

On the game

Lionel James

'One girl was pursuing a part-time Open University course. As society generally has changed, so have prostitutes.'

I have always been intrigued by prostitutes and what they do and yet I found it hard to relate the work of a prostitute with the generally accepted ideas on marriage, the family and patterns of leisure. So, as a sociology course project, I devised a general questionnaire, with certain specific questions on the aspects of these women's lives which interested me most. I decided to start by going on a tour around Soho to see if any prostitutes would be interested in participating in the project.

On going to Soho that first night, I must admit I was rather nervous. But simply by signs on doors and in windows, ranging from "model" to "continental governess," I was able to go right to where I intended to try to obtain my interviews. In all, I visited 53 establishments. Twelve women said that they were willing to give me an interview. With the other 41, I was lucky to get past the maid. Some were just not interested. Others, not surprisingly, said they never gave interviews. About six would have had to be disregarded, anyway, because they were foreigners with English so poor as to make any interview virtually impossible. In a couple of places nobody was at home, and many said they couldn't afford the time. I ended with a sample of twelve (down to ten later).

I really only had one disconcerting moment. On ringing the bell at one place, I was invited in by the maid (usually the maid will always answer the door) and told the relevant prices "madame" charged. By the time I had explained to the maid what I wanted, "madame" appeared, having heard my introductory remarks, and said, "If you want to know what I do in my leisure time, sonny, the same fucking thing I do the rest of the time, that's fuck. So pick up your silly little case and piss off out of it!"

In Soho there seems to be a certain type of parochial humour. On four occasions when the front door was opened, I asked if it was the "young lady" I was addressing. Every time the same reply came: "No, I'm the old man!" Several women assumed I was selling something, and on numerous occasions I had to explain I was neither from the *News of the World* nor a sexual pervert. In fact, about another dozen would have been willing to give me some of their time had I paid the appropriate fee they would have lost if they'd talked to me. It is important to note, then, that my final sample was not a direct reflection of how many prostitutes were actually interested in the type of work I was doing. I would say probably half of them saw the possible good that could come out of it, and that it might well negate many generally held conceptions about the type of work these women do.

I arranged with the twelve women the times to call again the following week—on the understanding that if, during the interviews or before them, a client arrived, I would have to wait.

The questionnaire contained 41 questions, many of them very general, to give me a rough idea about prostitutes and their background. I was basically interested in why these women entertain this type of job as a way of making a living; whether they would consider doing anything else; whether they

enjoyed their work; the satisfaction they gained from it, and why; how they saw their work in relation to society as a whole; and their views on family, home, friends and leisure.

On the last point, I came across the study by S. R. Parker, which seemed relevant and worth trying to apply. Parker delineates three types of work/leisure relationships, depending on the job one does. Firstly, he says, there is an "extension" relationship, where there is an overspill of work into leisure time but the central life interest is work. He cites doctors, professional social workers and farmers as typical of this group. Secondly, there is the "neutral" relationship, where there is complete separation of work from non-work, and work from home. There is little intrinsic satisfaction gained from work, and the central life interest is the home. He cites as examples here the routine clerk and technician. Thirdly, there is the "opposition" relationship—where there is sharp distinction between work and family rather than between work and home. There is dubious satisfaction in work. Leisure is the central interest, offsetting the harshness of work. I thought it would be useful to see where a prostitute would fit into these leisure relationships.

Although twelve women originally agreed to be interviewed, two changed their minds when I went to see them on the second occasion. One of them said she had thought it over and decided against answering my questions in case her friends, who didn't know she was a prostitute, heard about it. The other woman said I would find little of interest in her as she was "just an ordinary girl."

Of the ten prostitutes I finally interviewed, the age range was from 18 to 37. The actual ages were: 18, 19, 19, 20, 24, 26, 26, 28, 32 and 37. Eight of these were British (although one insisted on my entering her nationality as Scottish) and the remaining two were French and Greek. One of the British women had in fact been born in Poland, but lived in England for all but two years of her life. The other two "immigrants" had been resident a long time in this country. Of the ten interviewees, five were single, one married, three divorced and one separated. One had been divorced twice (the eldest).

The educational careers of these women were somewhat varied. They had all attended secondary schools, or their equivalent abroad, until the age of 15 or 16. Three had been to grammar school and these had three CSEs, five O levels and seven O levels respectively. I would not have considered any of the ten below average intelligence. Armand Mergen, in a German study in 1969, wrote of the results of an investigation which indicated that "of 500 prostitutes examined, 56 per cent were found to be 'obviously feeble-minded'." This I expected to find true; but several of my interviewees were amazingly articulate and good conversationalists.

As far as these women's previous occupations were concerned they had all had "straight" jobs before they decided to become prostitutes—secretaries, clerks, typists, factory workers and so on. One woman had even been a children's nurse. Only two, interestingly, had ever worked in allied trades

—that is, as a stripper or night-club waitress.

Everybody I interviewed in fact worked for herself and not for a pimp. I don't think that this is particularly significant because I imagine prostitutes who worked for an organisation would be very reluctant to give an interview. Of my ten interviewees, only two had started in the business working for somebody else. I was told that what often happens is that they start working for one man, who takes his percentage, and when the girl has earned enough money she buys her own flat in the area and starts up independently.

Of the women who had a regular relationship with a man outside, all said their boyfriend (or husband in one case) didn't know about their occupation. The married woman had two children (primary school age) and her husband worked nights. She would take the children to school in the morning before she went to work (prostitutes in Soho, as a rule, work from early afternoon to late evening) and her husband would pick them up from school later in the afternoon before he went to work. He apparently just knew his wife worked in a club as a waitress, and he asked no further questions. None of the women's relatives knew about their work, and, as far as friends knowing, it varied. I also asked them whether they became friends with women in the same occupation and whether the majority of their friends were in the same business. The answers to these questions were pretty consistent with one another. Six of them answered no to them both, while one answered yes to them. The others varied, having friends both inside and outside the business. In fact, one woman said she had lost many of her "straight" friends through going into the business, and another said it was difficult to have friends who were not themselves in the business.

Cathy Nossa, an American prostitute, recently wrote: "the depressing side of prostitution is the isolation of the prostitute's lifestyle. Because her profession is . . . socially abominable, the only person with whom a prostitute can openly and comfortably talk is another prostitute." This may be true in certain cases, although my evidence does not support it. In fact, in conversations with the prostitutes I was never aware of, or led to believe, that any social network existed among them. The fact that some prostitutes know other prostitutes might be used to show evidence of some network organisation. But if this is the case, then all I can say is the web is very large indeed. Cathy Nossa goes on to say: "Prostitutes are largely hidden from each other unless they happen to be on duty at the same time and place . . . a situation in which they are more likely to be in competition rather than solidarity with each other."

I asked the ten women why they entertained prostitution as a way of making a living, whether they had considered doing anything else and, if so, what? All of them replied it was purely for the money they could make out of it. All said they had tried various jobs and become very bored. The important thing was the fact that they were all their own bosses, free to go home when they liked. Typically, they might work long hours for a few days and then take a couple of days off. All of them, it seemed, had been originally introduced by a friend, tried it for a couple of weeks, and decided to continue. A couple of them admitted they had started off in the wrong circle of friends and had, to a certain extent, drifted into the profession.

Only two of them considered they weren't in a transitory employment and even they said they would have to wait and see what happened. The

From public to private: prostitution, not very long ago, was a fairly recognised community activity (as in turn of the century Paris, left). By the time of the Wolfenden report (centre) it was, in a way, more specialised and more "offensive." Now it has gone indoors (below). Each prostitute is, for each client, a kind of private concubine (as Mademoiselle O'Murphy was for Louis XV; see cover).



Eugene Atget/1910



Jean Mornica/1959



Giles Sholl/1972

others all felt they would work for a few years until they had acquired enough money to start their own businesses or travel. Several said that they would like to start their own dressmaking firm, boutique and so on, where they would still be their own boss. One woman said she would like to start her own spiritualist society (being a spiritualist herself) and another girl said she would like to continue her education and maybe go to university. All of them, in describing what they would like to do as alternative employment, stressed the point that they liked working with people, whether in charge of their own firm or simply working in a pub.

One girl felt she had "prostituted" herself in the jobs she had done before. Cathy Nossa says: "Entering into 'the life' was a culmination of a gradual awareness of, and resentment toward, the prostituting of myself in more legally and socially acceptable ways, in the course of my search for a means of support that was flexible enough to leave me with the time and energy to do the things that were important to me . . . I have actually had more freedom in being myself than I initially thought I would . . . for most prostitutes it's a choice between sucking cock and kissing ass."

Only one woman said she actually enjoyed her work, as against it being a way of earning a living. She said this was only because she seemed to meet nicer men than she would outside. One girl said she gained some sexual satisfaction from her work. The rest seemed to be able to maintain themselves in a state of frigidity while working, but could, if they met somebody they liked socially, resume normal sexual relations and get a great amount of pleasure, either within or outside the bounds of romantic love.

I asked them what their central life interest was—that is, what was most important to them: work, home and/or family, or leisure? One said work; eight said home and/or family; and one said leisure. The girl who gave work as most important to her she said she worked very long hours, and living on the premises (which is unusual) didn't give her much time to see her family. She was 18. The woman who opted for leisure said she had many friends and tended to keep away from Soho when not working, but having a good time. Her leisure seemed to me to have a certain recuperative aspect to it. All the others (the single girls especially) tended to live at home, or at least spend a lot of time with their parents. All said they had good relationships with the rest of their family, and visiting relations seemed to be the main leisure activity in most cases.

There was a definite tendency for all ten women not to have a particularly extravagant or hectic social life, and they tended to stay in, read, watch television and so on. In fact, two girls said they never drank and very rarely frequented public houses. The leisure activities of these girls, seem to fit into Parker's category of neutrality. The story these girls usually told their parents was that they were secretaries or something similar. Many women said they read a great deal and one girl was in fact pursuing a part-time Open University course in psychology. Interestingly, the single women had many girlfriends but few men that they knew socially.

The average working day for a prostitute (based on my research) is about ten to twelve hours. Usually they would start off about midday and work through until late evening, or alternatively start early evening and work until about 3 am. I was told that many prostitutes had a day job in a bank, office and so on, and when they finished about 5 pm, they

started work in Soho. Many said their leisure time could well be affected by the amount of time they allocated to work, but usually they didn't let it. If they wanted to leave, they could at any time.

Recently, Edward Glover, in delineating two types of prostitute, said: "The first consists mostly of street-walkers of the 'drab' type, who in most cases practise prostitution as a lifelong profession. They are apathetic and 'hopeless' in attitude, some mentally disordered, others mentally backward; others, again, prone to form associations with criminals. They incline also to excessive use of alcohol . . . In marked contrast . . . comes the 'young' prostitute—unstable adolescents, often of borderline intelligence, attracted by a gay life; irresponsible, rebellious and defiant, or on occasion indolent and indifferent." The typical prostitute that comes out of my research doesn't fit into either category.

All the women said they thought their work had hardly any social status attached to it as far as the outside world was concerned. One girl said she thought it was recognised as a rotten business. However, all ten women felt they were helping people in some way by providing a service. They all said they looked on their work as a way of giving paid consultations. All the women said they often had clients visit them who came just to talk and no sexual act ever took place. I was told it was important to be a very good listener in their line of work. Often they had to just listen for hours to people pouring out their problems to them. One young girl said that she often looked upon herself as a kind of "psychological doctor." They maintained that all prostitutes did a lot of good which the majority of people never seemed to realise. Not only were prostitutes acting as a social outlet, they said, but men could come and talk to them about things their wives wouldn't be interested in.

On the actual physical side, they all felt—traditionally—that if it wasn't for the easy availability of prostitutes, sex crimes and assaults on young girls would increase. They felt that if there was any trouble with a man, they were experienced enough to cope with it—whereas the average woman outside was not. Although none of the prostitutes I saw was in any way muscular looking, there were, it seemed, always people around to help out if the need arose. Police, I was told, were always near at hand if trouble started and were definitely on the prostitutes' side. Every woman admitted, in fact, that she had police visit her as clients from time to time.

Men would also visit these prostitutes—traditionally—in order to gain "specialist services" (whipping, domination, bondage and so on) which could cause a lot of undue harm and friction if they asked their wives to assist. One prostitute mentioned a married client she had who liked to be beaten up for half an hour, often until he bled, because his wife refused to do it. He then went home to his spouse and lived a very happy life. They were, they said, giving men many pleasures they might not get without causing trouble elsewhere. Types of client they listed were fairly general, but students (surprisingly) came up all the time and so did pop singers. One woman said: "It helps people to get out of themselves; if there weren't people like us things could be worse." Another woman said: "It helps society, might be more rapes without it" A third one said: "It does help, cuts down on sex crimes." All their remarks were very consistent.

From replies to other questions I asked, I found that the religious beliefs of the women were fairly mixed; and that five were working class and five middle class. Four had low work satisfaction and

six had no satisfaction (no one had high work satisfaction). With Parker's study in mind, I asked them whether they considered their occupation was nearer to that of a doctor, clerk or miner/fisherman. They all said a doctor. Eight women felt any husband would be opposed to the type of work they did. The other two agreed that, if they married, their husbands would have to be "very supportive."

In conclusion, it would seem the general opinion about prostitutes is not quite true (though, as I have

said, one cannot generalise from my own sample, either). My ideas have certainly been changed. I was basically expected to see a hard-drinking, somewhat feeble-minded, crude and unattractive woman. Gone are both the gin bottle and the inch of make-up that once existed. In its place are some very attractive, rational-thinking women, who in general were neither impolite nor obtuse. I was not once propositioned or had the services they offered forced on me. To me they seemed—and were—normal women.

Daytime television

Steve Bradshaw

Watching daytime television is an increasingly popular pastime. What goes out then, and who is it watches what?

Daytime television is the new national pastime. Every other housewife watches sometime during the day. Nearly a third (and many men, too) watch what the agencies call a "substantial amount." The habit is catching on so fast that breakfast-time television is expected to be with us by autumn.

It's hard to realise how quickly the puritan barricades are falling. Sixteen years ago, television was considered so lethal that it was banned entirely between 6 pm and 7 pm, so that mothers could get children to bed—the "toddlers' truce." There was a 90 minute break on Sundays, too, because no one wanted to compete with the church. Even when these curbs were lifted, the main one remained—transmissions were limited to 50 hours a week per channel. This strict rule could only be broken if the offending programmes were religious or educational.

A year ago this January, this final restriction was also abolished. The independent companies had not pressed for change because they felt it would not be economically viable, but now they were starting to think again, mainly because of cheap rentals, colour and a feeling that ITV was starting to lose its margin of "light" viewers. So they complained that the 50 hour limit was unfair to ITV, because the BBC (its two channels, to them, counting as one) was averaging over 80 hours a week.

Though the ITV companies won (as part of a subtle ministerial move to defer decision on a fourth TV channel), they were slow to act—through, they say, natural caution. A more likely reason, however, is that autumn is a better time than spring to get people interested in an indoor pastime. The success of bank holiday transmissions, the only real precedent, was hardly a reason for gloom. And so the ITV companies spent last summer working out a joint policy. They would start off with an extra four to four and a half hours a day; they would concentrate on housewives, but not at the expense of other groups like children, the sick, the elderly and shiftworkers; and they would keep advertisement rates low, down to what one agency called "give-away" prices. At the same time the BBC, which was also given the go-ahead but had no way of increasing its revenue, decided it would hardly be able to afford any new daytime programmes at all.

When the experiment finally started, six months ago, it was immediately successful: hardly anyone guessed so many people would start watching earlier. Already advertisers can count on reaching 30 per cent to 40 per cent of all housewives by buying schedules in the afternoon; another 10 per cent to

20 per cent watch at least some television before teatime. As early as the end of October, there were probably two million people viewing by 3 pm.

This is an astonishing rise, but it does not mean television has discovered a new public, or even made new friends. The figures suggest those who watch little television have not been tempted to watch in the daytime: heavy viewers are simply indulging their addiction more. The typical viewer is probably the young mother who doesn't go out to work, has enough energy to get through her housework quickly, already watches several hours of television a day, and now watches half an hour a day more.

There is evidence that the total television audience is not really going up. The average daily audience for ITV (an average of samples taken every 15 minutes between 7.30 pm and 10.30 pm, excluding small children) was 12,029,000 in February 1971. A year later it had fallen to 10,346,000. This year's figures show that only a fraction of that loss has been recovered—the current figure is just 10,532,000. In fact, January's figures were the worst since 1969. Given that the only new audience in daytime is likely to be shiftworkers, there is certainly no big increase in the number of people watching television (and the BBC hasn't escaped the trend).

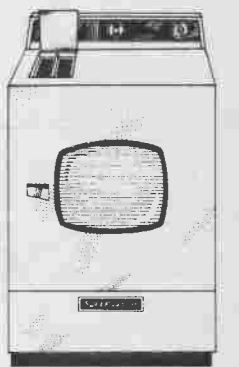
But the total amount of television viewed is certainly going up. On average, every home with a television had it switched to ITV in 1971 for 2.8 hours; in 1972, 2.6 hours; so far this year, it is 3.2 hours. For all channels, the average is 5.2 hours (1971); 4.8 hours (1972); and 5.6 hours (1973). Most of the increase of over half an hour a day has gone to ITV. These figures are not likely to be over-cautious, because they are issued by the British Bureau of Television Advertisers: but figures from the public broadcasting side of the fence (see table) tell a similar story. The BBC says it feels daytime audiences for ITV have increased "visibly" (but not "substantially"), resulting in ITV increasing its share of the total audience by about five per cent.

If most of this increase is due to housewives and

Average number of hours watched by adults and children over five a week

	BBC 1 & 2	ITV
March 1972	8.21	7.46
August 1972	7.56	6.23
September 1972	9.23	6.60
October 1972	8.31	6.47
March 1973	8.56	8.53

NB: afternoon schedules started September-October 1972



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