always threatening to kill me.” The mother replied, “But, Linda, he’s your husband.”

Certainly not all officials or families are unsupportive, but the stigma attached to the battered or sexually abused woman is socially legitimized. A battered woman said, “I have learned that the doctors, the police, the clergy, and my friends will excuse my husband for disturbing my face, but won’t forgive me for looking bruised and broken.”

Conspicuous mistreatment is taken as a sign of the woman’s “misconduct,” as if battering is a righteous punishment of female unchastity.

Outside of marriage, women are stigmatized as whores for any sexual encounter. Phyllis Schlafly, the most vocal of American anti-feminist campaigners said, “Virtuous women are seldom accosted.” In other words, being accosted is evidence of a lack of virtue, or unchastity. Furthermore, a woman victim is classically accused of having provoked, invited, or not resisted sexual violation. Prostitutes serve as models of female unchastity. As sexual solicitors, they are assumed to invite male violence. Supposedly, a whore cannot be violated because she already is in violation of chastity norms. In one case of a prostitute being raped, a Dutch officer of justice said in court that “given her profession, the sexual abuse could not have made a deep impression upon her.” A Dutch research study revealed that policemen ranked the rape of street prostitutes as the least serious of all possible rapes. Rape by many strange men was ranked as the most serious. Rape by a boyfriend or same acquaintance and rape of a drunk woman were ranked only slightly more seriously than the rape of a prostitute. The researcher asserts that rape is judged according to the risk taken by the woman in her behavior and whereabouts. Significantly, police judgment of the seriousness of a rape is the primary determinant of whether the case is brought to court.

Prostitutes know only too well how difficult it is for a whore to prove that she has been raped. Even the presence of a known prostitute in court is thought to jeopardize the credibility of a rape victim. Identification or association with unchastity (be it sexually, racially, or professionally defined) is considered a sign of defilement and availability. That view of the “female as either pure or common to all” works to condone male violence against so-called unchaste women and to blame those women for any abuse they suffer. Of course, those women could be any woman whose virtue is called into question.

Male unchastity is defined more by color, ethnicity, class, or homosexuality than is heterosexual behavior. Fortunately, those indicators are recognized as prejudices rather than proofs, at least in countries with strong traditions of tolerance, such as the Netherlands. For example, the association of rape with black men is a deeply engrained prejudice, but racial identity would not be acceptable as explicit legal evidence of guilt. A woman’s sexual history, however, is frequently brought to bear upon the reliability of her testimony. During the last few years, such information is changing status, thanks to feminist struggle, from proof to prejudice. Nonetheless, many courts in North America and West Europe are still likely to hold the rape victim responsible for the rapist’s crime.

The ultimate defilement is death by murder or disease. Then, too, unchastity is blamed for fatal corruption or pollution. In particular, the sexual unchastity assumed of prostitute women and homosexual men is perceived as a choice wrought with shame and vulnerability. Violence, illness, and most extremely, death are considered the puni-
tive consequences of self-imposed danger. Revealingly, the murder of a whore or a gay man is considered a “prostitute murder” or a “homosexual murder.” Both the whore and the gay man are seen as accomplices to their own demise. One such case was the murder of Pier Paolo Pasolini in Italy. The trial focused as much on the victim as on the murderer. Public scandal centered around Pasolini: Why did he involve himself in a gay scene? Why did he risk murder? Similarly, the murder of a prostitute is as much an incrimination of her reputation as of the murderer’s crime. Murder victims of the infamous Jack the Ripper were described in the press as prostitutes; in fact, some were and some were not. The sexual histories of the victims filled newspapers, as if to warn other women of the perils of sexual unchastity. Significantly, concern was expressed only about the danger to non-prostitutes. Also more recently, whore murderers in Leeds, Los Angeles, and Seattle have not been considered a serious social menace until non-prostitutes have been killed. The murder of whores does not worry, grieve, or outrage dominant society. In fact, violence against prostitutes is likely to increase public dissociation from whores.

Disease, like violence, is often blamed on the unchaste. The whore stigma has been defined as a mark of shame or disease on an unchaste woman. Historically, even before sexual transmission of disease was understood, prostitution (the symbol of unchastity for women and men) was erroneously associated with epidemics such as the Plague. Also today, the attribution of disease to prostitution is often more based upon assumption than fact. Unchastity is assumed to begin with the whores and spread from them to chaste society via men. The triangle between “dishonorable whore” and “unworthy husband” and “chaste wife” is most clearly drawn by assumptions of sexual disease transmission. “An innocent woman could only get venereal disease from a ‘sinful’ man. But the man could only get venereal disease from a ‘fallen woman’.” That description is offered in an excellent social historical study of venereal disease which goes on to say that such a “uni-directional mode of transmission reflected prevailing attitudes (at the turn of the century) rather than any bacteriologic reality.” The same prejudicial attitudes which prevailed at the beginning of the century still justify the blaming of prostitutes for disease.

Like prostitutes, homosexual men have historically been stigmatized as sexually diseased. However, unlike prostitutes, homosexual men are assumed to be insulated from chaste heterosexual society. They are therefore blamed not for contaminating “sinful men” and “innocent women” but rather for causing their own demise through supposed perverse promiscuity. In reality, homosexual men are not insulated (nor truly distinguishable) from chaste society, as evidenced by the fact that male prostitutes cater primarily to publically heterosexual, married men. That fact illustrates the distortion and hypocrisy of privileging supposedly chaste society. On a practical level, it also illustrates the necessity of sexual education and examination for all sexually active persons rather than for only those publicly identified as unchaste.

Sexuality, abuse, and disease are often perceived as both causes and symptoms of unchastity. Whether those socially significant factors lead to pleasure, pain, or death, they are often interpreted as defilement and as justification for permanent stigmatization. Any woman is vulnerable to the whore stigma as a result of life experience, sexist abuse, or ill fortune. Homosexual men occupy a socially parallel position to prostitute women when it comes to violence and disease. Heterosexual men are likely to feel immune to stigmatization only when they publicly distance themselves from “the unchaste ones.”

Conclusion

Unchastity is used to justify oppression and abuse. Women in general and deviant or subordinate men are especially subject to stigmatization as impure or defiled persons; dominant men may be subject to stigmatization on the basis of the unchastity of their associates (be they, for instance, prostitutes or homosexuals). The task of recognizing unchastity as a normal human reality and not as a peculiar condition of inferior humans calls for a profound transformation of values and attitudes.

Notes

2. This definition was derived by combining the definition of “whore” with the following definition of “stigma”: “a brand marked on a slave or criminal; a stain on one’s character; a mark of shame or discredit; a definite characteristic of some disease.”
3. Much of the material for this analysis was drawn from the author's research on attitudes toward prostitutes, published in Dutch and English: Gail Pheterson, *The Whore Stigma: Female Dishonor and Male Unworthiness*. The Hague: Dutch Ministry for Social Affairs and Employment, 1986. All unreferenced citations throughout the present text were direct communications to the author in personal interviews.


13. Both novels are American classics of the nineteenth century. *The Scarlet Letter*, written by Nathaniel Hawthorne, was first published in 1850; *The Red Badge of Courage*, written by Stephen Crane, was first published in 1895.


25. It is irresistible to mention that the loss of honor incurred through sexual abuse has governed women's lives for hundreds of years. A study of prostitution in 15th century France gives the following description: "In the end, the consequences of rape were exactly the same as those of questionable or shameful conduct. The victim was almost always disgraced... even those who testified in her favor always considered her defiled by what had happened to her. She herself felt ashamed, guilty, and disgraced. In this respect her youthful assailants had attained their objective, for the raped woman realized that in the eyes of those around her, and indeed in her own mind, the distance separating her from the public prostitute had greatly diminished. Reduced to a state of psychological and physical weakness, she had little hope of regaining her honor as long as she stayed in town." Specific examples of such loss of honor through rape are plentiful. In one case, when a servant girl complained to her mistress about having been attacked and insulted by three bachelors, she was given notice, for "if she was accused of such bad things, (the mistress) was not about to keep her, unless she was given convincing proof indicating whether the girl was a respectable person or a nasty hussy." See: Jacques Rossiaud, "Prostituition, Youths, and Society in the Towns of Southeastern France in the 15th Century," *Selections from the Annales: Economies, Societies, Civilizations*, Volume IV (edited by Robert Forster and Orest Ranum). Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1978, pp. 17, 41.


27. See: Leidsch Dagblad, "Buitenlust," "Officier: Verkrachting Doet Prostituee Minder." Diemen: October 9, 1985. (Dutch words of Mr. Franken van Bloemendaal, officier van justitie, Amsterdamse rechtbank: "Door het beroep dat zij uitoeftent, zal het seksueel misbruikt worden wel geen diepe indruk op haar hebben gemaakt").
Lesbians and Prostitutes: A Historical Sisterhood

Joan Nestle

The prevalence of lesbianism in brothels throughout the world has convinced me that prostitution, as a behavior deviation, attracts to a large extent women who have a very strong latent homosexual component. Through prostitution these women eventually overcome their homosexual repression. (from Female Homosexuality: A Psychodynamic Study of Lesbianism, by Frank Caprio, 1954.)

We’re having the meeting during Lesbian/Gay Freedom Week because many prostitute women are lesbians — yet we have to fight to be visible in the women’s and the gay movements. This is partly due to our illegality but also because being out about our profession, we face attitudes that suggest we’re either ‘traitors to the women’s cause’ or not ‘real lesbians.’ (A speaker at “Prostitutes: Our Life: Lesbian and Straight,” San Francisco, June, 1982.)

These indoor prostitutes are on the rise. Captain Jerome Piazza of the Manhattan South Public Moral Division estimates that there are at least 10,000 inside ‘pros’ in the city. Women Against Pornography contends that there are 25,000 prostitutes working inside and outside the city, over 9,500 of them on the West Side alone. (West Side Spirit, June 17, 1985.)

To prepare for the United Nation’s Conference on Women, the Kenyan government put new benches in the parks, filled in the potholes and swept the prostitutes off the streets. (New York Times, 1985.)

29. Specifically, the prosecuting attorney of a rape case in California asked a known prostitute not to be present throughout a rape trial because she thought it would reduce her client’s credability. The prostitute was a close friend of the client, a non-prostitute, and had initially been asked by her traumatized friend to be present for emotional support.
30. See above: Jacques Rossiaud, p. 12.
32. For an analysis of court attitudes and judgments in 48 rape cases in the Netherlands from 1980-1984, see: Ed. Leuw, “Verkrachtingszaken voor de rechtbank: een kwalitatieve analyse van observatiegegevens.” Tijdschrift Voor Criminologie. Boom Meppel: 27e jaargang, juli/oktober, 1985, pp.212-234. According to this study, the victim is assumed to be “purely innocent” (author’s quotation marks) in a majority of cases when the rapist is considered “sick” (psychologically irresponsible) or “bad” (immoral). Gang rapes fall under the category “bad.” In 25% of the cases, however, the rapist is considered “normal” (such as a “failed seductor”) and co-responsibility is then often sought in the victim. Some Dutch lawyers also claim victim responsibility for rapes which are considered “normative” within the sub-culture in question (2 of the 48 cases). The characteristics of the rapist and the circumstances/cultural context of the rape are shown to affect court decisions. The Dutch author claims that courts in the Netherlands are far less likely than courts in other countries to claim victim co-responsibility for rape, p.226.
37. Ibid, pp.31-32.
38. Ibid.