

SEX AND STEREOTYPES

Christine - a prostitute in Leicester

Christine is 52 and has been a female prostitute working from home for nearly 23 years. She first became involved in prostitution when a broken marriage left her in a one bedroomed flat in terrible run down conditions, with her three young children.

When I found myself with my first client, I didn't know what to do, or how to go about it and I didn't have anyone I could ask. I was so naive I thought I'd only do it once or twice and then stop, but after the money ran out, I just went back to it. I never would have guessed I'd still be doing it today.

I did try alternative means of raising money for a deposit for a house but no-one would lend it to me and the two jobs I had, a cleaning job and a bar job just didn't pay enough. £13 a week. The first client gave me £8, which I thought was an awful lot. Today of course I earn a lot more but it was the only job then, and still is the only job now, when I can earn at least £300 in my hand each week. Especially seeing as how I've never gained any experience in other kinds of work, have no qualifications and at the time was trying to bring up five children. I didn't like doing it, in fact I'd rather not do it at all and if someone offered me a job cleaning the streets for the same amount I'd do it and give up prostitution, but I realise it's just not going to happen.

I suppose you could say that it's a two way thing, men use me and I use them. But it's not an easy job. People think it's 'easy money' and that you just lie there

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with your legs open but there is so much more to it than this. Not only is it a strain physically but mentally too. I was frightened by the prospect of prison, and occasional fines made this quite real. I was terrified about how people would react, hence I never told my mother and I still have to deal with feelings that I'm dirty. After my first client I scrubbed my hands over and over but I still felt

demoralised and used. It's very difficult letting a stranger touch you and be intimate with you. You have to learn to switch off and I think that's probably why I have bouts of depression.

Some of my clients have been coming to me for 23 years. I've seen pictures of their wives and most of them are in their own words 'happily married'.

It is quite a compliment that they keep coming back but because of this, marriage to me is something out of a story book. You think you've got someone who is totally devoted but you don't know who he pops in to see in the afternoon do you? I suppose in this way it has damaged my view of men. I'll often get angry - I'd like to castrate the whole lot of them - especially when I think about what they do and sometimes about the situation and pressures upon me and lots of other women to enter prostitution. I frequently get girls I've never seen before come to my door and ask me how to go about it and where to start. It is heartbreaking.



I can't help but think though, that in some senses I'm doing the community a service. There are those who would take sex forcibly if they couldn't pay for it and the amount of men who want to play out rape scenes with me is worrying. There are also men who would get very frustrated if they couldn't perform the kinds of weird acts they perform with me. Those who dress up in women's clothes for example - and there are an awful lot; those who want to be beaten, talked dirty to, dominated, or those who simply like to watch. These men can't or don't want to express themselves in this way with their wives so I guess you could say I'm helping their marriages.

Of course people don't see it as a service or a job and they don't realise I often have to be a counsellor, psychiatrist,

a friend, a lover, a hooker and a housewife and mother all in one day. They only see me as a prostitute. My whole identity is spoiled by this one word. In their eyes I can only be 'a pro', apparently I can't also be a mother.

For example I go to the doctors and I can't be going for a smear test, it has to be for VD in other people's eyes. People don't like me talking to their male friends or partners as if I'm some sort of sex monster and my partner, especially because he's black, is considered to be my pimp.

Prostitutes can have normal lives outside their work but unfortunately these images of us as dirty, scrounging, man-stealing druggies persists. Over the years I've had abuse hurled at me as I walk down the street. I've had people kicking my door, constantly ringing my bell, eggs thrown at the windows, the windows smashed, abusive slogans sprayed on windows and walls and dirty knickers and sanitary towels pushed through the letter box. I've also had cuttings of people in vulgar positions posted to me, dirty phone calls and hoax fire engine and ambulance call outs, kitchen fitters around to refit my new kitchen and garage dealers calling for me to test drive cars I've never seen before. It will usually go quiet for a few months and then something else will happen.

I used to get really upset by it. People shouldn't treat you like that, any more for what you do as a living, than your colour, race or creed. I've become more hardened to it over the years though and I worry less now the children have grown up. When they were growing up I kept them out of it as much as possible. They never wanted for anything and were all extremely happy, although I suppose they had to deal with a certain amount of stigma which went along with 'my mom's a pro'.

I've never had a pimp and consequently most of my neighbours don't mind at all. In my view it is discreet and respectable. I run it like a business and although it's still degrading it's not a nuisance. It's people's perception of 'prostitution' that causes the trouble.

Interviewed by Catherine Benson, Research Assistant at the Centre for the Study of Public Order