

A Critique of the Feminist Charges Against Prostitution

Frances M. Shaver

ABSTRACT

The feminist support of the decriminalization of prostitution is limited to the support of prostitute women—it does not incorporate a defense of the business of prostitution. The reluctance to defend the business is grounded in the belief that the commercialization of human sexuality is immoral, degrading, and dangerous. These charges are evaluated in the light of available evidence. The hazards and degradation involved are linked, not to the buying and selling of sexual services but, to the broader social problems which create and maintain the current market conditions.

RÉSUMÉ

L'appui donné par les féministes à la décriminalisation de la prostitution se limite à la défense des prostituées; il ne s'étend pas à la défense du commerce de la prostitution. La réticence à prendre la défense de ce commerce est fondée sur la conviction que la commercialisation de la sexualité humaine est immorale, dégradante et dangereuse. Ces griefs sont évalués à la lumière de faits présentés ailleurs. Les dangers et la dégradation qu'implique la prostitution sont reliés, non pas à l'achat et à la vente des services sexuels, mais sur une plus large échelle aux problèmes sociaux qui créent et maintiennent les conditions actuelles du marché.

Introduction

According to a poll conducted for the Fraser Committee, 92 percent of Canadians are convinced that prostitution is here to stay (Fraser et al, 1985:398). Many would like to do something about it. The legal strategies proposed in the most recent debates on the topic vary considerably, both in terms of effectiveness and appropriateness, but all fall under one of three basic systems of control: *criminalization*, which involves the use of criminal sanction to control prostitution and any related activity; *legalization*, which has traditionally involved the licensing or registration of prostitutes and bawdy-houses and the requirement that prostitutes be monitored and checked for sexually transmitted diseases; and *decriminalization*, which involves the repeal of existing legislation (especially the soliciting section) on the grounds that prostitution is neither a crime nor a licensable activity.¹

Although there is little consensus among Canadians regarding which approach to take, decriminalization is the option espoused by the majority of women's groups across the country.

The Defense of Decriminalization

The feminist defense of the decriminalization of prostitution is strongly voiced and well argued. It is documented in the Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence of the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs (Canada,

1982a)², in the Fraser Committee Report on Pornography and Prostitution (Fraser et al, 1985)³, and in several other books and articles (CACSW, 1984b; Backhouse, 1984; McLeod, 1982; Ridington and Findlay, 1981; Woodward, 1980; James et al, 1977). The specific details of the policy espoused vary from group to group⁴, but the defense of decriminalization is essentially the same. It is based on two arguments: (1) a criticism of the formulation and enforcement of the prostitution laws and (2) an analysis of the underlying social problems that give rise to prostitution. In the former case, they charge that the prostitution laws are hypocritical, discriminatory, and sexist. As to the underlying conditions, they point to the relative poverty of women, the advantageous socio-economic position of men, and the sex role socialization of both sexes.⁵

Feminists have been able to provide some strong arguments and a great deal of evidence to uphold these charges. Furthermore, since there is nothing in the Fraser Committee Report (Fraser et al, 1985) to contradict their analysis, nor in the book entitled *Prostitution in Canada* (CACSW, 1984b), nor in my own assessment of their position (Shaver, 1985), no further challenge with regard to the validity of these particular charges or their defense of prostitute women is necessary. What does need to be challenged is their refusal to defend the profession. Prostitution, they argue, is dangerous and degrading and therefore, entirely undesirable as a profession. These charges were laid often and unequivocally in their submissions to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice

and Legal Affairs (Canada, 1982a) and to the Special Committee on Pornography and Prostitution (Fraser et al, 1985).⁶

Their reluctance to defend the business of prostitution is grounded in the belief that the commercialization of human sexuality is immoral, and in the hope that it will be eradicated in the long term through fundamental social change. These arguments, which become evident in an examination of their rejection of legalization and criminalization, merit closer examination, for although they too have been strongly voiced, they have not been adequately evaluated in the light of available evidence. The objective of this paper is to identify those charges and then to evaluate their validity. I argue that prostitution *can* be defended: The hazards and degradation involved are linked, not to the buying and selling of sexual services but, to the broader social problems which create and maintain current market conditions.

The Charges Inherent in the Rejection of Criminalization

The feminist rejection of the criminalization of prostitution activities (the current status quo) is based on the argument that what is needed is a non-sexist policy approach which will remove the hypocrisy, discrimination, and sexism in the law; reduce the economic disparity between women and men, and eradicate the double standard of sexual morality.

They concede that a criminalization policy could be applied in a non-sexist manner, but are quick to point out that such a policy would serve only to perpetuate the socio-economic disadvantage of women. The women who exchange sex for money are *not* criminals, they are "an exploited and victimized class of women, and must be recognized as such." According to the Victoria Status of Women Action Group, prostitution is simply a matter of survival for these women (VSWAG, 1983:34).

Similar sentiments are echoed by a number of other groups including The National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC, 1982, 1984), the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women (1984a, 1984b), and the National Association of Women and the Law (NAWL, 1983). In a brief prepared for the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs and endorsed by a number of women's groups⁷, the Vancouver Coalition for a Non-sexist Criminal Code argued that for some women in Canada, prostitution offers an income that would not otherwise be possible.

Faced with high levels of unemployment, inadequate training and educational opportunities, inequality in the workplace, and insufficient social services, women choose prostitution as a means of earning income. Economic pressures like these are exacerbated by social factors. Sex role stereotyping encourages girls and women to view themselves as sexual objects dependent on men (and encourages men to expect impersonal sexual services). In addition, studies show that up to 80 percent of prostitutes are victims of incest, rape or other forms of physical or sexual abuse in their childhood. For some women facing these economic and social pressures, prostitution offers a real alternative to criminal activity, welfare, and low-paying menial jobs (Canada, 1982b:37).

In other words, prostitution becomes an option for women in a society that endorses sexual bargaining and offers limited job opportunities to women.

The Alliance for the Safety of Prostitutes (ASP) states it more simply but no less eloquently: "We're not criminals, we're poor women trying to earn a living" (ASP n.d.).

The feminist rejection of criminalization provides simple and straight forward evidence of a resounding, though somewhat reluctant willingness to defend prostitute women: until the underlying social conditions can be changed, they must not be further jeopardized by being treated as criminals. The rejection of legalization as a policy option, however, is somewhat more complex. It provides several insights into the way in which feminists view the profession: prostitution offends them.

The Charges Inherent in the Rejection of Legalization

It is generally argued that legalization is an inappropriate policy approach since it implies social approval of a morally abhorrent, physically dangerous, and sexually degrading profession. These charges are clearly outlined in the position of the Victoria Status of Women Action Group:

Legalization implies the state's approval, and would legitimize not only recruiting, but violence and torture, giving sanction to the concept of a special class of women being maintained to take all the violent, abusive, and sick sexuality to protect 'good' women. It could, in addition, lead to such bizarre situations as prostitution being 'suggested' as a legitimate form of employment for women on welfare.

Legalization, with its attendant licensing and taxation of earnings, not only implies the state's approval, but its complicity in the exploitation of these women. The state becomes, in effect, pimp (VSWAG, 1983:36).

Similar sentiments are echoed in a number of other feminists writings including those already cited by the Vancouver Coalition for a Non-sexist Criminal Code, NAC, CACSW and by the Alliance for the Safety of Prostitutes (ASP, 1984).⁸

What becomes evident on closer examination of the feminists' rejection of both the prohibition and regulation of prostitution is their absolute refusal to condone the profession.

This reluctance to defend the business of prostitution is often grounded in the belief that no woman would "freely" choose to sell her body. That prostitution is seen as a last resort is clearly implied in the following allegations:

Whenever women are reduced to desperation, prostitution is the bottom line (Ridington and Findlay, 1981:14).

Prostitution offers a real alternative to criminal activity, welfare, and low-paying menial jobs (Canada, 1982b:37).

Women are compelled into a life of prostitution, usually, because they have *no other means* of economic livelihood (VSWAG, 1983:35).⁹

Prostitution will continue to be an option for some women as long as alternative means of economic support are difficult to obtain (CACSW, 1984b:94).

That it is seen as a last resort is also apparent in a marked predisposition to place the word choice between quotation marks, or to preface it with the word true as in "a true egalitarian society [is] one that allows all women and men to have *true freedom of choice*" (CACSW, 1984b:96 my emphasis).

The reluctance of Canadian feminists to admit that some women enter prostitution by choice is not shared by their counter parts south of the border. In 1982, the National Organization for Women passed a resolution affirming "the right of women to choose to work as prosti-

tutes when it is their choice" (NOW, n.d.). Note the lack of quotation marks around the words choose and choice.

The reluctance of Canadian feminists to defend the profession is also grounded in the hope that the long-term, social reforms they advocate will one day make it unnecessary.

In a society where women and men were completely equal, prostitution would be unthinkable (NAC, 1982:1).

Prostitution can be eradicated through fundamental social change (The Wolfenden Report, cited in NAC, 1982:9).

In a world like that [a truly egalitarian society] sexuality, companionship or security need not be bought or sold (CACSW, 1984a:29).

Further evidence of their reluctance to defend the profession is evident in their neglect to address certain issues. Violence, for example, is alluded to but there is little serious discussion with regard to its extent, its source, or to the techniques prostitutes develop to minimize it. Feminists are also prone to accept, uncritically, the stereotypical view of the pimp-prostitute relationship as violent and abusive and have very few complimentary things to say about customers. In some cases they have even argued that it is the aberrational behaviour of male customers which creates the need for prostitutes and furnishes the conditions in which other males are able to exploit them.¹⁰

Unfortunately, this has alienated prostitute women and made it difficult for feminists to fully ally themselves with them. It has also lead to a neglect on the part of feminists to adequately assess the validity of their own charges against the profession. This is a situation I wish to remedy.

Prostitution as Dangerous

Prostitute women certainly are at risk. Many of them are mentally, physically and sexually abused by their customers and their pimps. They also run the risks of disease, arrest and incarceration. In order, however, to access the validity of the feminist argument that prostitution is dangerous, we must first establish the extent to which these hazards exist and the extent to which they are linked to the commoditization of sex. Only then can we assess whether or not the dangers can be used to justify the position that prostitution should be eliminated and prostitutes rehabilitated for their own good.

A closer look at the business reveals that some of the occupational hazards just do not exist. According to the findings cited in the Fraser Committee Report and elsewhere, organized crime is not a factor in the business (Fraser et al, 1985:397; BC, 1979); most prostitutes are independent operators, "that is, they are not organized or managed by anyone other than themselves" (Fraser et al, 1985:378); and they are not a major cause of the spread of sexually transmitted disease (Fraser et al, 1985:397; Hart, 1977:70; James et al, 1977:46).

We may even have to lay aside the stereotypical view of the pimp-prostitute relationship as violent and abusive. It is not necessarily an accurate one. From the prostitutes' point of view there are at least two types of situations: the "pimp" as "lover," and the "pimp" as "business manager or owner" (Fraser et al, 1985:379; McLeod, 1982; Jaget, 1980; Layton, 1975) and they are adamant about the qualitative differences between the two (Lowman, 1985:36).¹¹ The former situation includes the boyfriend, the "old man" and the husband of the prostitute. Some of the men in this group will resort to the harassment techniques associated with professional pimps but they are the exception (Layton, 1975:148). Even so, they are not defined as pimps by the women with whom they live, nor seen by them "to be any more unethical for using their earnings than middle-class men enjoying their wife's second income" (Layton, 1975:147).

The law makes no distinction between the "lover" and the "business owner," a pimp is defined as a person who "lives wholly or in part on the earnings of a prostitute." Evidence that a person lives with or is habitually in the company of prostitutes is, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, accepted as proof that the person lives on the avails of prostitution. As a consequence, prostitutes are reluctant to talk about their men. Given the limited amount of information available, it is difficult to say which situation more accurately reflects the majority of pimp-prostitute relationships. Until that information is forthcoming feminists must give more credence to the testimony of prostitute women. So far they seem to have rejected the adamant pleas by prostitutes regarding the qualitative difference between a pimp and an "old man." Although feminists may not be ready to advocate the repeal, or even the reform, of the aspects of the pimping section of the criminal code which technically prevent a prostitute from cohabiting with a mate, they ought to question their apparent readiness to accept the stereotypical view of the pimp-prostitute relationship. To do otherwise contributes to the further alienation of prostitute women.

In other cases, the concern over occupational dangers may be misplaced since prostitutes have developed techniques to minimize them. They have regular medical check-ups, examine their customers for symptoms, and require them to use prophylactics (Fraser, 1985:384; McLeod, 1982; Prus and Irini, 1980; Woodward, 1980; James et al, 1977; Layton, 1975). To do otherwise would endanger their source of income.

They do not accept customers indiscriminately and usually develop techniques that help them to avoid many of the potentially dangerous ones. The Alliance for the Safety of Prostitutes in Vancouver and in Montreal publishes and distributes a "Bad Trick Sheet" describing and identifying the characteristics of dangerous customers. It has proved to be a useful tool in helping the prostitutes protect themselves. Furthermore, prostitutes are nowhere near as vulnerable to sexual harassment on the street as are non-prostitute women. On being harassed by a potential customer it is a simple matter for them to say "No," or "I'm not working tonight." If this does not work the situation will often require nothing more than a shout to a friend down the street: "Hey Jan, this here jerk thinks he can get a blow-job for \$25." The customer invariably responds by moving swiftly in the opposite direction. Non-prostitute women rarely think of, let alone use, such techniques.¹²

Risks increase once a prostitute is alone with a customer but even here techniques have been developed: prostitutes often work in pairs, noting when and with whom the other leaves and timing her return; desk clerks and bell hops are tipped and in return are expected to keep an eye on the time and an ear out for the sounds of violence. If returning to their apartments to complete a transaction, they will allude to a friend soon to arrive, or to the fact that the "trick pad" is shared with another (Fraser et al, 1985:384; McLeod, 1982; Jaget, 1982; Prus and Irini, 1980). In the escort business, "the customer and prostitute are carefully monitored by a third party" (Lowman, 1985:36).

The CACSW (1984b:45) concedes that a prostitute "MAY" be able to end a negotiation by claiming to be busy or not working, but on the whole, I found very little evidence that feminists take these arguments seriously. To do so would challenge their view of the offensive customer, and the "dark-side" of prostitution.¹³

In any case, most customers are pretty ordinary "guys." They represent a cross-section of ordinary men; not recruits from the deviant subculture. Prostitutes in Canada indicate that a majority of their customers are married

men between the ages of 30 and 50 who come from all social and economic backgrounds (Fraser et al, 1985:387). Estimates from British women (McLeod, 1982:75), from French women (Jaget, 1980), and from American women (James, 1977:48) working as prostitutes do nothing to challenge the Canadian view of the customer as "Mr. Average."

The fact that a job is hazardous cannot be regarded as a good reason to view it as undesirable. Police officers, for example, run considerable risks in their job but we seldom argue that police work should be prohibited. The usual course of action to hazards on a job is to minimize the risks involved by improving the working conditions. The individual prostitute does not need to be protected from herself if she is voluntarily involved in the commercial sex market. She, like the police officer, needs to be protected from the detrimental factors in her working environment.

An even stronger argument against those who propose that prostitution be abolished because of the hazards, is the fact that they are not inherently linked to the buying and selling of sex. The hazards are grounded in much broader social problems. When the Fraser Committee concluded that prostitutes do not appear to have higher levels of being sexually abused as children, it was not because they are unlikely to have been abused. It was "because [sexual abuse] appears to be such a common phenomenon in our society that the chance of any woman reaching adulthood without being the victim of an unwanted sexual act is approximately one in two" (Fraser et al, 1985:373).

All women in our society, not just prostitute women, are vulnerable to male violence and a great many of them are the actual targets of such violence. Women are beaten in their homes (in 1978 one in ten women were battered by the men with whom they lived), sexually harassed in the workplace, and held responsible for their own rape. In 1968, the system clearly stated that being a battered wife was grounds for divorce but it has yet to state clearly that such activity is undesirable. In London Ontario, in 1979, "police laid charges in only 3 percent of 222 cases of assault by men against their partners, although they advised 62 percent of the women to lay their own charges and advised 20 percent of them to seek medical attention" (RESPONSE, 1983:5). Prostitutes beaten and raped by their own customers are often told by the police that they have no case. This situation is not peculiar to prostitute women. Up until January 4, 1983, women raped by their husbands found themselves in the same situation, lacking grounds for a case. Rape of any kind is rarely investigated: out of every ten rapes reported only seven are investigated

and only three result in the arrest of a suspect. The average conviction rate in rape cases is 2 percent (CACSW Fact Sheet #4).

By way of comparison, there seems to be much less violence and fewer pimps involved in homosexual prostitution (Lowman, 1985:35-36; Fraser et al, 1985:379; Forbes, 1977). This is also highly supportive of the hypothesis that the violence involved in heterosexual prostitution is linked to gender differences rather than to the actual sale of sexual services.

Though one does not want to deny or make light of the increased risks taken by women who work as prostitutes, especially those who work in the streets, it is evident that most dangers are a consequence of their vulnerability as women rather than a consequence of their choice of profession. James (1977:44) is one of the few feminists writers to insist that the incidents of violence against prostitutes must be considered in the context of the number of women abused in society as a whole. It is an argument which needs to be taken much more seriously and evaluated more extensively.

Prostitution as Degrading

As for the charge of degradation, feminists argue that prostitution constitutes an extreme instance of the inequality between the sexes. It is seen to be closely related to the portrayal of women in pornography and the use of beautiful women in commercial advertising. As long as the female sex is up for sale just like any other commercial object, there can be no true liberation from oppression.

It is certainly true that women in our society are exploited in this manner, and as a consequence, some credence has to be given to the argument that the buying and selling of women's bodies institutionalizes the exploitation of all women. But only in some respects.

First and foremost, it must be clarified that it is sexual services that are being bought and sold through prostitution, not bodies. This is in contrast to commercial advertising where bodies are associated with the products. If prostitutes did sell their bodies, they would no longer be prostitutes but sexual slaves. The evidence provided in the proceeding section, that prostitutes operate independently of pimps and exercise a considerable degree of control over their customers, clearly indicates that they sell their services, not their bodies. This simple fact needs to be emphasized because the misnomer contributes to and maintains a distorted view about prostitution. Secondly, it is the cur-

rent socio-economic and legal conditions which produce the exploitation of women and not the sale of sexual services. In this respect, prostitution as we know it (as it is currently practiced) is a consequence of exploitation rather than a cause. For the most part, it is the relatively poor and powerless (women and adolescents) who are selling these services and the relatively rich and powerful (men) who are buying them; it is the sellers who are denigrated and penalized and the buyers who are protected from arrest and exposure. Feminists have not failed to notice this. Their defense of decriminalization is firmly grounded in a criticism of the formulation and enforcement of the law, and an analysis of the underlying social problems that give rise to prostitution in its present form. They have simply failed (or refused) to follow their arguments through to their logical conclusion—to do so would leave open the possibility that fundamental social change could just as easily foster egalitarian prostitution as eradicate it.

Prostitution as Morally Abhorrent

The third charge against prostitution as a profession is laid on the grounds that the commoditization of sex is morally abhorrent. This position seems to be sustained by the belief that the sale of sex dehumanizes sexual relations. Commercial sex is usually held to be cold, impersonal and impoverished. This was the position taken by the CACSW in their presentation to the Fraser Committee (CACSW, 1984a:18).

The problem with the argument is that it contrasts a sexual ideal with prostitutional sex. This completely disregards the fact that the sexual relations experienced by most people fall far short of this ideal. Here too, we find that sexual relations are often characterized by brevity, impersonality and a lack of mutual affection. While it may be unusual for the sexual transaction between customer and prostitute to take more than 20 to 30 minutes (Fraser, 1985:384), Kinsey et al (1953) noted that the effort devoted to foreplay by married couples is generally brief and perfunctory, and Fisher (1973:181) found in his studies that the amount of time typically devoted to foreplay ranges from 11 to 16 minutes with 12.5 being the median of the means in the six different studies he conducted.

Is abstinence to be the only option if the ideal cannot be attained? Implicit to the feminist argument is the notion that sex without mutual affection is unacceptable. While I am willing to concede that sex without mutual affection may be of poorer quality than that aspired to in the romantic ideal, it does not follow that it (sex pure and

simple) is unacceptable or inhuman. Taking sex out of the market place will not humanize it, for the market place is not the only context in which non-mutual, impersonal, and impoverished sexual relations are to be found. Blatant sexual bargaining goes on in singles clubs, in the back seats of cars, in the office, and in marriage. If sexual relations between people are to be humanized, we need to begin at a much more basic level.

Both men and women need to be liberated from the harness of their respective sex roles. But in order to be able to do this, we must liberate ourselves from those mental fossils which prevent us from looking upon sex and sexuality with the same naturalness as upon our cravings for food and drink (Ericsson, 1980:355).

Focusing on the exchange of cash for sex as the dehumanizing factor tends to distort and evade the extent of the more basic problem. It also contributes to the further alienation of prostitute women who interpret this charge as a judgement call against them.

Conclusion

It is not prostitution which is unsavory or undesirable. It is the broader socio-economic conditions which support and maintain it in its present form. If we want to take steps to reduce the hazards and degradation of prostitution we need first to re-evaluate our assessment of it as a distasteful profession. If this results in the legitimation of the profession, so be it. It will reduce the tension between prostitute and non-prostitute women, increase the chance to work in the full alliance, and contribute to the successful implementation of long-range programs aimed at eradicating both the socio-economic disparity between women and men and the double standard of sexual morality (Shaver, 1985).

These programs will *modify* rather than eliminate prostitution. If the result is a form of prostitution which is free from emotional prejudice; where those who become prostitutes are adults who are not compelled to do so; where prostitutes are no more economically exploited than other wage workers; and where the buying and selling of sexual services is equally available to both women and men then, why should we refuse to defend it?

NOTES

1. See Fraser et al (1985: Chapter 39) for a discussion of the range and character of these options and Shaver (1985) for an evaluation.

2. Several women's groups appeared before the Standing Committee including the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC), the National Association of Women and the Law (NAWL), the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies, the Vancouver Elizabeth Fry Society, The Toronto Elizabeth Fry Society and the Victoria Status of Women Action Group (VSWAG). Other groups, including the Vancouver Association of Women and the Law, and the British Columbia Federation of Women, submitted their briefs in concert with the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association, under the name of the Vancouver Coalition for Non-sexist Criminal Code.
3. The majority of women's groups appearing before the Fraser Committee espoused decriminalization (Fraser et al, 1985:358). These groups included: NAC; the Vancouver Status of Women; VSWAG; the Manitoba Action Committee on the Status of Women; Feminist Research Group, Regina; the Elizabeth Fry Society of Toronto, and the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women (CACSW). The latter group argued for partial decriminalization only.
4. NAC and the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies, for example, advocate the removal of street soliciting from the *Criminal Code* and the repeal of the common bawdy-house provisions. The CACSW advocates a strengthened soliciting section and the loosening of the bawdy-house provision to allow a small number of prostitutes to work out of their residences. Another option, articulated by Professor Connie Backhouse and a group of women law students, advocates that all proscriptions against prostitutes be removed from the *Code* but that penalties against purchasers, those operating bawdy-houses and those living on the avails be stiffened.
5. See Shaver (1985b) for a short description of these arguments.
6. Feminists share this distaste for the profession with most Canadians—even the Fraser Committee referred to it as an "unsavory profession" (Fraser et al, 1985:387).
7. This brief was endorsed by the Vancouver Status of Women, the Victoria Status of Women Action Group, the Street Walkers and Street Workers Ad Hoc Association of Vancouver (later to become the Alliance for the Safety of Prostitutes (ASP)), the Vancouver Women's Bookstore, the Vancouver Elizabeth Fry Society, and NAC.
8. The Canadian Organization for the Rights of Prostitutes (CORP) argues against legalization for different reasons. The group has no quarrel with the idea of society condoning prostitution, its members want simply to be recognized as legitimate service workers with an independent status and argue that legalization as traditionally practiced interferes with this wish (CORP, 1984).
9. Emphasis in the original.
10. This case was made most strongly by Prof. Constance Backhouse and students from the Faculty of Law, University of Western Ontario, in their brief to the Fraser Committee (See Fraser et al [1985:520-521] for a brief description of this position). Other groups also argue that it is the needs of male clients who create the market, for example see VSWAG (1983:38) and Ridington and Findlay (1981:17-18).
11. Lowman (1985) provides a capsule summary of the results of the five regional prostitution surveys commissioned by the Department of Justice for the Fraser Committee. The five studies include a total of 272 interviews with prostitutes.
12. This information is based on interviews I conducted while doing research on prostitution for the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women. An abridged version of the report appears in (CACSW, 1984b).
13. Such a reaction is not peculiar to feminists. The members of the Badgley Committee also tended to overstate the role of pimps and violence in juvenile prostitution and to discredit the testimony of the prostitutes interviewed for their study (Lowman, 1987).

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Nobody Is Afraid of the Sky

When a school teacher returns home
 she is suddenly afraid
 because the hand-knit afghan
 in alternating rows of yellow, gold, orange and white
 is smothering her
 Her fingernails cut open her palms

A grandmother is unable to walk down the street
 she feels she is losing control
 of her breathing
 when her husband is even ten minutes late for dinner

Like the scientists who invented the nuclear
 bomb because the theory was so beautiful, so
 pure, they have invented simple fear, pure fear
 Nobody is afraid of the sky. They're afraid
 of the fear they have inside them, or so
 the theory says, they're going to
 fly apart, going to die, going to go crazy and this,
 too, is fear

yet they are still afraid of the sky
 prairie hailstorms that erupt
 smashing a librarian's living room window
 and then vanish

the rainbowed foothills light rain
 we are driving back toward the city
 when the car has a close encounter
 with the sun almost setting on top of us
 in burnished brightening colour
 I have never seen anything like it in the east
 is it the atmosphere, the altitude, the imagination
 kindled by an unrelenting terrain of sloping hills
 and silhouetted farm animals huddled together for the
 moment
 they resemble an indigenous herd that levelled tree and
 shrub
 in each direction for a thousand miles

The majority of doctors have no idea
 how could a grown woman possibly be afraid
 I look normal I don't start having seizures
 or foaming at the mouth, but my reactions are
 not normal
 Maybe it's just the things that happen
 When the symptoms started they made me feel
 like I had to be in control

there is a collision

there are dozens of thoughts that flow through
 your mind it is instantaneous

it is necessary to blame others when
 you have nerves that go off like a gun
 it is difficult to admit your own mind has be-
 trayed you
 I thought life isn't supposed to be that way
 I was ashamed and guilty...I wondered
 if life would have been different
 Well, life isn't supposed to be anything

Travel (driving, even walk-
 ing) seems to be at the heart of it

I live with tension This is the coda of fear
 the control is gone I have to just lie there

and let the world spin by

Anne Richard Burke
 Alberta