

# NewOptions

October 29/November 26, 1990

Issue No. Seventy-one

## Some of Our Daughters, Some of Our Lovers

*I didn't plan on making this a special "theme" issue. I didn't plan on spending two months writing it. I was just going to write a brief cover story on female prostitution, and more specifically on the ways three prostitutes' rights groups look at prostitution.*

*But it quickly took on a life of its own. I found it difficult to believe any of the prostitutes' groups, and realized I had to discover for myself what prostitution is all about. That meant I had to get to know some prostitutes.*

*And then, without my fully realizing it, the theme of the issue shifted. On one level it is still about prostitutes. But on another level it is about our need for love, and about what happens when many of us are incapable of love.*

*Some of the language and images in this article may be offensive to you. I didn't see any way around that however. All the names have been changed, but for better or worse, everything else is the absolute truth.*

We've all seen them, stared at them, wondered about them, more than we like to admit.

Short-skirted, high-heeled women endlessly walking certain streets in our cities and towns. Heavily painted women in too-tight jeans asking if you want a "date." Women with sad crazy smiles saying they want you *now* and adding that they won't charge much.

In Washington, on the blocks around 13th and N Streets (10 minutes' walk from the White House), you can see them getting into men's cars; going down stairwells with men; taking men into alleys. You can see them kibitzing with each other on the street corners. You can see them sipping soft drinks to wash away the aftertaste of their last man.

And as a matter of fact, they don't charge much: \$25 for a b.j., \$50 for a half-and-half. And even that is negotiable.

### **But is it news?**

The best guess is that there are a million

homeless people in the U.S. For whatever good it does them, they are a constant media concern. They are "news."

The best guess (by the most competent prostitute advocates) is that there are a million female prostitutes in the U.S. — a million women who earn at least part of their income by having sex for pay. But they are not a media concern. They are not "news." They are simply *there*, like the weather.

It is very convenient to treat issues like homelessness as news but issues like prostitution as not-news. Homelessness is a relatively easy problem to solve. We can solve it with some clever combination of money and policy. But prostitution cannot be addressed so easily.

We've always had prostitutes; perhaps we always will. Their presence, therefore, does not just say something about our nation's policies or leaders. It also says something very fundamental about us.

And not the kind of thing you want to dwell on, on the six o'clock news.

### **Whores R us**

What it says about us begins (but does not end) with the fact that prostitutes are not some mysterious and distant Other. They are deeply implicated in our lives. They are *many* of our daughters; they are *many* of our lovers, or our husbands' lovers.

If a million U.S. women work as prostitutes in any one year, and the turnover is 10% a year — then at any one time, *five million U.S. women* either are or have been prostitutes.

Nobody knows how many men use prostitutes. From talking with men, I'd estimate that one out of five of us sees prostitutes in any one year. That's *20,000,000 adult men*.

That is not an implausible figure. We know that the average adult street prostitute sees 1,500 men a year (women working in massage parlors, or as call girls, or out of their homes, may see fewer). We know that most

of these men go to prostitutes more than once a year. But even if the ratio goes down dramatically — to 20 men per prostitute — with a million prostitutes that works out to 20,000,000 men.

That is a lot of women and men.

### **Three "explanations"**

So — what does prostitution say about us? What's it *really* all about?

To come up with a convincing answer, I thought I'd have to look no farther than the work of the three major prostitutes' rights organizations. But they do not agree among themselves as to the answer. Each is promoting a different "line":

- **It's about women's freedom.** According to COYOTE (acronym for "Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics"), the important thing is that "women have the right to determine, for themselves, how they will use their bodies," as COYOTE co-director and lesbian activist Priscilla Alexander puts it. For Alexander and COYOTE, prostitution is just another kind of work — "sex work" is the politically correct designation.

In Alexander's anthology *Sex Work* (1987), she adopts an unusually matter-of-fact and surprisingly accepting tone: "Some [women] get to like the work as they become skilled at it. Other women hate it from the beginning to the end. And still others like some aspects of the job while hating parts of it." Similar sentiments abound in a more recent anthology, Gail Pheterson's *A Vindication of the Rights of Whores* (1989).

- **It's about economics.** Another leading prostitutes' rights group, the U.S. Prostitutes' Collective (U.S. PROS — terrific double entendre), argues that the economy encourages and even forces some women to become prostitutes. "Prostitution is about money," says U.S. PROS spokeswoman Rachel West. "If women's basic economic situation does not change, then women will continue to

work as prostitutes.”

• **It's about male oppression.** The third major prostitutes' rights group, WHISPER (Women Hurt in Systems of Prostitution Engaged in Revolt), believes that no woman ever really *chooses* to work as a prostitute — that prostitution is an institution created by men to control and exploit women.

“There has been a deliberate attempt to validate men's perceived need, and self-proclaimed right, to buy and sell women's bodies for sexual use,” says Sarah Wynter, founder and editor of WHISPER's national newsletter. “This has been accomplished, in part, by euphemizing prostitution as an occupation. . . .

“Both the conservative right and the liberal left male hierarchies collude to teach and keep women in prostitution. . . .”

### Too pat

All three organizations are doing good work. But I did not trust their politically correct positions on prostitution. They seemed too shallow and pat.

I mistrusted those politically correct anthologies, too. Behind both of them I detected a pernicious assumption: *The sexual love relationship between men and women is neither sacred nor special.*

A spokeswoman for the Women's Organization for Equality (WOE) let that assumption out of the bag in Pheterson's anthology: “What's the difference between being promiscuous and being paid for it, and just being all free and not being paid for it? . . . I can't see any difference.” *You can't?* Priscilla Alexander also made that assumption explicit when she wrote, in the introduction to her anthology, “[M]oney has become the main factor that distinguishes prostitution from marriage.” The *main* factor?

### “Community of complicity”

All of a sudden, an article that might have been relatively easy to write became much harder. If I could not rely on the major prostitutes' rights groups and the standard anthologies on the subject, there was only one thing left to do. I would have to interview some prostitutes myself.

I began hanging out in the neighborhood around 13th and N Streets — a neighborhood full of streetwalkers. At first I was afraid to even approach them. So I spent some time just observing . . . and plotting my strategy.

I had noticed that all the prostitutes whose words found their way into the Alexander and Pheterson anthologies sounded just like they were talking to — and for — radical-feminist and lesbian activists. I was sure that, to some extent, the prostitutes had shaped what they said and wrote in order to meet the expectations of their anthologists, and I was deeply

committed to not making that same mistake. The last thing I wanted was for the prostitutes I interviewed to shape their thoughts and feelings in order to please me, a male journalist and “concerned professional.”

So standing there on the streets at night, watching the prostitutes get in and out of their customers' cars, I realized that if I wanted to come close to anything like the truth about their lives, I'd have to break down, as much as humanly possible, the barriers between us. To the greatest extent possible I'd have to come across to them not as an ideologue and not as a Journalist, but as just another flawed and vulnerable person.

I further realized that there was only one way to do this and maintain their interest. I'd have to come up to them like any other trick and ask to have sex with them.

The way I liked to put it to myself was I'd be entering into a “community of complicity” with them.

I was too afraid of catching sexually transmitted diseases to propose having intercourse with them, but I figured I could ask them to whip me or something. And then — so I thought — at some point I'd interrupt the proceedings, say I didn't feel in the mood that night, mention I'm a journalist, and ask if they'd mind being interviewed — if not that night, then sometime soon.

It was an unorthodox approach, I know. But it worked.

Over the course of the last two months, I spoke with 15 prostitutes, and conducted long and searching interviews with six of them. (I confined myself to whites, whom I felt I'd be able to understand better, and confined myself further to those who didn't look completely blown away by drugs or suffering.)

Most of the interviews lasted several sessions and all took place in my apartment. Each of the prostitutes got to know me first as a (very) flawed and (very) vulnerable human being, and only then as a Professional Journalist. And each of them, in turn, revealed themselves to me in ways that were touching and illuminating and even, I believe, accurate (I checked parts of their stories with *other* streetwalkers — they gossip incessantly about each other — just to make sure I wasn't being led astray).

Of course, 15 white D.C. streetwalkers is hardly a representative sampling of all the prostitutes in the nation. But I think they conveyed enough of the depth and texture of their lives to allow me to begin to understand prostitution beyond the “correct lines” of the ideologues.

### Beginner's luck

I wasn't real successful with the first prostitute I tried to take home. But the experience

unforgettably confirmed for me the limitations of all three correct lines on prostitution.

I'd seen Amy in the neighborhood for weeks. She was hard to miss. She usually dressed in a black leather jacket and rode a bike, pedalling right up to cars and asking guys if they wanted a date. (If they did, she excused herself while she chained her bike to a post.) A Green prostitute!, I thought, with my heart on my sleeve. And she was a genuinely attractive woman, small but well-built, with soft cheeks and big brown eyes and a mouth that puckered expressively and often.

Around midnight I was walking in a particularly run-down part of the neighborhood when I saw Amy on the corner. I walked by her slowly and tentatively and she asked if I wanted a date. My heart was pounding wildly. I said I was just walking around but she looked so attractive I was willing to change my mind.

Her mouth puckered. What was I into?, she wanted to know.

I'd like to be abused, I said, trying to follow my “strategy.”

I thought you might be into that, she said, 'cause of the leather you're wearing.

I only have \$25, I said, but I have a nice place we can go to.

Well I live just down the street, she said. And she took my hand and started leading me there. *What do I do now?*, I thought. *Maybe just play along with her for a while, then invite her to my place some other time?*

Do you share the place?, I asked, terrified I might be jumped by some pimp. No way, she said, relax, it's all mine.

I continued trying to figure out how to get out of the situation without making it impossible to see her again. Meanwhile, she kept walking — faster and faster, it seemed — and began telling me about herself. She was 24 years old, born and bred in Baltimore, had been “tricking” two years, and also had a

## NewOptions

NEW OPTIONS (ISSN 0890-1619) is published every month except August by New Options Inc., 2005 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., lower level, Washington, D.C. 20036, (202) 745-7460.

Please address ALL correspondence to Post Office Box 19324, Washington, D.C. 20036.

Subscriptions \$25 a year in the U.S., \$32 Canada, \$39 elsewhere. Back issues \$2 each. Microfilm from Univ. Microfilms (Ann Arbor).

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## Groups

straight job (her phrase!) as a hairdresser in a suburban mall.

We got to her apartment building — one of those new but already shoddy-looking tall buildings around 14th and N with 24-hour security downstairs. The security guard glared at us as she whisked me into the elevator.

Now I was really panicky. *What was I doing? How could I stop this?* She got off on the third floor and yelled into her apartment, “Is anybody there?” But I thought you said it was yours, I said. Be quiet! she said. Stand here in the hall. My girlfriend might be visiting.

She walked inside. Hello! she said; and a thick male voice said something drowsy and unintelligible. I can’t stay now, she said, and went out to me again.

Let’s go up to the seventh floor landing, she said, and she led me up the stairs. Nobody ever goes up there, she said. I’ve taken plenty of dates up there, and they have a great time. Once a guy spread a blanket on the floor and we stayed there for nearly an hour!

The seventh floor landing was dingy and cold, and it didn’t look private to me. And I didn’t want to be there in the first place! Amy, I said, listen, I’m too nervous to do anything here, it’s not private at all. Let’s go to my place. I’ll pay for the cab.

She looked at me directly for the first time, and her big brown eyes turned cold as ice. She demanded the \$25 that I “promised” her. But you promised to take me to your *apartment*, I said.

Then she draws the knife, with a motion so swift and smooth I can hardly follow. It’s got a nasty curl at the tip of the blade, and an eagle’s head on the handle, and she’s holding it in a way that makes it clear she knows how to use it.

I can tell my knees are beginning to buckle, from the fear. I’m sorry, I say to Amy. Of course I’m gonna pay you. Here!

She takes the money and mercifully, miraculously, puts the knife away. She’s only had to use it once, she says — on a guy who tried to take his money back from her. She slashed his face and chest, she says, “but didn’t jab it in”; she is very proud of that fact.

She goes to the foot of the next flight of stairs and gets down on her knees. Now that you’ve paid you can finish your date, she says. She pulls up her sweater, revealing a red see-through brassiere. Her nipples are taut. She puckers her lips suggestively.

Uh, Amy, I say, thanks a lot. But after seeing that knife I no longer feel like it. Why don’t we just go now?

She gets back on her feet. How much money do you have left?, she asks. Just enough for cab fare, I say. Yeah, well your place is walking distance, she says, and pulls out the

knife again.

My eyes become as big as hers. She sees this and says she needs the \$4 because she has \$1 of her own plus my \$25, and \$30 will allow her to buy a “D” (for “dilaudid” — a potent drug). Unhesitatingly, I hand it over.

When we go out she’s all charm. She thanks the security guard for watching her bike (which had been sitting in the lobby). She tells me to get my hair done at her studio sometime. I tell her I’m a journalist and might like to interview her, and she puckers her lips and gives me her phone number. Then she gets up on her bike and is gone.

I begin to walk home and realize I’m trembling. I walk the streets for hours, thinking about all that happened.

I knew I didn’t have any idea why Amy was working the streets. But I’d already seen enough to know that all three of the “correct lines” on prostitution were useless as guides to understanding her.

It was inconceivable to me that she was living that life by choice. She claimed to have a job as a hairdresser (something I later confirmed), so she didn’t need to sell herself to make a living. And she had too much spunk to be purely a victim — of men, “the patriarchy,” or anything else.

### Heart of darkness

If Amy definitively taught me the limitations of the three “correct lines,” Beth helped point me toward a better, deeper understanding of prostitution.

I often saw Beth sitting on the stone wall at the corner of 13th and N — a thin woman with an intelligent, angular face overlaid by pimples and pock marks. We talked occasionally; I’m sure she thought I was a regular. One day I went to the neighborhood hoping to bring someone home for an interview, and there Beth was, sitting on her stone wall in a short denim skirt. Although it was bitter cold, she wasn’t wearing underwear.

I told her I was looking for someone to beat me, and she told me she was real good at that. In the cab she held my hand, then started rubbing my thigh.

By the time I got her upstairs, though, I began dreading any kind of physical contact with her. Something was off about her — something was not quite right.

So what would you like?, she asked me.

You’re the expert, I told her. And besides, I’ve never been beaten before. I’d just like to feel less . . . *responsible* for a while. (I thought that sounded pretty realistic.)

She seemed to be spacing out; she was clearly on some kind of drug. Lemme think about this, she said. You’re different. I wanna come up with the right thing for you.

Her head began weaving back and forth.

Are you all right?, I asked.

Am I all right?, she said, mimicking me. Lemme tell you something. You don’t know shit about problems. I don’t have nothin’ but what I’ve got on my back. I don’t even know where I’m gonna sleep tonight.

Look at my legs!, she says. She pulls up her skirt and I see that they’re covered with cuts and bruises. My body can’t heal itself anymore!, she shouts.

She leaves her skirt up. I’m finding it hard to look at her, and she knows it.

I’m a heroin addict! she shouts, knowing it’ll horrify me to hear it.

You want a little ass-whipping? That’s nothing — nothing. Lemme tell you something. I’ve had three coathangers stuck up my ass! I’ve had a red-hot poker up there! . . .

You are so lucky you chose me! There’s bitches out there who’d see this place and stake it out! There’s girls out there with the AIDS virus! I was sitting with one this morning. . . .

I really wanted to calm her down. I brought her some After the Fall sparkling fruit juice and asked if she’d ever been to college. It wasn’t a spurious question; there was an intelligence in there somewhere.

Yeah, she says, finally covering her legs. I spent a semester at Stanford. At 18. My dad had lots of money, she says — virtually spitting out the words “dad” and “money.”

I had a great advisor there, she says. She thought I’d be a real good psychologist. But I dropped out to be with my boyfriend, and he had a drug habit. And I’ve been into drugs for 10 years now.

She clutches her side and puts a bit of lower-class-black intonation into her voice. Now the doctor say I’m gonna die in two or three months. From cancer!

Oh my God, I think — instantly suspecting that her “cancer” is, in reality, AIDS. Beth, I say, listen: I can’t ask you to abuse me.

I am abusing you, she says. And you lovin’ it!

She launches into a long explanation of why men feel they’re raping her when she’s whipping them. Her advisor was right, I think: she *would* have made a good psychologist.

Then she launches into a long rap that sounds like she picked it up verbatim from the black pimps she claims to have had.

Whites are mad at black pimps for pimping their white women, she declares. But blacks are just pimping to get some money to build up their own economy. That’s how everybody does it!

Your landlord pimps you for rent, right? Boss pimps his workers. Whites pimp blacks every day. . . .

Sure, the blacks are pimping our bodies. But that’s *all* they’re pimping. You go to work,

the white man is pimping your body *and your mind* . . .

### Behind Beth's hip rap

After I got Beth out of there, I bolted the door and sat down on the rug — once again, trembling.

She certainly sounded “politically correct” at times. Parts of her rap would have been great in the Alexander or Pheterson anthologies. But seeing and hearing it all in context gave a different impression entirely.

Beth's anger was real. But it was also a protective coating. Beneath it I sensed (I could almost reach out and touch) an emotional pain so great that to have felt it fully might have killed her. In fact, I was sure that it *was* killing her, no less stealthily than the AIDS or cancer or whatever.

You could hear the pain in her voice. You could see it in her face, in her eyes. Doesn't it come bouncing off the page at you?

I didn't understand the ultimate source of the pain — though when she spoke of her dad with contempt, I felt I was getting a clue.

But I did understand one thing. Beth's emotional hurt was the key to *why* she was on the streets. It was a lot more key than all her politically correct insights about the universality of pimping.

### The task redefined

After talking with Beth I realized my task would be even harder than I thought.

It wasn't enough to take prostitutes home and ask them the questions a reporter might ask. I had to talk with them long enough — and listen to them closely enough — to detect where they hurt, and why . . . to uncover what Hemingway used to call the “broken places.”

That became the purpose of my taped interviews. The first were with Nancy.

### Getting to Nancy

I'd seen Nancy around for years — as a 19-year-old she'd been tricking near our first office — and if you met her at a party or something you'd have never guessed she was a prostitute. She looked like your typical corn-fed Midwesterner, straw-colored hair, winning smile, slightly overweight but almost intimidatingly wholesome-looking. Acted like your storybook Midwesterner too — “nice” almost to a fault.

The first time I took her home she had her clothes off before we'd hardly said a word. I'm more comfortable this way, she said, smiling and laughing and sitting with her legs crossed on my couch. It was genuinely hard for her to get into the whipping, and after I told her to stop she spent a lot of time in my bathroom, fixing her make-up, combing her hair, trying to look wholesome again.

“Why do you choose this way of life?” I shouted, over the running water.

“Money,” she said. “No boss, I can work for myself. I can work when I want. . . .”

“Were you a happy kid?”

“Very! I come from a very good family.”

Damn, I thought. I've done this whole thing with her and she's still talking to me like I'm a do-gooder. But after a few weeks she came over again, more ready to be real.

### Nancy's happy home

“I *was* a real happy kid,” she said, sitting at my big kitchen table in an oversized knit sweater. “I had everything I wanted, I had a lot of friends in school, I made good grades.”

“Uh — my father wasn't around much. But my mother and I were very, very close. My mom and him were total opposites. She was very caring and understanding, gave people a million and one chances.”

Tell me about your dad, Nancy.

“My father owns a car business, an auto body repair shop and a car rental service. And he's doing very, very well for himself. But my mother passed away four years ago — she was only 41. That was real hard, when she passed away.”

“He's remarried now. I don't know how long it's gonna last [*laughs*]. My father's not the marrying type. . . .”

Why wasn't your father around much? “He was more into workin', trying to make money. We didn't communicate much. [*Voice is flat, no emotion*.] We still don't. Even when I was in rehab and had to stay with him, it was hard.”

“Now don't get me wrong. There's nothing my father wouldn't do for me. As far as money's concerned, I could have whatever I wanted, as much as I wanted. He gave me a beautiful car; he gave me a beautiful home, in Virginia, I had a four-bedroom house all by myself. But [*laughs*] I don't have it any more.”

Can you sum it up, Nancy? “He gives me a lot of material things. That's it. As far as being there when you need someone emotionally, uh, you know, he's just not there.”

Was he like that with your mom, too? “Yeah.”

Nancy can't seem to stop scratching her wrist; I pretend not to notice.

### Nancy's descent

Nancy was introduced to drugs in junior high school, and by high school she was hooked. “Back when I was growing up,” she says, “there wasn't all this talk about drugs. People just overlooked it. And I just said, Oh, I don't have a problem” [*laughs*].

Her drugs of choice were (and still are) di-  
laudids and cocaine, and they are not cheap. She says that's why she took a job at a mas-

sage parlor — the one just across the street from the Washington Hilton, where President Reagan was shot. “I made anywhere from three to five hundred dollars a day, and spent it all, every day,” on drugs. But she didn't get along with the owner, and “had to” start turning tricks on the street. She was 19 years old.

Then she went into rehab. “I stayed off drugs for about a year and nine months after going through treatment. And then my mother passed away, and my boyfriend and I broke up, and, um, I don't know; I didn't really like myself that much; I turned to food to feel good, and I overdid it; and I knew in back of my mind, well, if people use drugs they lose weight real fast; so I started using drugs again. And that's when I went back out into the street. And then I went back into treatment, but I left again.”

“You have to have the will power to say no. It's kind of hard when you're working out on the street.”

Nancy smiled sadly and looked down at the table.

### The men in Nancy's life

Nancy's love life is no happier than her mother's was. “In two relationships I've come close to getting married. And then something along the line causes me to relapse. [*Voice goes way down*.] And I start using drugs again. And the relationship ends. . . .”

“I don't have a boyfriend when I'm doing this kind of work. . . .”

But there is one special person in her life, and don't you dare call him a pimp. “I have someone that I hang out with who — he's not a pimp, but a lot of the pimps will think that he is, because he's black. So they leave me alone.”

“He's a real good friend. And he doesn't let anything happen to me [*laughs*]. You know, we don't always get along too well. But, uh [*her voice trails off*].”

“One thing my friend does do is he follows me. You know, the person I'm with won't know he's following me. Once in a while they'll see; but if they're not up to anything it shouldn't bother them.”

Oh God, I think. “Is that guy out there now?”

“No,” she says, “he dropped me off and left. I'll have to catch a cab.”

What does he get out of the relationship, Nancy?

“It depends. Like say I get a hundred dollar date, you know, I'll give him twenty bucks for his time. Or I'll give him gas money, you know? But it's not like I give him all my money! I don't believe in that.”

How did you meet this nice man? “He helped me out and gave me some money one time [*laughs*]. So I went ahead and dated him.”

But this was before I *knew* him. And then I saw him a couple of months later, and, you know, he just started helpin' me out with rides and stuff, and we started talking. And we just ended up getting close after a while.

"He's a nice person, but — if and when I finish school and I'm not out here any more, I don't really think I'm gonna hang around him [laughs], to be honest. . . ."

I thought back to Beth and some other prostitutes I'd talked with who sounded like they were repeating lines fed to them by their black male "friends," and I asked Nancy what was going on. "Most of these black guys have no job," she said. "Most of them want to get high themselves. So these girls — I don't want to say they've been brainwashed, but a lot of them have [been], in my opinion.

"And my friend tells me the same thing. He knows a lot of black guys who live with some of those white girls. And they tell them how much they love them, and all that. He says it's a crock of shit, you know."

### Nancy reflects

For years Nancy has been in and out of a community college. Currently she's studying business administration. "Eventually I want to be a legal assistant," she told me bravely.

But she has a hard time envisioning even that for herself. "A lot of time I put myself down and I think I'm not good enough," she says. "Like, I'm thinking I could start out as a receptionist, although I have a lot more skills than what's required for a receptionist. . . ." She's scratching her wrist so hard I get up and bring her some lotion.

Did you ever *want* to do anything, Nancy?, I ask. "I wanted to be a lawyer [laughs]. Yeah! I did real well in school. My grandfather [on my mother's side] always said I'd make a good lawyer. And, uh, *he* was a lawyer.

"That's what I wanted to do. But — it's kind of strange how things happen. You know, how it progresses. Drugs — being out on the street —"

No, Nancy, I thought, it's all too predictable how things happen. If your parents don't love each other, and your dad doesn't communicate with you, then once you become a teenager it's hard to imagine being or doing anything special; and the temptation to abuse and obliterate yourself can be overwhelming.

I didn't know how to communicate any of that to Nancy, and in any event I wouldn't get the chance. Someone called up on the phone from the lobby. It was Nancy's "friend," and he was hopping mad. Something about her taking too long. Something about another trick waiting.

Like a good soldier, I insisted on going down with her. By the time the elevator brought us down there he was already in his

car. It was a real nice car, and he was dressed like someone out of *Gentlemen's Quarterly*.

"C'mon shorty!" he hissed at me. "Let's go!" he shouted at her in a menacing voice.

Nancy tried to flash me her patented wholesome smile. I have to catch my cab now, she said.

It was only then that I realized how massive her denial of her reality was. She'd not only tried to put me on about certain things. She also tried — needed — to put herself on. If that wasn't really a cab out there, then by God she'd make it one. For both of us.

The receptionist in my lobby wasn't fooled a bit. She glared at me every day for weeks afterwards.

### Getting to Gail

If Nancy was pretty representative of the (formerly) middle-class streetwalkers I met, Gail was pretty representative of the lower-middle-class ones.

It's hard to miss Gail when you go down to 13th and N. She's the short woman with the semi-punk haircut and the rebellious scowls. She's the woman bursting with so much energy that she sometimes seems to be dancing on the sidewalk, and always seems to enjoy the banter with the drivers in the passing cars.

She's even harder to miss these days. She's six months pregnant.

I didn't have it in me to ask a pregnant woman to whip me. So I haggled over price with Gail a couple of times — just to establish that "community of complicity" with her. Then one day I saw her sitting quietly (!!!) on a brick wall, and asked her to come to my apartment to be interviewed. She looked kind of skeptical, but said sure.

Her first words could have come straight from Alexander or Pheterson: "I used to think hookers were low-life women who thought nothing of their bodies. And that's not so, that's not so. . . ." But as the interview progressed her doubts and unhappiness became more pronounced, until the whole thing resembled a symphony of sadness.

### Gail's happy home

"I'm 25," Gail is telling me, "I'm from Florida, was born and raised in St. Petersburg. I haven't seen my father since I was 15.

"My mother is what they call a 'transit informant.' A snitch for the po-lice [Gail always puts the emphasis on the first syllable of "po-lice"]. Yeah.

"Evidently — what I found out happened was — our house burned down when she was living in Ohio. And to my surprise, I had a younger brother [laughs], and he burned up in the fire. She was [off getting] some drugs for herself. And [becoming an informant is

how she was able to] beat that rap, you know.

"She kidnapped my two kids. She set me up on 14th and W to go to jail, and I went back to get my kids, 'cause I was moving them away from her; and all my shit was on the porch [lowers voice], and they were gone.

"And the po-lice here won't let me press kidnapping charges even though I have legal custody. It's not the fact that I'm a hooker, it's that she's a snitch! Evidently she says she wants her grandkids otherwise she's stoppin' [being an informant]. And she's good, she's real good at snitchin'; at bein' naive and playin' the game."

And about your father, Gail? "He used to be car parts, auto parts, something like that." Did your parents get along? "Naw, they divorced when I was 12.

"And then my mother remarried. A man named Larry Osha. And he was molesting me an' she didn't *believe* it, you know [smiles]. And I went to the state, you know, the authorities, and they didn't do anything because he was so 'respectable' — he was production manager [on a kids' TV show down there, and] up here he worked for public television.

"He died of a heart attack, thank God!"

### Gail's descent

Gail loves to speak of her "wild" (her term) childhood. "When I was 13 I always ran away, I was ungovernable. I got expelled from school [switches to a seductive sing-song voice] 'cause I was in the boys' bathroom smokin' pot and drinkin' beer, the only girl in there, you know [raucous laughter]. Got expelled. Failed the eighth grade three times."

She eventually did graduate, went to Tampa College for a while, and learned to type 90 words a minute. But to no avail. "Secretary is boring," she says now. "And I can't stand bein' told what to do. I'm very rebellious. I'm like a cat in a corner, I come out scratching. . . . So rather than do that, I started dancing.

"People liked the way I danced, and I made a lot of money, and it made me *feel good*. And I didn't have people telling me to do this and do that. Cause when you dance, you know, you do it the way *you* want to do it. You come at 11, you leave at seven, you dance for 10 minutes an hour and that's it."

Gail also started doing hard drugs. "A girl down in Florida [got me involved]. She was quote-unquote a friend of mine. Anybody who knows what this shit can do to yuh and would then turn you on to it, after sayin' they're your friend, is nothin' but scum."

And then one day "I was hitchhikin' down the street, a guy picked me up an' offered me money an' — it just went on from there. . . .

"I was in a situation where I needed money. I'd lost my ID, I didn't have my birth certificate to get another ID, somebody'd stole my

[dancing] costumes. And my kids needed to eat, and I needed to eat and pay rent. . . .

"And then I came up here. I'd sent my kids up here to be with my mom, cause I knew jail and all that would come real quickly. And then I was hooking up here. And a year later my mom took my kids, and [*a stillness comes over her voice*] — here I am now."

### The men in Gail's life

I asked Gail if she'd ever been in love with a man, and, softly, she answered "No." Had she ever loved a woman? "Nope. Never been with a woman. Never *be* with one. . . ."

What about the fathers of your kids? "It was very short, I just couldn't get into it. I just couldn't let my feelings out. . . ."

"I've come closer with some black guys. The father [of the baby inside me]!"

Are you still seeing him? "I see him all the time. He's the one that brought me back here" [Gail had excused herself at one point during our interview to go off and buy drugs].

Another nice guy, I thought. Uh, Gail, I said. Do you really want to do hard drugs when you're six months pregnant? "Please, no lectures. Ple-e-ze! Hey!

"Not every baby born is gonna be a crack baby! I was shooting up a lot when I was pregnant with my first baby. And I gained five pounds the whole pregnancy. And they told me if she came out with 10 fingers, 10 toes, and could spell her name by the time she was 20, she'd be lucky. They expected a mute, a total nothin'. And she came out an' she was so healthy, and she was so-o-o smart. Oh! She was smart! Disney Duck Tales, who-o-o, she knows the whole song; every day, got to watch it. I mean she's very, very smart."

Will her friend be helping her raise their baby? "I'll take care of this baby by myself. I love this baby enough for the both of us!

"The father *chooses* not to be around! I chose to keep it! It's what I want! I don't need a father who don't want to be a father. I'm not gonna make a man do something he don't wanna do."

### Gail reflects

Gail's defiant personality serves a very practical purpose: It keeps her going. But talk with her long enough and a more reflective, more self-critical side comes to the fore.

"At first it's the excitement," she told me toward the end of our afternoon together. "I mean, the thrill of breakin' the law and getting away with it. I love doing that! But after a while it gets old. . . ."

"If I had a real boyfriend — my ex-boyfriend is a kingpin drug dealer, you know [*laughs*], I mean he didn't live the normal 9-to-

5 life. . . . Um, lemme think, can't put this into words. . . . I *miss* bein' a square — they call 'em a 'square,' you know, normal life. . . ."

Yes, Gail, I do know. I used to use that language too. My friends and I once tried to give intellectual legitimacy to the kind of visceral rebellion your life seems — on the surface — to be about.

And to whatever extent we helped put you in the bind you're in, I am truly sorry.

### Brutes and boors?

Many of the pieces in the Alexander and Pheterson anthologies imply that the clients of prostitutes are dangerous or pathetic or both.

And that's not just the left's correct line. The tone *most* of us adopt when discussing men who use prostitutes is one of disdain and contempt. We seem to want to feel they're all brutes and boors — the better to put distance between them and us, perhaps.

I knew enough before I started this article to be skeptical of that attitude. Still, it was a big revelation for me to hear my prostitutes talk about how *ordinary* most of their customers are — and how starved for affection most of them are.

"Most of the people I date are middle class," Nancy told me. "Most of them work with computers, or in an office, you know. Accountants. I've met a lot of lawyers. . . ."

"There's a few young people I date, but I'd say most of them are over 30 and are married" [*laughs*].

"They're all different kinds," Gail told me. "Most of 'em are married. And married men come out and pay for what their wives won't give them."

"If the wife don't give head, that's what they come out and pay for. The wife cut 'em off completely, they'll come out and pay for pussy. . . . It's all whatever they don't get at home."

"Most of them are very nice," Nancy says. "They just wanna be with someone young, I guess" [*laughs*].

"I have a guy who just likes to hug and hold, you know," Gail says. "Affection! Another guy who just likes to talk."

Don't they have you do weird things sometimes? "Oh, I've jacked a guy off with my feet," says Gail, laughing. "Yeah. I date a CIA guy who likes to be ripped right before he goes in for the kill, cause he's a pussycat, and — you know — all kinds of stuff."

"I try to make friends with them," says Lisa, interviewed below. "And sometimes I get into 'em, you know?"

"I get to know a lot of 'em," says Gail, "cause you get what you call 'regulars.' They keep coming back. You know, if you like the way I give head, you come back and see me

knowin' I'm not gonna rip you off. And you get to *know* me, I mean, person-to-person.

"I have guys who are fallin' in love with me, literally. And some of 'em, they start to feel like I'm their daughter, I'm part of their family. They come close to me and feel like they're committing incest" [*laughs*].

"I've met a few who are real jerks, really nasty," says Nancy. "But when they get nasty with you, you have to get really nasty right back, you know, and you have to act like you're not scared."

"I gave a guy head right back in the alley on 14th and Rhode Island," says Gail. "And, uh, after I was done datin' him he starts pullin' my hair; he was gonna take my money back. An' there was a mickey bottle, Budweiser, unopened. And I took the bottle and hit him over the head and knocked him out. . . ."

"And I dated this other guy for over a year. He was a regular. And then one time he hit me over the head with a lead pipe, and I had to have stitches. . . ."

So the prostitutes have to be constantly on guard. But the politically incorrect fact is that the vast majority of their clients are *not* brutes or boors. Most of them are just like you and me, and desperate for female affection or attention of a kind that they can't get in real life.

Or that they don't know *how* to get.

### Getting to Lisa

The first time I saw Lisa I knew she had a very revealing story to tell. It was midnight, and she was *limping* up and down N Street in a yellow jogging suit; she was a pretty sorry sight. But her thin, angular face was alert and incredibly expressive — I knew there was a sensitive being in there somewhere.

We talked several times over the next couple of weeks, and other times I sort of spied on her. Once I saw her hobbling down the street with the help of a metal walker; another time I saw her sitting in her beat-up old Chevy, presumably waiting for tricks she knew. Finally I asked her to come punish me, and she said she'd drive over that night, and asked me to wait for her outside since she might need help crossing the street.

She arrived half an hour late (on a very cold night), and she looked worse than I'd ever seen her. Her yellow jogging suit was stained all over, and she couldn't even get out of the car without my help. Also, she was trembling. I put my jacket around her shoulders and my arm around her waist, and guided her across the street and past an appalled receptionist in my lobby. She apologized to me for going so slow.

I sat her down on the couch in my apartment, made her some coffee, brought her an ashtray. She apologized for asking me to

bring the ashtray. She tried to relax and asked me to tell her what I wanted her to do. I was sweating — Christ!, I didn't want to go through with this. But I felt I had to. She apologized for asking me to help her take her shoes and pants off.

Even getting them off was painful for her, and I soon saw why. Her arms and legs had been chewed up by something; they were covered with deep scars. I tried to not let her see my horror. I gave her my belt and let her beat me a little, and then told her I just wasn't into it that night.

Then we just sat there on the couch, both of us half-naked, both of us uncontrollably trembling. She apologized for what she feared was the poor quality of her discipline. I asked if she'd mind being interviewed.

### Lisa's happy home

Truly, life is more astonishing than fiction. I have confirmed that Lisa, 33, is the daughter of a man who was once one of a Southern state's most ambitious conservative politicians, an outspoken foe of abortion and the Equal Rights Amendment. Lisa remembers seeing Jack Kemp and operatives from the first Reagan campaign in her father's home.

"I do come from a nice family," she began. "Just because I've tricked and all of that. . . ."

"You know, my father was in the [legislature]. But my mother drank a little bit, and that caused problems between them. And there was a divorce. I was seven years old. . . ."

"I couldn't take my mother's drinking and depression and stuff. So I moved in with my father. He got married to someone 12 years younger. . . ."

"Eventually we got on pretty well. [But then] he turned Christian. One day he was going to the races and having a lot of fun. Drinking but not abusing it. And the next day it was church, church, church; I mean, everything was Jesus Christ this and Jesus Christ that, and I don't mean in vain. . . ."

"My mother committed suicide a couple years back. She never got over that my father remarried. . . ."

"My father wanted me to go to college, and I mean I tried, but it just seemed like [I was having] more and more problems. [My father and stepmother] didn't have a lot of patience, and they just got tired of it all. And I felt deserted and alone. . . ."

"If I really need money I can get it from him. As far as going [home] Christmas and Thanksgiving, no. And he calls himself one of these Christian people. That's what gets me. . . . I mean, there's no second chances."

Now Lisa stays with her uncle, who's in advertising. "I can be honest with him. But he gets mad. And I'll take the car for a couple of days [and go on binges], because I have a

hard time living with him. I can't live in clutter, with food around. . . ."

"He kind of gets off hearing about the dates where I've beat and yelled at people."

### Lisa's descent

Lisa is still sitting on my couch, pants off, belt in hand. The words come cascading out of her, she's totally caught up in what she's saying.

"I got married when I was about 19. Had a baby when I was 24. My husband was into drugs. He got into drugs in the service, in Germany, before I met him, but I thought the problem was over.

"I used to watch him get high. But I never did. For like years. And then it was like, I'll try it [*coughs*]."

"He would use heroin and I would use coke. And then he got into trouble, you know, real trouble to support his habit, stealing and so forth. And he got locked up.

"I waited [for him] as long as I could. And then I just got tired of it. And — I always pick the druggies for some reason. I don't know why. I mean, I think I can make them better, or change them, or [*voice deepens and thickens here*] — and it just doesn't work that way.

"So I came [to D.C.] with this other guy that I was involved with. And then I was down in [the N Street neighborhood] and I ran into a girl friend and I think she was tricking for money.

"And then one day I was going to job interviews and stuff, and I went down there to talk to her. And I was dressed in a nice suit and stockings and high heels, and looked fine. I was just standing on the corner, looking for her. And some man just propositioned me. And that was it. I just got into it, off and on.

"Sometimes I thought it was a joke. I'd gone to an all-girls Catholic high school and was deprived of being around men, you know [*laughs*]."

"But then I went to jail — prison — for this. And my daughter went to court with me. And I got 45 days. And that guy I was with took my daughter to my father. And I haven't seen her since. . . ."

Two years ago another disaster befell Lisa. "I was coming [in] from Virginia, on the last [subway] train to MacPherson Square. I was the only one to go [up the escalator], they closed and locked the gate, and I got on there and they turned it off and on, and it shimmied and shook. Next thing I knew I was unconscious. Ate my arms and legs up."

An orthopedic surgeon installed an artificial hip. And that was only the beginning. "I got better — I was in a wheelchair, and then I could walk. And then, out of the blue, I dislocated it.

"And I've dislocated it two or three times

[since then]. I've been having operations every three or four months! I'm beginning to think that my body can't adjust to it. You know, some people just can't."

Oh, Lisa, I thought. How *could* your body adjust to it, given your lifestyle?

The last time I spoke with Lisa she was in the hospital, awaiting yet another operation. I was going to go see her, but at the last minute she got some terrible news. The surgeon had decided to remove the artificial hip. If she couldn't stop him, she'd be confined to a wheelchair for the rest of her life.

She was in no mood for visitors.

### Lisa reflects

More than any of the other prostitutes I talked with, Lisa is *continuously* aware of what it is she's missing — of what she needs to (begin to) be happy and whole.

"Hey, everybody needs a family, huh?," she told me on the couch, her scarred legs drawn up under her body.

Some of what Lisa cried out to me when she was whipping me was clearly meant for her father and ex-husband, and I've been playing it back in my mind ever since:

"You think you're something, don't you? Well, let me tell you you're shit! You're good for nothing! You always let me down!

(CRACK!)

"How come you always let me down? How come you're never there when I need you?

(LASH!)

"You're never there when I need you! Never there when I need you!"

### The problem revealed

The prostitutes' rights organizations I mentioned at the beginning of this article see prostitution as an economic problem, or a civil liberties problem, or both. After spending hours and hours with all kinds of prostitutes, I certainly agree that there are economic and civil liberties issues that need to be addressed. But I also see, now, that prostitution is an even larger problem, one that speaks volumes about who we are *as human beings*.

Most of the prostitutes I talked with had marketable skills. Certainly most of them could have made it economically in "straight" society.

Most of my prostitutes had good relations with the police. "If you're honest with them, they're there for you," Gail told me.

But none of my prostitutes — not one — had ever been exposed to a healthy male-female sexual love relationship.

None of their parents had had one.

And none of them had ever managed to achieve one on their own, either with their husbands or with any of their boyfriends.

And we should not forget that their clients

are — for the most part — ordinary men who simply aren't able to meet all their needs for female affection.

The largest cause of female prostitution, then, isn't sexual discrimination, economic exploitation or male oppression.

It is that too many of us do not know how to love.

Husbands and wives, parents and children, boyfriends and girlfriends, same-sex partners — for too many of us, it's just not all there.

### Old options

Of course, the way you define a problem determines what you'll want to do about it.

If you see prostitution as largely a civil liberties or economic problem, then you'll feel comfortable with the agendas of the three prostitutes' rights organizations.

COYOTE wants to decriminalize prostitution.

U.S. PROS wants to abolish all laws against prostitution (it suspects that "decriminalization" would still allow the state to control prostitutes' working conditions). In addition, it supports "economic independence" for all women — by which it means bigger welfare checks and fewer immigration laws.

WHISPER wants the state to stop arresting prostitutes and *start* arresting their clients, and all other "men who traffic in women's bodies for their own pleasure and profit."

### New options

If you see prostitution as largely a problem of lack of love, you'll be drawn to a different agenda.

You might support decriminalization, but *not* legalization. You'll want cities to determine where women can and cannot solicit tricks, for example. And you'll want to prosecute the pimps and hangers-on, the *real* exploiters.

And you *won't* support decriminalization because you see "sex work" as just another kind of work. As this article makes crystal-clear, it isn't! Your rationale will be more pragmatic — nothing is being gained by having *the police* try to stop it. "They're out there tryin' to bust the hookers," Gail said knowingly. "As long as there's a man willing to pay for pussy, there's gonna be a woman to take the money."

You'll certainly support greater economic security — but not just for welfare mothers, or illegal immigrants, or whomever. If our problem is lack of love, you won't want to exacerbate a situation in which interest groups brutally fight each other for resources. Instead, you'll want to support some of the *universal* economic-security schemes we've discussed in NEW OPTIONS: the Universal Stock Ownership Plan, for example (#29), or the

idea of separating work from income (#21).

In addition, you'll want to support decriminalization of drugs (#62). With decriminalization, prostitutes won't have to earn nearly as much money to support their drug habits.

Above all, however, you'll want to support measures that can build a society in which people *learn to love* each other . . . and themselves.

There are such measures; NEW OPTIONS has written about a number of them.

Some *pre-schools* are making training in social and emotional skills a regular part of their curriculum (#27).

*Parental leave, family counselling and new-parent programs* are helping us "rear gentler and more compassionate people" (#42).

*Empowered teachers, visual/spatial teaching methods and democratic classrooms* are helping schools reach the "whole person" and not just the left brain (#59).

*Multicultural trainings* — often held at the workplace — are helping to foster solidarity across ethnic and racial lines (#68).

Finally, John Vasconcellos's *Self-Esteem Task Force* has come up with a myriad of suggestions for promoting self-esteem (#67).

These approaches do not offer a "quick fix" for prostitution. But nothing can. The problem does not exist only in the prostitutes and their clients, but in nearly all of us to some degree. We're each going to have to clean up our acts.

### Afterword

When I started this article, I still had a romantic view of prostitutes and prostitution. A couple of years ago I'd have gone as far as prostitutes' rights activist Lynn Hampton when she said, in the Pheterson anthology, "I think that the woman who defies her family, her country, her religion — and often, her husband — and becomes a prostitute by

choice is the most liberated of all women."

Now that I've finished this article I have a very different view. There is nothing I can say that can fully convey the pain, the sadness, and the futility of the lives of the women I interviewed. And most of them claim that their stories are typical.

I've spent many nights wanting to go back to 13th and N and talk with some of them again. I want to see if Lisa escaped that wheelchair. And I want to bring Gail — now in her seventh month — some hot chocolate. I wonder if she drinks the stuff.

But I know enough, now, to know that there's nothing I can do for them, really. And I know they know that, too. So I have kept my distance . . . a "journalist," at last.

I've also spent many nights thinking about this: That in my own life I have not made room for the love, the intimacy, the generativity, that I claim This Society so desperately needs.

I am still working 80 hours a week, for a pittance. Still trying to save the world. I do not have time to love someone fully. I do not have the resources to be a good provider. I do not have the psychic space to be a father.

Now that I've written this article, I notice these things more. And they make me very sad.

What I am saying is that writing this article has made me want to change my life in ways that will allow me to get married and have children, and love my family with my every breath. It has made me realize that that is a good and important and even (may Alexander and Pheterson forgive me) necessary thing, a major clause in the human contract.

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Issue No. Seventy-one

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# New Options

January 28, 1991

Issue No. Seventy-three

## How Can an Effective Person Be Happy in the World?

*We felt we were running a risk when we printed our article on love and prostitution ("Some of Our Daughters, Some of Our Lovers," #71). We were afraid you'd think it was too "personal." We were afraid you wouldn't understand what we were trying to do.*

*How wrong we were! Not only were your responses overwhelmingly positive (by a ratio of better than 6:1), they were extraordinarily thoughtful — and, often, just as "personal."*

*Ultimately we heard from nearly 200 of you. That's got to be some kind of record for periodicals with under 15,000 subscribers.*

*At first we didn't want to print more than two pages' worth of your letters. After all, our last issue consisted largely of your letters on the Green gathering. But as you'll see, there was something special about these letters that demanded to be heard. Some extra measure of honesty and humanity. . . .*

*In a way, the last two issues are a perfect pair. If the Green letters speak to the larger question of "How can a good person be effective in the world?," then these letters speak to the larger question of, "How can an effective person be happy in the world?"*

### "Your issue disturbed me very much"

*We begin with some letters debating whether or not our article was a Good Thing.*

### Opening salvos

I've been out of the country for almost five years, but I got back and saw your issue #71, on love and prostitutes. It is an astonishing piece of reportage and humanity. Congratulations.

— James Fallows

*Washington Editor, The Atlantic  
Washington DC, Potomac Valley Bior'n*

Your Oct./Nov. issue disturbed me very much. I have reflected a long time about the source of my distress.

You reached some conclusions that resonate with my own convictions, hunches and intuitions about prostitution. And I am happy that through your experiences you came to a deeper sense of your own needs and vulnerabilities.

But surely a journalist with your credentials could have discovered a way to establish a trust relationship with those women without becoming a customer who asks to be beaten by them.

Prostitution is a sad and destructive way of life for both men and women. You entered into solidarity with them by choosing to participate in activities which perpetuate the destructiveness and sadness.

It is my decision to no longer trust the political commentary of such a social observer and critic, and I therefore regretfully cancel my subscription to NEW OPTIONS.

— Darlene White

*Edina MN, Heartland Bioregion*

Thank you from the bottom of my heart for following your heart into the uncharted territory of lovelessness, epitomized by the cycle of prostitution.

I expect to see your article reprinted often, put into anthologies and "literature-based" textbooks and such. You'll probably get book and movie offers.

It reminds me of the article I read many years ago by an unknown journalist named Gloria Steinem, about her experiences as an undercover journalist who became a Playboy Bunny in order to report on it firsthand. I never forgot it. And I won't forget issue #71. If you stop publishing NEW OPTIONS, "Some of Our Daughters, Some of Our Lovers" would be a fitting finale.

— Lauren Ayers

*Fair Oaks CA, Shasta Bioregion*

As a therapist, may I advise you to seek counselling?

There are many ways to interview prostitutes. Simply paying for their time, then being honest, works. Usually they are grateful to

### Countdown to Pub. Date

*New Options for America* — the forthcoming anthology of our 25 best articles, with special introductory sections by M.S. and a foreword by Marilyn Ferguson — will remain on sale at the special pre-publication price of \$7.95 through March 31.

(Until last week it was our 24 best articles. At the publisher's urging, we've added a final part — "Politics Is Not Enough" — which will consist entirely of our article on love and prostitution.)

Ten or more copies can be purchased for \$5.97 each. Our biggest customer so far: the minority leader emeritus of the Michigan House of Representatives. He bought 150 copies to distribute to all his colleagues.

Please send all orders to California State University Press, Cal. State U.—Fresno, Fresno CA 93740. Please address any questions to Carla Millar at CSU Press, or call her at (209) 278-7082.

not have to perform and will sense your genuine interest.

This is not theory. One of my trainees did his Master's on drug use among prostitutes here in L.A., and his straightforward approach worked fine.

I was concerned by your choice of whipping as a way to seek rapport with them. Then toward the end of the article you spoke of your workaholicism (self-imposed 80-hour weeks). It sounds like a self-hurting pattern.

## Analysis

You do much good for others. Please do something for yourself and get some professional counselling.

— **Francis Deffry, M.A.**  
*Los Angeles CA, Pacific Rim Bioregion*

I just finished reading issue #71, and I simply want to applaud you for your courage in writing a piece that is surely going to draw a lot of flak.

When people are finished attacking you, either publicly or privately, for participating in the subjugation of women, or negating what you say because you're a liberal white male do-gooder, or psychoanalyzing your decision to have them whip you, I hope you'll still feel it was worth it. I'll never look at prostitutes — or think about love and gender and drugs and family — in the same way again. You got through. They got through. Thanks.

— **Alan AtKisson**  
*Managing Editor, In Context*  
*Bainbridge Island WA, Cascade Bior'n*

## Ugh!

Your article felt very painful. My wish/prayer/hope for you is that you'll begin to be compassionate to yourself. Why have someone flog you when you seem to be doing it pretty well yourself?

— **Bill Withers**  
*Redwing Blackbird Distribution*  
*Decatur GA, Piedmont Bioregion*

Why, why, WHY did you decide to refer to the women you interviewed for issue #71 as "my prostitutes" (p. 7, col. 3)?

Since objectification — what we do when we don't know how to love — is one of the problems, why contribute to it?

— **Mary Pat Connors**  
*Everett WA, Cascade Bioregion*

You probably helped to further prostitution with your concern over the plight of each trapped girl you interviewed. You gave them a positive regard you would surely not have bestowed had they been only nondescript, average typists in the general pool.

— **Ruth Hatch**  
*Huntersville NC, Piedmont Bioregion*

## Wow!

Great issue on prostitution! How courageous — idea-wise and personally.

— **Alisa Gravitz**  
*Co-op America*  
*Washington DC, Potomac Valley Bior'n*

What strikes me most in your article is your incredible courage — the courage to "go

out with" prostitutes to get the real story, the courage to tell it as you experienced it, and above all, the amazing courage to bare your heart to thousands of readers. I don't think I have ever read an article by a journalist anywhere, anytime, quite like it.

— **Pierre Pradervand**  
*Author, Listening to Africa (1990)*  
*Geneva, Switzerland*

Without question, the most courageous piece I've seen written by anyone in a long time. Moving conclusion. It left me taking a long look at what's really important in my own life.

— **Jim Richmond**  
*Green Committees of Correspondence*  
*Kansas City MO, Great Plains Bioregion*

Your piece on prostitutes was just amazing! GREAT reporting! You are a hero. And, yes, you are a human being . . . don't let life be all work.

— **Claudia Ayers**  
*Sacramento CA, Central Valley Bioregion*

Your prostitute story is incredibly powerful. Thank you for pursuing it as you did, then having the courage to write it as you did.

— **Eliza Klose**  
*Institute for Soviet-American Relations*  
*Washington DC, Potomac Valley Bior'n*

I was very moved by the power of your article.

About halfway through I momentarily put it aside as the level of intimacy was beginning to make me feel uncomfortable. But then I felt that, if you had the courage to put this stuff out, I could receive it; and I continued reading.

— **Larry Sullivan**  
*Silver Spring MD, Chesapeake Bior'n*

Stunning, gutsy work! I salute you.

— **Larry Daloz**  
*Cambridge MA, Lower New Engl. Bior'n*

You are a saint as far as I'm concerned.

— **Dan Greifenberger**  
*Norwalk CT, Lower New England Bior'n*

The issue of prostitution and people's need for love is important. Keep up the good work — and post a copy of the newsletter in the lobby of your building! (smile).

— **Ethelbert Miller**  
*Afro-American Resource Ctr, Howard U.*  
*Washington DC, Potomac Valley Bior'n*

What I cherish most of all about your article is that you made no judgments — but simply saw how our unhealed wounds cause

violence to ourselves and others.

— **Ms. Gene Knudsen-Hoffman**  
*Author, Ways Out (1988)*  
*Santa Barbara CA, Pacific Rim Bior'n*

I only wish you had not said that "there's nothing I can do for them, really." By searching out the prostitutes' true stories, and writing about them with respect, you have in effect given more than you have taken.

— **Don Bolger**  
*Isle of Pines SC, Coastal Plain Bior'n*

## "You missed the main issues"

*In these letters you discuss whether or not we understood the prostitutes.*

## "It is addiction"

You are right. COYOTE et al. missed the main issues with prostitutes. Unfortunately, so did you.

Look at your interviews, man. It ain't lack of love. It's addiction.

Addiction is a primary illness. That means it takes you out if it isn't treated.

— **Francis Deffry**  
*Los Angeles CA, Pacific Rim Bioregion*

I have had COYOTE speak in the Contemporary Sexuality course I teach, and I too have been dissatisfied by their perspective.

In my opinion, what you address at the end of your article — the addictions we pursue (sex, work, drugs, consumerism) to fulfill the spiritual void in our lives — is at the root of much of our personal and social dysfunction.

— **Dr. Mary Beth Love**  
*San Francisco State University*  
*San Francisco CA, Shasta Bioregion*

## NewOptions

NEW OPTIONS (ISSN 0890-1619) is published every month except August by New Options Inc., 2005 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., lower level, Washington, D.C. 20036, (202) 745-7460.

Please address ALL correspondence to Post Office Box 19324, Washington, D.C. 20036.

Subscriptions \$25 a year in the U.S., \$32 Canada, \$39 elsewhere. Back issues \$2 each. Microfilm from Univ. Microfilms (Ann Arbor).

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## Groups

I agree there is a tremendous need for and lack of love in our society. (That's why I always ask the post office for LOVE stamps.) However, one of the reasons the prostitutes remained prostitutes was their need for money for drugs.

Some got drawn into drug use by accident — by being offered drugs by peers. Others obviously turned to drugs to substitute for unfulfilled needs. One of your interviewees admitted she could not get off drugs.

I just ask that you not overlook the drug problem in defining causes.

— Leah R. Karpen

Weaverville NC, Appalachia Bioregion

## Live and let live

For men, monogamy is an unnatural state. Prostitution should be seen as polyandry or polygyny for pay. Prostitution must be legalized to ensure health, safety, pimpless wages and intelligent sex.

If I need to pay young women because I can't attract them for sex, so be it. My feelings are my feelings. Live and let live.

— John Spofforth

Athens OH, Heartland Bioregion

You were so focused on D.C. in 1990 in your article that you neglected how compensated sexwork ("prostitution" to you) has undergone many transformations during the last 10,000,000 years.

Long ago there may have been dozens of pacifist, vegetarian indigenous tribes in which multiple relations were accepted. Wealthy widows and widowers lacking matrimonial intent have long sought to compensate sex-partners.

— John R. Ewbank

Southampton PA, Lenape Bioregion

I greatly enjoyed your article on prostitution. You obviously invested a great deal of yourself in it, and I don't want to trivialize that. However, I must take issue with your rather sweeping conclusions.

You interview some prostitutes. Their parents don't get along. They can't communicate with their fathers. Their fathers aren't there to provide emotional support when times are tough. Childhood wasn't so swell.

In other words, these women come from ordinary families with ordinary parents, had ordinary childhoods and experience ordinary problems! Yet from this you want to rush in and say, in effect, "See, prostitution represents something terrible in our society." You call for limiting where prostitutes may conduct their business, and prosecuting the men they hire to assist their affairs.

I suspect that if you went out and inter-

viewed some secretaries, say, you'd find the same kinds of women with the same kinds of backgrounds and problems. Would you then rush in and say the reason we have secretaries is because we don't have enough love in our lives? Would you call for prosecuting their bosses?

C'mon. The reason we have prostitution is that sex is still a (relatively) taboo subject in our society, and that for many people patronizing a prostitute is simply the best available means for fulfilling particular sexual fantasies.

You basically admit you've turned square with advancing age. And you were obviously biased against prostitution before you started your article.

— Terry Inman

Libertarian Student Network

Florissant MO, Heartland Bioregion

## It's the bottom line

What implications does it raise when I say that one of the few issues of NEW OPTIONS that I've read cover-to-cover was the one on "prostitutes" — whom I will refer to as "sexual trade workers"?

A rather interesting note was your decision to exclude African-American sexual trade workers. Few writers have explored the notion of the African-American as the sexual property of the white male. This exploration might have put the whole question of prostitutes in a new perspective.

If you excluded yourself on the basis of race (as you say), shouldn't that same severance hold true for class and gender?

You are in a situation of intentional downward mobility, situational poverty, quixotic poverty; yet you are trying to understand those who are part of the permanent underclass and those who are marginally employed. Though you comment on your financial "plight," few persons of your privileged group really grasp the realities of the women and men who work America's streets.

Your article reminded me of the book and popular film *Black Like Me*. Movies and books like that one tend to mock and caricature their subjects. Isn't it rather patronizing to assume that a people can't speak *for itself*? In some ways your article is a sham.

The best part — at least for me — was the section on the male "johns" of the sexual trade workers. (One reason you were able to capture the views of males is you're so much a part of the male cosmology.) Breaking the stereotype of "johns" and seeing them as individuals who are in dire need of loving and caring female relationships was a significant contribution.

I am always appalled at how writers in the

West — even the so-called progressive ones — never really question the American way. For me, the best way to define prostitution is to define it *as* the American way.

To surrender one's dreams for the reality of a two-car home in suburbia is a kind of prostitution. To neglect one's children and lovers for the sake of career advancement is a kind of prostitution.

Prostitution is the bottom line, isn't it?

— Kwaku O. Kushindana

Baton Rouge LA, Delta Bioregion

## Can we generalize?

Your recent piece on prostitution was gutsy — self-disclosing in an almost reckless way — but still fallacious in its conclusions.

I've worked with many hookers over the years (as a therapist), and there are as many varieties of whore as there are of accountant — maybe more! You seem to acknowledge that about the johns they service, but are more reluctant to come to the same conclusion about prostitutes.

If prostitution were legalized, the variety would be even more obvious, since participants would no longer have to self-identify as criminals.

— Alex Rode Redmountain, Ph.D.

Atlanta GA, Piedmont Bioregion

Thank you for writing the only piece I have ever seen on prostitution that parallels my own conclusions after working as a prison psychologist where I had a number of prostitutes as clients, and had contact with others.

I never encountered any who had done that work out of anything except desperation. They may fool some people, all of the time, into thinking that they're having a great time, or that that line of work was freely chosen from a position of personal strength. But the heartbreak and self-hate that was revealed in my office utterly belied those self-serving illusions on the part of male clients, "protected" wives and so-called feminists with a case to prove.

I rather doubt that any of these folks would want *their* loved ones to make a career of prostitution, whether it was decriminalized, legalized, or merely tolerated as it is now. There may be a few prostitutes who emerge unscathed, ala the movie *Pretty Woman*, but I would wager it is a precious few.

Through my psychological training and my own self-exploration I have formulated a (not original) view of social and psychological pathology which has to do with imbalance of the masculine and feminine energies we each have within us. What I saw in prison, especially among women who had worked the streets, was devastating rejection of their own

femininity. Some were almost parodies of male toughs, holding their own feminine sides hostage out of fear and anger, so desperately afraid of violence or rejection that they never allowed themselves to show vulnerability or true receptivity to anyone.

The one thing which did not come out in your article was that many women enter the ranks at a very young age after a background of incest — the perfect training ground for sexual subjugation. Not only are the “skills” learned to perfection, but the confusion, anger, fear, self-hate, and distrust and loathing of men which are engendered complete the resumé.

I agree with you that love is a big part of the answer; I gave it all I had while I was in there.

A lot of society has a cynical attitude, both about the value of people who have gotten on the wrong road and about the power of love to effectuate real change. Well, mindless love is *not* the answer. But heartless minds aren't going to solve it either.

— Julie Logan

*Lexington KY, Cumberland Bioregion*

## “I have struggled with similar questions . . .”

*In these letters you respond to the article with empathy — often by sharing from your own lives.*

## Go for it!

I have never written to NEW OPTIONS before, but I just finished issue #71 and, with my heart opened and tears in my eyes, I am moved to say I love you.

My husband's comment after reading this issue (the first one he's read, by the way) is, “That guy has balls the size of the Empire State Building!” Not a Politically Correct metaphor perhaps, but he captures something.

Courage like yours is a major qualification for marriage and fatherhood, which I hope you will pursue as one of your major ways of saving the world. The world needs you to create a family. Go for it!

— Sarah Conn

*W. Newton MA, Lower New Engl. Bior'n*

I was touched by your afterword in the last issue of NEW OPTIONS. I have struggled with similar questions myself.

To make a profound difference in one small corner of the world — your own home — is as vital as any broader, shallower campaign. And I think family keeps you honest

with yourself — nothing calls your soul into account more than the demands of a spouse and children.

It's easy for idealistic people to feel that they mustn't stint in their service to the wider world, but to sacrifice one's personal life misses the point of it all. Just as physicians must heal themselves, so reformers must reform themselves if they are truly going to do good.

— Sharon Kass

*Takoma Park MD, Potomac Valley Bior'n*

Until I was 50 years old, I wasn't a father — and my wife and I led lives that were to an important extent independent of each other.

At age 50 (she at 42), we became pregnant. Our daughter is now almost four years old and is a great light in our lives.

Toward the end of 1989 my wife was diagnosed as having ovarian cancer, stage three. She's had three operations since then, and her prognosis is guarded.

I have had a minimal *public* professional life since my daughter was born (we always co-parented). I no longer teach, write, lecture or organize. I am too involved in taking care of my daughter, wife and self — in addition to maintaining my practice in psychotherapy.

My last four years have been the hardest, and in some ways the most rewarding, in my life. I have become so much more human — so much more able to empathize with people's hardships and suffering.

— Frank A. Rubinfeld, Ph.D.

*Author, The Peace Manual (1986)  
Berkeley Ca, Shasta Bioregion*

## On becoming a person

Your closing paragraphs are almost unbearably poignant.

In the 1970s I was trying to save the world. I was also an avid outdoorsman (canoeing, rockclimbing, backpacking, cross-country skiing, etc.). My other major project was attempting to become a person, as Carl Rogers put it — largely by trying to overcome a lack of love as a child. (Funny how that pops up.)

I had never paid much attention to making a living. In the mid-70s I was making \$2 an hour working in a backpacking shop. I had always enjoyed children, and at family gatherings I often preferred their company to that of the adults. Yet I never thought I would have a child. I couldn't see ever earning enough to be a decent provider, nor could I see bringing a child into “a world like this.”

Well, to make a long story short, I'll skip ahead to getting married (I didn't ever really expect that to happen either) in 82 and having a daughter in 83. My best friend, who had a young son, told me he was really looking forward to our having a child, and I found out

what he meant — Mercedes has been an absolute delight. She's the most joyful free spirit I have ever known. I have learned so much from the experience of living with her.

There are a lot of older parents of young children around, and a lot of them just enjoy their children without the need for control that seems more common in younger parents. One of my hopes for a better world rests on these children, who are, I believe, more emotionally secure than any group in history.

— Lloyd Hansen

*Minneapolis MN, Heartland Bioregion*

## Belly of the beast

I consider the prostitution issue of NEW OPTIONS to be a turning point for you, and maybe NEW OPTIONS itself.

For some time I have detected the unhealed places in you even as you supported positive, life-affirming ideas and projects. Your burnout came across loud and clear in your writing recently, and I would never have thought an article on prostitution would turn the tide. Thinking about it, though, it makes sense: going to the belly of the burnout beast — the prostitute's life — would cause you to re-evaluate what is personally important to you.

Thanks for sharing your experience. I have a feeling that the best is yet to come for you.

I had a similar experience (albeit not with prostitution) in reaching my limits with social change work. What really did it is that I was seriously considering getting deeply involved with Habitat for Humanity, a worthwhile project indeed. Then I woke up and realized that I don't even have a home of my own.

I had so disassociated myself from my own need for security, I was almost willing to give up the one thing that feels like safety to most people — a home. So, now I'm involved in co-housing, which will give me a modest home at a reasonable cost. Then I can help others!

I recommend Anne Wilson Schaeff's work to you, particularly *When Society Becomes an Addict* (1987). She talks about how “helpers” — therapists, activists, and other do-gooders — often play the role of co-dependents in an addictive society.

Her work opened my eyes. I'm committed to helping create a better world, but I will no longer sacrifice myself as I've sometimes done in the past. The only possible result is burnout, and I'm in this for the long run.

— Roberta Wilson

*Seattle WA, Cascade Bioregion*

## New directions?

Your last two issues — on the Greens and on prostitution — were quite remarkable. I

am deeply moved by your courage and your insistence on looking for a truth that is outside any set of pre-defined buzzwords.

I personally feel a strong need to involve myself in the political process, but have had a hard time doing so because I can't identify with anything going on in the political spectrum — right, left or center. No one seems to be speaking in human terms.

I have been reading NEW OPTIONS for some years because the ideas you report on are ideas that make sense. However, in your recent issues you have gone beyond mere ideas-that-make-sense. You have begun the task of articulating a truly human politics.

I work as a psychotherapist, and it is clear to me that the difficulties my clients experience have a strong political dimension. People suffer because they cannot find a place for their experience in the collectively created definitions of reality that they are taught.

Political activists from the entire left-right political spectrum share a common definition of political reality. Each party sustains the others by providing them with convenient and predictable sparring partners.

In bringing your own personal experience into the discussion, and in exploring the personal experiences of the prostitutes, you are challenging the entire stale, cut-off, depersonalized nature of politics in this country.

— Eric Weiss, M.A.

*Los Angeles CA, Pacific Rim Bioregion*

## Permission granted

NEW OPTIONS #71 is quite incredible. I applaud your insight and your personal courage and honesty.

The Greens issue and parts of this one make it seem like it may be time for you to move on. If you do, you'll have my blessings and wholehearted support — even though I know we'll all miss NEW OPTIONS dearly.

The world is much bigger than any of us understands, though; and in some way the particulars of which may be impossible to anticipate, you may end up doing a more profound service to the causes and ideas, and principles, and *people* you've been working for, by moving on to your next chapter.

— Jim Guinness

*Newton MA, Lower New England Bio'r'n*

I have a feel for what you've been through over the last decade, for I have had my share as well: the New World Alliance; writing *The Heroes Are Us* ("A Call to Rescue Our World"); running for the U.S. Congress (17 months, 12 hours a day — nonstop); writing *Russell, Alexandra and John* (a story of personal and planetary change); starting and being executive director of ProEarth; and now

going to the Yale Divinity School and studying Ethics, Global Ecology, and the State of the World (a unique program I structured and had approved).

I am getting tired of it all. Like you, I think. That is what I read in your piece on the Greens and the one on prostitutes. You are sounding like you want to get out, that you've had enough. That you would like some rewards for all of your efforts — both some financial rewards and being able to see some tangible results, politically.

Some people applaud your efforts (and mine) as noble while they go on earning a living and providing for their security within the existing problematic paradigm, one that they perpetuate. The changes you and I (and many others) seek may one day come about — to some degree — but probably only by crises.

If you're considering getting out of the "save the world" business, go ahead and do so and start enjoying your life. You've paid more than your share of the dues. If it makes you feel any better, know that I am tired of it all too.

— Joe Simonetta

*Sarasota FL, Peninsula Bioregion*

## Shadow and act

I just read your prostitute issue of NEW OPTIONS and I expect that of your 13,000 subscribers at least a thousand will overcome their inertia and respond on this one. I expect that some overwhelming percentage of that will contain marriage proposals, and I hope that there will be many responding as I intend to do right now by taking issue with your self-castigation.

I'm sorry for whatever disconnection you feel because you have not married and had a family. I cannot deny the importance nor depth of the joy and lessons provided by the fulfillment of these instinctual drives and being a direct link in the propagation of the species. But I do want to put in my own small vote for the value of the life path you have taken (that has taken you).

So often in your writings one gets the sense that you feel it has been all adolescent illusion driving you — that you wish you'd stayed in America during Vietnam and were now a powerful figure on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee or in some other established institutional context. In reading your life as a psychoanalytical parable, you interpret it all as adolescent rebellion which you are ready to be done with.

But the institutions really did call for critical resistance. And your work continues to be important while you continue to live out archetypal dynamics more visibly and dramatically than many of us.

All of this is just a way of saying, I guess, that you are not alone. It's not the national political movement — nor the family — that you want. But in these dark times we cannot deny the sparks.

— Amy Hannon

*Greenville NC, Coastal Plain Bioregion*

## "Lack of love is killing the world"

*In these letters you confront the heart of our article: you ask if the central problem in our society is lack of love.*

## Breakthrough!

I can hardly believe that you wrote the piece on prostitutes.

I am sure many of your readers will be startled. For me, it was wonderful to see a journalist make his topic into a path with a heart. A path to his own heart.

And what did you discover? Just what many of us are discovering these days. Namely, that the deep source of our troubles — personal, social, economic — began in childhood, where we missed the experience of feeling loved and accepted.

This is a much deeper and more significant discovery than we ever suspected. It's given rise to what I call the "personal responsibility" movement which springs from A.A.-type 12-step models and which is being carried forward by the work of authors like John Bradshaw (*Homecoming*, 1990) and Robert Bly (*Iron John*, 1991).

The bottom-line message is just what you discovered in befriending prostitutes — that lack of love and lack of emotional intimacy is what many of us are (or were) dying from. It's killing the world.

Congratulations on your exemplary journalism. You actually broke through the crust of intellectualism!

— Paul Shippee

*Boulder CO, Rocky Mountain Bioregion*

## Take it from us

I want to take a moment to let you know how moved I am by "Some of Our Daughters."

I am a lifestyle assessment counsellor here in the Midwest. From my personal life and "professional journey," I've come to know that most of the ills of the world are emotional. We are a people suffering from an inability to love.

— Marilyn Silver

*Springfield IL, Heartland Bioregion*

Our civilization is short of love. Just as we deny the threat of nuclear war and environmental disaster, so we also deny this fundamental fact: that most of us live relatively impoverished emotional lives.

I am working on it myself. I've been married for 43 years and we have three grown kids. Like many of my World War II generation, I was busy being a student and provider during all the years my kids were growing up, and was in many ways an absentee father.

Last week I went to see two of them for visits, the third comes soon, and I plan to make such visits more often and more meaningful.

— David Thatcher

Sebastopol CA, Shasta Bioregion

I just finished reading your synthesis of good journalism and tender sensitivity on the subject of love. It derailed a firm resolution to finish revising the final chapter of my new book, which, relatedly, is entitled *Moving to Utopia: 12 Guidelines to Personal and Planetary Evolution from Loneliness to Love*.

I suppose I should simply thank you for this serious attention to a subject rarely discussed as a most serious dynamic in both personal and political life. And sign this letter. But that would be inadequate.

It took me decades to learn to give love, and longer to face the terrors of opening up to accept it. I was far too busy as a political activist and polemicist. Love was silly sentimentality, maudlin escapism from the "cold hard facts" of the planetary crisis.

In the final 15 years of a previously loveless marriage, I cared for a wife slowly dying of an incurable disease and began to give up my macho defenses against even uttering that four-letter word. Nearly 40 years in a 12-step group of "sharing experience, strength and hope" with fellow alcoholics continued my education. I'm still learning.

Blaming venal politicians and anachronistic institutions is not enough. Somehow, we have got to get the guts to open ourselves to the intimacy we crave, and open our nations to the cooperation we need. Or perish!

— Ted Cox

Palm Springs CA, Pacific Rim Bioregion

*The author was an investigative reporter for Scripps-Howard and UPI. He is 79 years old.*

## Not so fast, bub

If the largest cause of prostitution is lack of love and not sexual discrimination or male oppression, then why isn't the number of male prostitutes who cater to female clients equal to the number of female prostitutes who cater to male clients?

And why is it that the unloved women in

your article have become prostitutes and drug addicts, while the unloved men have become ordinary middle-class guys?

As usual, your newsletter's trivialization of feminist issues disturbs me.

— Penny Norris

Baltimore MD, Chesapeake Bioregion

## Friendly amendments

Congratulations on inviting controversy. Perhaps now our approach — to present body acceptance as a part of the solution to social misery ("Body Acceptance Is the Idea, Nude Recreation Is the Way") — will no longer seem so radical.

— Lee Baxandall

Naturist Society

Oshkosh WI, Heartland Bioregion

If love is the social antidote for prostitution, then particular emphasis should be placed upon enhancing the sharing of rights and responsibilities between the spouses.

Unless children see the love between their parents, teaching the parents childrearing techniques does not necessarily prevent dysfunctional families.

— John R. Ewbank

Southampton PA, "Lenape Bioregion"

Thanks for "Daughters/Lovers." Now take your research one step further and look at the long history of sexual repression and denial in this society. That's what produces the dysfunctional relationships you write about.

— Cullen Stuart

Lincoln ME, Highlands Bioregion

Your article on whores was marvelous. It shows that we must attack the evil in the world — e.g., Saddam Hussein — so we don't all wind up like the poor souls in your article.

— Max Van de Meirer

Pasadena CA, Pacific Rim Bioregion

## How it all works

I was not going to renew . . . a 64-year-old liberal tired of just bull-shitting . . . thought your Greens article was right on . . . not wanting to read idealism any more.

But I'm a psychotherapist of 30 years, and this is the first article on prostitution that really hits it. Thank you! You are one hell of a journalist.

Guy named Kohut said it best, but in jargon where you need your detective decoder pin to decipher what he's saying. Essentially, if you didn't get the love you need during that first two or three years, you chase it for the rest of your life, but nobody can give it to you . . . like pouring love down a rathole. Kids

need to be heard, need to be told that they are special, that they can do it . . . *very early*, and from *then on*.

The illusion of love (being held, listening to others, giving others what they need) never fixes it. Only way to fix it is to love your Self, love your "inner child" unconditionally. And that takes a long time. Kohut thought six to nine years of therapy.

Now John Bradshaw has translated Kohut and Masterson and Miller and a bunch of other radical therapists into plain English and taken to the TV boards . . . a bit preachy, but I see this kind of pain now in 70% or more of the population . . . not just prostitutes . . . workaholics, affair addicts, religious groupies, haters, you name it.

I have come to the place where there is less and less I disbelieve. Beats hell out of me how it all works. Six weeks ago my hardwood floor small businessman (whose ex-wife is dying of AIDS because she left him for a guy she met in the rehab. program for drug addicts, didn't tell her he had AIDS till he gave it to her) said he ran into this book in the bookstore and started reading it . . . about a channeled personality, a Dr. Peebles, channeled through this young man on KABC San Diego (I think) . . . well . . . very appropriate book for him . . . Peebles points out that all the interaction between human beings is love-motivated, including murder . . . lots of short concepts that shake up your brain, like, "Why do people come to Earth?" "To learn relating . . . to peoples, animals, earth. . ."

Prostitutes are trying to learn relating . . . to get love somehow . . . and so are the people who come to them, you say. Right. I have women who don't screw their men . . . suppressed rage . . . the men didn't give them the love they thought would cure their pain and they get even . . . and then the husbands get even and also look for that relating. Weird. Fascinating.

Anyway — keep my subscription coming. You are very special.

— Patricia Sheffer

Cupertino CA, Shasta Bioregion

## "The nuclear family is not the only way"

*Finally, here are some letters that accept our premise (lack of love is the problem) but don't necessarily accept our conclusion (marriage is a "major clause in the human contract").*

## Please spare us

I am gay, happily monogamous, and very much in love with my partner, Paul. I was sor-

ry to see an otherwise excellent story on prostitution dissolve into a maudlin paean to the nuclear family.

Sexual intimacy between two lovers is truly one of the greatest gifts the universe offers. If it is lacking in your life, I hope you find it. But please spare us from your overwrought generalizations about the joys of matrimony and fatherhood.

— **Mark A. Hogarth**  
*Staten Island NY, Hudson Valley Bio'n*

You limited your compass to heterosexuals. But it could easily apply to homosexuals as well.

The lack of love that casts teenage boys out onto the streets (usually by hateful fathers!) where it is hard to avoid prostitution, drugs, and violent crime, is a real horror story. The impersonal sex encounters that many gays engage in are also a consequence of a lack of love (and also often a consequence of a heterosexual marriage that should never have occurred).

On the other hand, I've known gay couples who've been together for decades. And the gays who volunteer to care for AIDS patients are proof that at least some of us are dedicated to a sharing/caring lifestyle.

— **Laurence G. Wolf**  
*Cincinnati OH, Cumberland Bioregion*

## Back to basics

As a person who was married only 18 months ago, I can attest to the value of having a life partner!

— **Dana Ullman, M.P.H.**  
*Author, Homeopathy (1988)*  
*Berkeley CA, Shasta Bioregion*

Read your issue #71 last night and thought, How sad! We are coming too slowly to the realization that we've failed badly at the basics in this country for decades.

We decry symptoms — our diminishing international competitiveness, poor educational system, drug problem, crime problem, violence problem, prostitution problem. . . . In the meantime, our divorce rate approaches 50%. *Who is raising the children?*

Who is teaching them (necessarily by example) love, commitment, devotion, endurance, perseverance, integrity? Without those, can we really expect them to understand literature, history, psychology — not to mention business administration, algebra, geometry?

Much as I loved them — much as I recognize the good that came out of them — the 60s and 70s did terrible harm to this country. People stopped being unselfish, effective parents, and this has created and encouraged a

host of egregious social ills. The large number of Americans involved in prostitution is only one example.

We're in trouble.  
— **Paul D. Mallamo**  
*Taos NM, Rio Grande Bioregion*

## Broaden your vision!

My compliments to your in-depth exploration of the world of prostitution. In my view, your gutsy "research" methods lent credibility to your conclusions. ♪

Your last sentence spoke of seeing marriage and children as a "necessary . . . clause in the human contract." I would suggest broadened vision here.

The family has long been too rigid an institution to accommodate the vast range of intimacy and closeness possible for human beings. Your article didn't say it specifically, but I suspect you'd agree with the notion that failures of the family are an ingredient in much of prostitution.

Changing the family goes beyond eliminating just the sexism (as important a goal as that is). Other pieces that are in need of examination and "cleaning up" include homophobia, monogamy, the definition of what constitutes "faithfulness" and "commitment," ageism — the list goes on.

Closeness and intimacy are among the *easiest* human needs to provide for — except for all our deeply held and protected hurts related to them.

— **Scott Reed**  
*Seattle WA, Cascade Bioregion*

It is not true, as American romanticism would have us believe, that the only way to be truly close, loving and supportive with anyone is in the nuclear family.

I've done both. Married for many years, grandchildren — I love them all very much. But I also love and (I hope) support people in many other relationships: community dwellers, students, and so on.

I would even say (hint, hint) that working for people is a love for them that fulfills, so long as we can be uncompulsive about it. I always remember Kasturbai (Mrs.) Gandhi's reply to how many children they had: "I have four, he has 400 million."

— **Michael Nagler**  
*Author, America Without Violence (1982)*  
*Berkeley CA, Shasta Bioregion*

## "Go and sin no more"

I was touched by your issue on prostitution. You handled a very difficult and controversial issue with a great deal of grace and sensitivity.

Though I don't agree with many of your political conclusions, I am quite heartened by your personal conclusions. It saddens me, however, to see that the one thing that could truly help the life situation of prostitutes, drug addicts, pimps, fathers, mothers, etc., is passed over with so little understanding.

When a prostitute was brought to Jesus, He said, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone." Did Jesus cast the first stone? No. Instead He told her, "Go and sin no more."

I realize that this injunction probably seems simplistic to you — for haven't many of these women tried to do just that, and failed miserably? You are right: they can't do it on their own. We need to have communities that are loving and supportive. We need sensitive teachers and role models.

But most of all, we need to have a change of heart. For we are all flawed. We have all sinned.

Let's face it. Multiple sex partners and drugs just aren't good for us. Our minds and bodies are not made to handle those things.

Sin starts out being pleasurable — temporarily filling an emotional or spiritual void. But we know that in the long run it will destroy us, not just spiritually but physically or emotionally as well.

— **Michelle Seward**  
*Boulder CO, Rocky Mountain Bioregion*

## Lives of our own

There is another point of view on the issue of family life — namely, that not all of us will have it, or at least not the ideal.

I have two children, but have never had the cozy homelife — the perfect birth scenario with a loving husband coaching me through each contraction, a spouse who loved my children as I loved them.

As a man-crazy woman who has finally kicked the Romance Habit, I am enjoying the clarity of thinking, the effectiveness in my work, the extra time for my children, and the delight in friendship which fill my life now. I wouldn't try to fix what isn't broken by looking for a Significant Other.

A life of working with people I love at a Waldorf School, living in co-housing, reading, writing, and contra dancing suits me better than all my attempts to meet a man's expectations in a Relationship.

Ralph Nader was once asked about his private life, and he replied to the effect that, "A person who has an interesting public life doesn't have time to have an interesting private life." I've often pondered that and now consider it a sound basis for life, for those who can manage it. But I never thought that would include me. Surprise!

This fervent letter is only to suggest that

what we think we want might not be what we really need in order to be happy and contribute to others.

— **Lauren Ayers**

*Fair Oaks CA, Shasta Bioregion*

At the age of 13 I decided to never have children. Partly because I was saddled with four younger siblings, partly from fear of what the world would have to offer. There have been times when I've come close to changing my mind, but overpopulation has clinched the deal for me.

So, being a fairly normal woman, what do I do with my generative, nurturing instincts? For years I tried to make men happy. I would give them my trust, my money, my body, but it never seemed to be enough, for either of us. A dozen years ago I met an intelligent and very understanding man who has (mostly) stuck with me since then. We nurture each other. But there is still a lack.

A little over a year ago I decided that my child would be the Earth. She is everybody's mother, certainly; but just as an aging parent needs extra help and support, so does She.

So far I have done little: joining Nature Conservancy, helping out with Earth Day activities. But the Earth is in my mind almost all the time, much as a child would be. I can judge the worth and rightness of all my actions against what I perceive to be the Earth's best interests, and I am trying to form the most accurate picture I can.

— **Kathe Wilson**

*Bartlett IL, Heartland Bioregion*

## Laurel's community

I have been a fan of NEW OPTIONS for years but your Oct./Nov. issue was the most powerful yet.

If you know the *Laurel's Kitchen* books at all, you know that supporting loving families has been my first priority for years! So what I want to say to you may be a little surprising.

Everyone *does* need a loving family. But everyone doesn't have to get married and have children in order to "love [their] family with every breath." Your newsletter is aglow with the great love you have for people — not the "I love humanity, but it's people I can't stand" sort, either.

Maybe it would help if I told you about my family. I live in a community of 50, with Francisco, the youngest, a week old and our oldest, 80+ years. Some are married, many (about half) single. My husband and I don't have children but I can have an armful of kids any time, and still put in long hours at work. Not trying to be self-congratulatory here — it's what I wish for everyone. Especially you!

Surely, "love" is a much grander thing than

even the nuclear family, precious as that is, and if we can free it of its hampering association with sex, it can embrace everyone we meet. This society thinks love is sex. The only way I know of to reverse that is for some of us at least to make non-sexual loving our primary job.

The mystics talk about "love without an object" — I would say that anyone attempting great work must strive for it.

— **Laurel Robertson**

*Tomales CA, Shasta Bioregion*

*Laurel Robertson is co-author of my favorite cookbook, The New Laurel's Kitchen: A Handbook for Vegetarian Cookery (1986).*

## Come back when

I have been one of your readers for about three years. During that time I lost my wife to cancer, after her bearing me six lovely children (the oldest just turned 20, a brilliant freshman at Berkeley, prime candidate for the draft). I remarried last July and wrapped two more children into our family, and my wife, AIDS coordinator for our county, is pregnant.

I have taught sexual ethics to some extent in every introductory class in philosophy I teach. But nothing I've said has had as much impact as my completely unconscious, indeliberate references to my wife and children. The student evaluations constantly refer to it: "I like the way Prof. Dundon talks about his kids."

The students are afraid that they will not find happiness in marriage and family, but they feel themselves being drawn there.

I see, now, that my *primary obligation* is to show my great happiness at being in love, at being married, at being a father. Show it by sheer accident, by deliberate fidelity, never letting my eyes wander, never suggesting that

some outside interest would be anything except great pain to all. Students want to believe that fidelity is possible and is happy.

When it comes down to some kind of principle which can help them sort out the do's and don't's of sex, I have simply come down to this: "No matter how innocent, harmless and seductive it may seem, don't do anything that separates sex from the deepest, most committed and permanent love you are capable of." Don't run away from commitment — or, if you are not ready for it, do not imagine that you can, without causing great pain and damage to yourself and dear friends, enjoy the sweetness of sex.

I am glad I'm out of that world of "relationships" — so devoid of love — among whose injured ones I walked during my brief widowhood.

If you carry out your resolve to get married and have children, you will indeed have less time, but its quality will be higher and your search for policy answers will be more realistic. I remember the story of the leader of the postwar Italian Christian Democratic Party (somewhat left-leaning at the time) talking to his intellectual henchmen. They were bursting with schemes for social planning that were going to make great demands on the middle class and intellectual/political leaders.

The elderly leader finally began to fear their increasingly fervent enthusiasm, their boundless expectations of their capacity to create a New Italy. He said: "You are living like monks, and you expect the rest of the world to be able to live that way. Go out, fall in love, get married, and then come back and we will plan a real society."

Good luck in your good work.

— **Prof. Stanislaus J. Dundon**

*University of California at Davis*

*Davis CA, Central Valley Bioregion*

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Issue No. Seventy-three

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