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## **Prostitution in Graphic Narratives**

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## **Streszczenie**

Celem niniejszej pracy jest przedstawienie obrazu prostytucji w komiksie amerykańskim. Analizie poddane zostały wszystkie rodzaje *graphic narratives* rozpoczynając od karykatur a na komiksie głównego nurtu kończąc. Obraz prostytucji wyłaniający się z danego przekazu obrazkowego został skonfrontowany z rolą i sytuacją prostytucji w kulturze amerykańskiej. Praca pokazuje w jaki sposób prostytucja i osoba prostytutki przedstawiona jest w różnych rodzajach *graphic narratives* oraz stwierdza w jak dużym stopniu rola i rzeczywiste aspekty zawodu zostały w tych rodzajach odzwierciedlone.

## **Słowa kluczowe**

prostytucja , prostytutka, amerykański komiks *mainstreamowy*, amerykański komiks *undergroundowy*, strip.

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## Introduction

During one of his lectures Vladimir Nabokov said the following to his students:

We should always remember that the work of art is invariably the creation of a new world, so that the first thing we should do is study that new world as closely as possible, approaching it as something brand new, having no obvious connection with the worlds we already know.<sup>1</sup>

The master of modern novel was deeply convinced that even the most realistic work of art is still only a manufactured creation. Naturally, in realistic works fiction may mirror reality closely, but it is still artificial reality created by a human being. In this respect comic books are also “synthetic” worlds not obliged to mirror reality. Each comic book brings a unique world with its own inimitable rules and sensibility. “The realistic approach and the fantastic approach are both just that: approaches, styles, ways to turn conceptual imagination into narrative artifice.”<sup>2</sup>

This paper in no respect challenges Nabokov’s views. Comic books portray artificial worlds designed by their authors, worlds that are patchworks of concepts depicted in sequences of images and words. However, it may be said that for human beings reality is also only a complex of concepts and symbols. According to Jacques Lacan only objects that do not undergo symbolization or conceptualization belong to reality: “the Real is located outside Symbolic.”<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the mind of a human being changes every perceptual image or stimuli into concepts. It means that human beings are unable to actually know reality – they can only perceive the real world through concepts. In this

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<sup>1</sup> Comic Book Resources, Callahan, Timothy. 2009. Good Readers and Good Comics. <http://www.comicbookresources.com/?id=19851&page=article>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Lacan, J., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954-1955* (W. W. Norton & Company, 1991).

respect one can analyze sequential art<sup>4</sup> as the symbolic and conceptual view of reality – the vision of the author of fictitious work who is able to transport his concepts onto the paper and present them to the reader in the act of remediating the conceptualizations of reality.

As Scott Mc Cloud said in his work *Understanding Comics*:

All the things we experience in life can be separated into two realms, the realm of the concept and the realm of the senses. [. . .] By deemphasizing the appearance of the physical world in favor of the idea of form, cartoon places itself in the world of concepts. Through traditional realism, the comic artist can portray the world without and through the cartoon the world within.<sup>5</sup>

Following McCloud, this paper treats the contents of comic books as concepts that illustrate the world author lives in. The concepts and the structures of the story reflect the problems that pervade society as well as social and cultural shifts and changes of values. Comic book authors depict their subjective, conceptual visions of some facets of reality they live in. It can be stated that comic books, like other literary forms, reflect their times in both form and content. Consequently, careful analyses may reveal many interesting aspects of social, historical and artistic background behind each such work. What is more, as a medium controlled by moral authorities to a lesser extent than films or literature, comic books comment on controversial issues and feature social groups absent from the mainstream media, shedding a new light on our reality and providing unique points of view.

The examples of how the reality and fictitious worlds of sequential arts connect are numerous. Comic strips, the precursor of comic books which became popular in the late-19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, were “syndicated strips [...] satiriz[ing] the foibles of domestic life,

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<sup>4</sup> Art forms that use sequence of images to graphic storytelling and conveying information. The term was first used by Will Eisner In his book *Comics and Sequential Art*.

<sup>5</sup> Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (Harper Paperbacks, 1994).

social relations, and ethnicity in the tradition of vaudeville routines.”<sup>6</sup> In today’s world such strips appear in almost every newspaper and often convey some form of social or political commentary. With the continuous evolution of form and the implementation of “pulp” stories comic books became targeted at wider audiences. With the spread of themes and issues illustrated in comic books, their influence on society also widened. Bradford W. Wright argues that in the times of Great Depression comic books together with literature and movies “served therapeutic, patriotic and even conservative ends.”<sup>7</sup> The adventures of the first star of the comic industry Superman mirrored the United States of the 1930s and 1940s. His adventures reflect a conflict between corporations and common people, and illustrate social reforms of those times and corruption of the police or government officials. The adventures of the hero, who brought the comic book market to peaks of popularity, reflected on the concept of America as a “land where the virtue of the poor and the weak towered over that of the wealthy and powerful. Yet the common man could not expect to prevail on his own.”<sup>8</sup> Whatever the image was, its presence in comic books as well as in social consciousness of American people was the proof that sequential art became a medium in which the country could be commented on and reflected. During World War II comic books became the propaganda tool. Their distorted reflection of the war with Americans as flawless heroes and the Japanese and Germans depicted as inhumane murderers formed the attitudes of young American boys going to war.

Not only general issues may be reflected in comic books but also specific concepts. Superman’s female counterpart – Wonder Woman – is seen by the contemporary academics as an embodiment of both “a pitch to ambitious girls”<sup>9</sup> and “object of male

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<sup>6</sup> Bradford W. Wright, *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America* (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

sexual fantasies and fetishes.”<sup>10</sup> However, it must be kept in mind that these adventure comics were mainly targeted at young audiences who were mainly interested in the outfits and the superpowers of the protagonists and their adversaries. The complexity of both the realities of the world and the personality of the protagonist was not needed nor expected. “Yet comic book creators also incorporated real-world concerns into their fantasy tales, even though the limitations of the medium, the market and the industry reduced it to exaggeration and formulaic predictability.”<sup>11</sup> Comic books in the 1950s depicted young girls as eager to marry early and become devoted housewives, which both reflected the contemporary state of social affairs and encouraged youngsters to pursue such course of life. Sequential art can also accurately depict lives of specific people or realities of particular places. Many of Will Eisner’s works focus exclusively on New York City and there are comic books that present accurate biographies of famous people, including a recent graphic novel illustrating the life and works of governor of Alaska Sarah Palin.

In the 1960s comic books matured, reflecting disappointment with the ideals of the middle class, politics and the Vietnam War. All new social trends and phenomena of the times were reflected in comic books – feminism, hippie movement, civil rights for Afro-Americans and gays, and environmentalism. When social changes occurred they were simultaneously present in the fictitious world of comic books. The superheroes of the 1940s and the 1950s were depicted as taking part in Vietnam war and being disappointed with life and their own existence. And in today’s world the exhibits like *The Superhero as Society’s Mirror, From World War II to Iraq*<sup>12</sup> are focused on the relation between comic book images and the social and political realities.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Wright, *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*.

<sup>12</sup> “Reflecting Culture: The Evolution of American Comic Book Superheroes - Montclair Art Museum - Art - New York Times,” [http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/14/arts/design/14comi.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/14/arts/design/14comi.html?_r=1).



All the examples presented above demonstrate that the realities of everyday life can be successfully portrayed in the fictitious worlds of comic books. Even disguised superheroes can be read as epitomes of current notions in the real society their authors live in. A similar view can be applied to prostitutes regarded as a group present both in reality and fictitious words of sequential art. This thesis will undertake the analysis the image and role of the above mentioned group in comic books and compare the findings to their social role in the real world.

The social background for the analysis will be provided in the first chapter. It will discuss social realities of the profession and the place of the prostitute in the American society. Against such data many aspects of the image depicted in comic books will become more visible.

The following three chapters will be devoted to the analyses of the works of sequential art in which prostitutes appear. The choice of works is as broad as possible to give a sense of the spectrum of such portrayals. The image of the profession will be discussed in three groups of sequential art: comic strips, underground comics, and the mainstream analyzed together with alternative comics. The works in each chapter will be scrutinized through the prism of findings from the first chapter. In this way the comparative image of prostitution portrayed in each of the categories of sequential art should emerge.

The thesis as a whole will attempt to answer the question how the prostitute is portrayed in sequential art from comic strips, to mainstream comic books and graphic novels, to underground comics and whether this image reflects the social realities of the profession.

## **Chapter One**

### **Prostitution – its History, Characteristics and Role in Contemporary Society.**

This chapter analyzes the history of prostitution, the term itself, structures of the profession, its social role and receptions. The discussion will address as few specific details as possible and constitute more of a being bird's eye view of the profession. It should also be borne in mind that probably none of the authors of comic books analyzed here was concerned with examining prostitution. More often than not, they built their image mostly on what is widely known, distorting it additionally with their own feelings and false stereotypes.

The sight of a streetwalker gives a common trespasser a set of diverse feelings varying from contempt to envy. This nameless woman is often talk about, condemned or pitied. Nevertheless almost nobody asks himself, how such a person/profession appeared in the human society and what led to the current situation where their position is perceived mainly as negative. To properly understand the nature of prostitution it is essential to know its diverse history and examine the place it had in the past.

The prostitute has been present in human societies since the ancient times. Depending on the set of values established by the community she was a saint guardian, a servant to gods, or an essential part of the established social order, where she served men in various ways. Only with the rise of Christianity did the prostitute become a sinner isolated from other members of the community.

In Hindu temples, priestesses were at the same time prostitutes. They were selected girls, beautiful and well-mannered. Their role was not only to worship gods but also to transmit their mystical enlightenment to men, additionally providing them with mental

comfort and bodily pleasures. Socially, Hindu prostitutes were favorably perceived and were the source of positive values. Their “kindness” called “charis” was the basis of the word “charity,” an expression hardly associated with prostitutes today. In the ancient Egypt, and other countries of the region, prostitutes of the temple were guardians of the hours:

Dancing harlots came to be called Hours: Persian *hour*, Greek *horae*.

Egyptian temple-women also were Ladies of the Hour. Each ruled a certain hour of the night, and protected the solar boat of Ra in the underworld during his passage through her hour. The Dance of the Hours began as a pagan ceremony of the *Horae* (divine Whores) who kept the hours of the night by dances(...). The oldest authentic Hebrew folk dance is still called *hora* after the circle dances of the sacred harlots. The *Horae* also guarded the gates of heaven, ministered to the souls of the blessed, and turned the heavenly spheres.<sup>1</sup>

In the temples of Ishtar, a very old Sumer deity, every woman present in the building was treated as the embodiment of the goddess herself and thus worshipped by every man who entered and had sexual intercourse with her.<sup>2</sup> However, religious practices varied, and not only priestesses but also secular women prostituted themselves in certain situations:

In Cyprus where Ishtar was known by the name Aphrodite, it was the custom that unmarried women should prostitute themselves at the goddess' sanctuary and give the profit to the goddess. In Ishtar's temple in Babylon, all women, without regard to their class, acted as a prostitute at least once.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “History of prostitution,” Hometown com., <http://hometown.aol.com/queen0fhades666/prostitution.html>.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> “Ishtar : Ancient Goddess of Love and War,” Dragonrest, <http://www.dragonrest.net/histories/ishtar.html>.

Similar customs were not unthinkable in the times of the Roman Empire. The wives of high officials could take the role of prostitutes for a short time, when the prophecy was needed.

In ancient Egypt and Asia Minor prostitutes were treated with respect and enjoyed high social status, often accompanying high officials or becoming queens and princesses themselves. Their high prestige stemmed from the fact that they were treated as embodiments of deity called *Quadeshet* – the Great Whore.<sup>4</sup> In Greek society there were two classes of prostitutes: *auletrides* and *hetairai* – the former a kind of musicians, street performers, acrobats and striptease dancers and the latter very exclusive and highly educated women meeting with powerful men of their times.<sup>5</sup>

From the examples given above, it can be noticed that the role of prostitutes in the ancient societies, which are the sources of the Western culture, was not limited to servicing men. Just the opposite, sexual intercourse was only an element completing a vast range of her services in the society and the prostitute herself was often perceived in spiritual rather than physical terms.

Nevertheless, with the rise of Christianity, the status of courtesans changed when Christians, so hostile to pagan mythology and beliefs, tried to deprive prostitutes of their connection to gods and goddesses. The main point was that most prostitutes were at the same time priestesses worshiping other gods, thus promoting other religions and violating the First Commandment. All prostitutes in ancient mythology were substituted with “virgins” and temple priestesses deprived of their honors and spirituality:

Real horae were relegated to hora-houses, no longer temples. The traditional red light of the whorehouse descended from the houses of

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<sup>4</sup> “History of prostitution,” <http://hometown.aol.com/queen0fhades666/prostitution.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

Roman *venerii* who displayed the sign of an erect phallus, painted blood red.<sup>6</sup>

With this single move the isolated courtesans lost their influence in society. They became similar to the prostitutes present in the Hebrew society, where this kind of women had nothing in common with cultural or spiritual dimension of life. They were simply servicing men, although were not in any case condemned for their performance:

being a prostitute (harlot or *zonah* in Hebrew) herself, if single, is guilty of no biblical crime unless she is a priest's daughter [ . . . ] Prostitution was common in biblical times. In proverbs men are warned against squandering their money foolishly on prostitutes. But it was a money issue not morality. There was no law against prostitution for non-Hebrew women.<sup>7</sup>

In the Middle Ages prostitutes were perceived as sinful but nevertheless needed. Saint Augustine preached that if it were not for prostitutes, the world would vanish under the chaos of lust, and that for a man it is advisable to release any of his “unnatural needs” with a prostitute and not with wife.<sup>8</sup> The only widely-known prostitute present in the spiritual realm and presented as a positive character was Mary Magdalene. Her person was in fact an artificial creation amalgamated from four Mary-s mentioned in the Bible, only one of whom is the sinner prostitute that washes feet of Jesus and follows him, briefly mentioned in the Gospel according to Saint Luke<sup>9</sup> She was one of many unnamed figures in the New Testament until, under the influence of Pope Gregory I’s sermon, she became identified with Mary of Bethany (the sister of Martha and Lazarus) and the actual Mary

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Sexwork.com., “Prostitution Is Not A Biblical Conflict,” Sexwork Cyber Resource Center <http://www.sexwork.com/coalition/christian.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Augustine, St., *Divine Providence And The Problem Of Evil: A Translation Of St. Augustine's De Ordine*, (Kessinger Publishing, LLC, 2008), 38.

<sup>9</sup> St. Luke, 7, 37-38.

Magdalene, the exorcised woman who followed Jesus later and spoke to him after his resurrection. Moreover, Pope Gregory I emphasized Mary's sin:

Gregory identified Mary as *peccatrix*, a sinful woman, using her as a model for the repentant sinner, but he did not call her *meretrix*, a prostitute. [. . .] Gregory's identification and the consideration of the woman's sin as sexual later gave rise to the image of Mary as a prostitute.<sup>10</sup>

Since the publication of that sermon, Mary Magdalene, a more powerful figure by reason of combining four female figures in one, together with her sinfulness and repentance entered the Christian tradition. In the vernacular sphere she may till this day symbolize the dualistic nature of a woman. She is simultaneously the sinful Eve, who tempted Adam, and is, therefore responsible for all the sins of humankind that followed, and the holy Mary, the mother of Christ, who, by giving birth to the Son of God, redeemed human race. For many Catholics she represents such an ambiguous woman: a virgin and a prostitute in one:

For the stereotypical Catholic schoolboy, she's an equal part of his two-fold dilemma concerning each woman he meets: Are you another face of Mary, the mother of God, full of grace and free from sin - someone who could be my true love? Or are you another face of Mary Magdalene, the prostitute and sinner who repented after Jesus saved her from being stoned by a mob - the same Mary who then saw the risen Christ first?<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Wikipedia. The Free Encyklopedia, "Mary Magdalene – Wikipedia, the free encyklopedia," Wikipedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary\\_Magdalene#Identification\\_as\\_a\\_prostitute](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Magdalene#Identification_as_a_prostitute).

<sup>11</sup> Victor Greto, Religion News, "New look at Mary Magdalene," [http://www.thenazareneway.com/new\\_look\\_at\\_mary\\_magdalene.htm](http://www.thenazareneway.com/new_look_at_mary_magdalene.htm).

The image is still so strong that some clients of prostitutes like them to play Mary Magdalene. Ms. Victor, a prostitute, recollects a client who “set a table like the Last Supper and sat in a robe and sandals and wanted you to play Mary Magdalene.”<sup>12</sup>

The figure of Mary, as a reflection of the moral duality of women turns attention to the fact that in Western civilization women have been perceived through the contrasting lens of their sexuality: as pure, restrained virgins deprived of sexual drive and as a sinful temptress.

The most difficult aspect of sex, widely acknowledged both by physicians and by priests, was its highly pleasurable nature, an aspect variously thought to indicate its inherently natural and/or sinful qualities. As a consequence of this duality, sex was most often depicted in extreme ways that ignored the well-balanced middle ground inhabited by most medieval people. Celibacy or whoredom, chastity or adultery -- in literature and art there was often no middle ground, and these oppositional portrayals bled over specifically into depictions of women. Because of their manifestly "other" nature (not male, and therefore not, when specifically called "women," able to participate in the "default" category that would allow them to exist outside of gender), women became inextricably bound up in sexuality, as a result of which all women in medieval art and literature carry some sort of sexual association -- chaste and virginal or depraved and sexually voracious -- to a greater or lesser degree. Female figures who participate in sexual activities are noted for their participation, and those who abstain are noted for their celibacy, but very rarely if at all is a non-allegorical

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<sup>12</sup> “Shanel Yang - Easy Steps to Success » Interview with the Prostitute,” <http://shanelyang.com/2008/01/06/interview-with-the%20-prostitute/>.

woman depicted without some reference to her life or potential life as a sexual being.<sup>13</sup>

These sharp contrasts are a very important part of the phenomenon of prostitution and will be closely examined later on, since in the contemporary society many women identify themselves as either, “decent” or “bad,” with the latter surprisingly often embodied in a person of a prostitute.

The image of the ancient prostitute-priestess with sexuality and spirituality bound together in a harmonious whole and the image of Mary Magdalene, a fatal hybrid of holy purity and sinful sensuality significantly influence the image of the prostitute in comic books. Nevertheless, a history of prostitution and its position in the society is only the first step in the discussion. The definition of what prostitution is today is also necessary.

What is meant by the term “prostitution” in contemporary Western culture? The following part of the chapter will be devoted not only to answering this question but also to arriving at a description that will inform the subsequent discussion of comic books. It should be as broad as possible to include a vast world of sex-services that are commodified in the society, while the next two chapters will demonstrate if and how this sphere is presented in the fictional world of comic books and graphic novels.

As this thesis is mainly focused on the examination of the world of prostitution in the United States, the legal U.S. definition of the term “prostitution” is in order. As the law varies from state to state with Nevada legalizing what is seen as an offence in other states, it is perhaps advisable to find some common legal denominators. The most common denominator for all US states is as follows:

The term "prostitution" generally means the commission by a person of any natural or unnatural sexual act, deviate sexual

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<sup>13</sup> River Campus Libraries. University of Rochester, “Sex, Society, and Medieval Women,” Library Rochester Education, <http://www.library.rochester.edu/camelot/medsex/text.htm>.



intercourse, or sexual contact for monetary consideration or other thing of value.<sup>14</sup>

The broadness of this description does not minimize its accuracy. Moreover, although it was created through combining various letters of American law, it sounds surprisingly similar to what Mihael Zhou has come to trying to find such definition that would reflect how most ordinary people perceive the word “prostitution” in their minds:

Prostitution is a commercial act of exchange in which there are a buyer and a seller, and what is being exchanged is physical sex.<sup>15</sup>

In his essay, Zhou also turns attention to the process of eliminating all the extraneous factors from this definition. In his description of “prostitution” the author recognized gender, age, legality of the transaction, role of the middlemen in it, and, which seems the least obvious, consent as irrelevant. According to his findings, prostitution happens among members of both genders, at almost all ages, and its legalization does not change its character. Pimps or madams may be present to control the transactions, although many prostitutes work on their own. As far as consent is concerned, thousands of unfortunate victims of human trafficking have never had the right to decide over their occupation. This broad definition seems suitable for this thesis on account of being based on what people think – the paper is precisely preoccupied with the mental images of comic book authors, and not facts and data.

Unfortunately, this definition has one dangerous generalization. It includes only physical sex as a commodity. It is, in fact, how most people perceive the act of prostitution, but at the same time such definition excludes acts of selling non-physical sex-services which are not infrequent, especially in high-quality prostitution services. If Zhou’s description was to be followed, then erotic dancing, phone sex, and dating in exchange for

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<sup>14</sup> USLegal Inc., “Prostitution Law & Legal Definition,” <http://definitions.uslegal.com/p/prostitution/>.

<sup>15</sup> The Dialectic Ad Absurdum Too much talk, Not enough sex, “A Formal Definition of Prostitution,” <http://thedialectica.blogspot.com/2008/03/formal-definition-of-prostitution.html>.

career opportunities or money compensation would have to be excluded while still being a part of the phenomenon:

Prostitution [. . .] includes everything from the prostitute on the street who is forced to have sex with whomever her pimp chooses to the ‘upper class’ prostitute who is able to choose her own clients and might even be attracted to, or have ‘long term relationships’ with some of her clients. It also touches on delicate subjects as women having sexual relationships with their bosses to move forward in their careers, or dates ending up with the expectation of sex as a compensation for the money spent on the girl earlier in the evening.<sup>16</sup>

The last two categories may seem puzzling since they appear to be far from what most people consider an act of prostitution. What makes them look decent is the fact that such activities often resemble long-term relationships and give both sides of the transaction the feeling that there is some intimacy between them. In the Polish publication treating the so-called “sponsoring” (having stable, long relationship established only for sexual intercourse) in Warsaw, the author considers if this phenomenon is an act of prostitution or not:

Prostytucja polega na częstej zmianie partnerów, a sponsoring to związek stały, choć oparty na czerpaniu finansowych korzyści z seksu, bez angażowania emocji, ale tak bywa i w małżeństwie. [...] Granica między prostytutką a sponsoringiem jest płynna. W przypadku tego ostatniego układ jest jasny: spotkania za pieniądze lub prezenty. [...] To prosty,

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<sup>16</sup> Camilla Kronqvist, “Is Prostitution Morally Wrong?” Sexual Relationships for Bryn Browne Department of Philosophy, University of Wales Lampeter available online at <http://web.abo.fi/~ckronqvi/files/prostitution.pdf>.

handlowy układ – ona ma coś czego chce on, a on ma coś, czego pragnie ona.<sup>17</sup>

In the quotation, such relationship is called a “business relationship.” This may be an argument for including it among prostitution activities. Moreover, when exclusive prostitutes are examined further in this chapter, it becomes clear that their relations with clients remind closely those of “sponsoring” with the only difference being the occupation of the girl. In the first case the client deals with a professional prostitute while in the other with a person with financial needs.

While Zhou’s definition seems to be insufficient, Roberta Perkins in her essay suggests a different view on the profession:

Prostitution is a business transaction understood as such by the parties involved and in the nature of a short term contract in which one or more people pay an agreed price to one or more other people for helping them gain sexual gratification by various methods.<sup>18</sup>

In this case intercourse is characterized by the term “various methods,” which may include a vast diversity of services clients pay for. Nevertheless, for the definition to be suitable for this thesis, one detail should be changed. The phrase “short term contract” excludes long relationships established for having sex and some cases of exclusive prostitution. The final description should then be as follows:

Prostitution is a business transaction understood as such by the parties involved and in the nature of a contract in which one or more people pay an agreed price to one or more other people for helping them gain sexual gratification by various methods.

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<sup>17</sup> Renata Gardian, *Zjawisko sponsoringu jako forma prostytucji kobiecej*, (Warszawa: Impuls, 2007), 51.

<sup>18</sup> Australian Government. Australian Institute of Criminology, “Prostitution : a work-based occupation [in: Working girls : prostitutes, their life and social control],” <http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/lcj/working/ch1-1.html>.

As a result, the above definition will allow for considering as much of the world of sex-services as possible and fit its comic-book versions.

So far the historical background has been given, and the definition of what is meant by prostitution in contemporary western societies and in this work has been discussed. The next step is to take a closer look at the structure of prostitution. It will be extremely helpful during the analysis of the image of prostitutes in comic books, as each fictional character represents a specific group.

Prostitution is a complex phenomenon and its structure can be viewed from numerous perspectives. In this work various groups of prostitutes, including not only women but also men, children and transgender persons, are part of diverse sectors of sex services:

The commercial sex industry includes street prostitution, massage brothels, escort services, outcall services, strip clubs, lap dancing, phone sex, adult and child pornography, video and internet pornography, and prostitution tourism. Most women who are in prostitution for longer than a few months drift among these various permutations of the commercial sex industry.<sup>19</sup>

The quotation above shows clearly that it would be difficult to analyze the sex industry with respect to any specifics of sex workers themselves since such categories as gender, age or social background constantly drift among various sex service activities. *Revolving Door* and *Behind Closed Doors* reports investigating the New York City prostitution show that the age of prostitution workers varies from the early teens to the fifties. The researchers faced the same situation as far as gender and living conditions are concerned.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Prostitution Research & Education, "Abort Prostitution Research and Education," <http://www.prostitutionresearch.com/factsheet.html>.

<sup>20</sup> Urban Justice Center, "Revolving Door. An Analysis of Street-Based Prostitution in New York City", 2003, <http://www.sexworkersproject.org/downloads/RevolvingDoor.pdf>.

Moreover, only a small percentage of sex workers participate in sex-industry activities full-time. Some of them have legal part-time jobs or they are students engaging in sex-work. Statistical data about prostitutes usually comes from police reports<sup>21</sup> which are also biased since they address almost exclusively street prostitution while indoor prostitution is not taken into consideration.

In the situation in which the characteristics of sex workers and their estimated number change without distinct regularities, it is advisable to analyze prostitution with respect to the type of services each working person provides. Such being the case, the most overall division would be into outdoor and indoor services.

The New York report about indoor prostitution says that “[...]85% of sex work occurs indoors, while 85% of arrests for prostitution are made among street-based sex workers.”<sup>22</sup> It is again a proof that police reports are not a reliable source of data about this profession and that a large part of prostitution is not visible for both ordinary people and law enforcement units.

Only street prostitution can be regarded as outdoor prostitution. All other aspects of sex services can be classified as indoor. Streetwalking is a less paid, less exclusive and the most dangerous aspect of sex work. It can be a good starting point while analyzing prostitution if the order of describing the various professions would be from the less to the most exclusive ones.

Working on the streets is the most dangerous, the least comfortable and the least respected, but because of its visibility the most present in the collective imagination, including comic books. In reality, working without shelter and direct protection is the least desired by sex workers. Nevertheless, many girls decide to start going in the streets for

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<sup>21</sup> Australian Government. Australian Institute of Criminology, “Prostitution : a work-based occupation [in: Working girls : prostitutes, their life and social control],” <http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/lcj/working/ch1-1.html>.

<sup>22</sup> Sex Workers Project Urban Justice Center, “BehindClosedDoors An Analysis of Indoor Sex Work in New York City,” 2005, <http://www.sexworkersproject.org/downloads/BehindClosedDoors.pdf>.

several reasons. Firstly, practically every person can engage in street prostitution because it demands no specific skills or looks. It is low-paid and the clients have no high expectations. Secondly, service is fast and if a sex worker knows how to attract clients, they can make money fast and allocate it for their most urgent needs. The interviewed female prostitute says:

I needed a hundred dollars a night to maintain a drug habit and keep a room somewhere. It meant to turn seven or eight tricks at night till four in the morning. [. . .] For the first time I ran the risk of being busted. [. . .] on the streets, how do you know who you're gonna pick up?<sup>23</sup>

The quotation comes from a woman who, like many other sex workers, started her career in sex industry from the position of an exclusive prostitute but became addicted to substances and had no other choice but to engage in streetwalking. Her habits made her incapable of maintaining clients with high expectations. She entered the world of client and police abuse, which is present to some extent in every aspect of prostitution but is common only in streetwalking. From her point of view the world she entered appeared extremely violent but there are sources that find sex worker personality the main factor conditioning their position on the streets:

in street prostitution much depends on how an individual interacts with this environment. There are women who seem to be perpetual victims, who are being constantly robbed, beaten or raped.[. . .]To them, every client and other man on the street is a threat.[. . .] On the other hand there are women who are stimulated by street work. They seem to enjoy the action and excitement [. . .]They have fun communicating with men and have talent for a good sales pitch, which brings them a high number

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<sup>23</sup> “Shanel Yang – Easy Steps to Success » Interview with the Prostitute.”  
<http://shanelyang.com/2008/01/06/interview-with-the%20-prostitute/>.

of jobs [ . . . ] they make large amounts of money from quick turnovers or “short-time” with many clients.<sup>24</sup>

Another strong characteristic of working on the streets that differentiates outdoor prostitution from indoor one is its focus on money and physical sex exchange. A former streetwalker says:

I used to lie there with my hands behind my head and do mathematics’ equations in my head or memorize the keyboard typewriter. It was strictly a transaction. No conversation, no acting, no myth around it, no romanticism. It was purely a business transaction.<sup>25</sup>

Conversely, romanticism and a myth of intimacy is present in all forms of indoor prostitution. A street walker, unlike other prostitutes, asks for the money first, very openly showing the impersonality of the barter to the client. The environment is the major factor that prevents them from adding any decorum to physical activities; focus on fast profit and low quality of services makes it so crude, too: “As a street walker, I didn’t have to act. I let myself show the contempt I felt for the tricks. They weren’t paying enough to make it worth performing for them.”<sup>26</sup>

If a sex worker is given, or has a shelter of their own, the character of sex services changes considerably. The physical comfort is higher and so is the quality of services. The price rises but many clients prefer to pay for more than just plain, physical intercourse.

Historically, the most common institutions of indoor prostitution were brothels. It was more convenient to have one fixed place to go to for erotic pleasure than to wander in the streets and look for a person to have sex with. In many countries a brothel was a

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<sup>24</sup> Roberta Perkins, *Prostitution: a work - based occupation*, Australian Government. Australian Institute of Criminology, <http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/lcj/working/ch1-1.html>.

<sup>25</sup> “Shanel Yang - Easy Steps to Success » Interview with the Prostitute.” <http://shaneyang.com/2008/01/06/interview-with-the%20-prostitute/>.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

location for social meetings, a place to meet sheriff and a mayor.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, with the development of telephone and the Internet, the need for a fixed place of meetings has disappeared. Brothels still exist, such as the famous Bunny Ranch in Nevada but to a large extent they have been replaced by escort agencies where the meetings with clients are conducted at a sex-worker's place and the agency itself only manages meeting schedules and provides advertising for the girls. Apart from prostitutes working in brothels and through agencies, many other work on their own, getting clients from mutual recommendations. Such indoor sex-laborers arrange meetings with clients mostly by telephone and are often called "call-girls."

Sex workers from this sector of services have to care about their looks, behavior and contacts greatly. The better they look, the richer clients they get. A professional call-girl spends the day on the preparations for the meeting with a client. In such case, there may be one, two meetings a day, but they are very well paid. Conversations about the payment are unacceptable during the meeting and the payment itself is given indirectly. More exclusive call girls play the role of classy, rich girls:

As a call girl, I had lunch at the same places society women had lunch.

There was no way of telling me apart from nobody else in the upper tax bracket. I made my own hours, no more than three or so hours of work at evening. I didn't have to accept calls. All I had to do was play a role.<sup>28</sup>

Their way of life resembles the lifestyles of upper classes, even if it depends mostly on acting. In many cases a relationship with a sex-worker from this category is reminiscent of promiscuous consumption:

I always had money in my pocket. I didn't know what the inside of the subway smelled like. Nobody traveled any other way except by cab. I ate

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<sup>27</sup> *American Pimp*, DVD. Directed by Albert Hughes, Allen Hughes, Underworld Entertainment, 1999.

<sup>28</sup> "Shanel Yang - Easy Steps to Success » Interview with the Prostitute."  
<http://shaneyang.com/2008/01/06/interview-with-the%20prostitute/>.



in all the best restaurants and I drank in all the best clubs. A lot of people wanted you to go out to dinner with them. All you had to do was to be an ornament.<sup>29</sup>

In such conditions danger of disease, violence or encounter with the police is minimal. Moreover, call-girls rely on discreet publicity, recommendations and internet resources such as web-cams, forums and online message boards, which minimize the probability of meeting an aggressive or mentally-unstable person:

Any john who was obnoxious or aggressive was just crossed out of your book. You passed the word around that this person was not somebody other people should call. We used to share numbers – standard procedure [. . .] somebody new gave half of what they got the first time for each number. You'd tell them: 'Call so-and-so. That's a fifty dollar trick.' They would give you twenty five dollars. Then the number was theirs.<sup>30</sup>

Many independent work-girls act in a way described above since such behavior eliminates the need of an intermediary or any form of organized prostitution, which is closely connected with crime and high competition.<sup>31</sup>

A client of a call girl is often more concerned with their appearance and behavior than with the physical intercourse. In fact, many clients do not get involved at all in physical sex. A good call-girl relies on her abilities to play various "roles" and adapt to the client's needs. Some of the clients look for "a porn star experience,"<sup>32</sup> which means meeting with a very aggressive and promiscuous sex worker, while others prefer "girlfriend experience,"<sup>33</sup> an ersatz of a regular relationship with an affectionate and

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> "Prostitution : a work-based occupation [in: Working girls : prostitutes, their life and social control]." <http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/lcj/working/ch1-1.html>.

<sup>32</sup> *Cathouse: The Series* Season 1 , DVD. Directed by Patti Kaplan, George Productions, 2005.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

delicate girl\boy that gives an illusion of actual dating. Many clients, before encountering a call-girl, exchange e-mails or chat to pick an individual that fulfills their needs as far as character is concerned.

A few sex workers become celebrity prostitutes through media or business career. The most known recently is Carol Leigh, widely known as the Scarlot Harlot. Being a prostitute, she actively engages in the sex workers' rights movement; she is also a writer, painter and a satirist.<sup>34</sup> In fact, she coined the term "sex worker" used in this paper.<sup>35</sup> Melissa Gira, a San Francisco prostitute killed last year, was a co-founder of *Bound, Not Gagged*, a group blog written by and for sex workers. "Tired of so-called experts speaking for sex workers in the mainstream media, Gira created the site as a forum where working women could express their opinions, reactions and frustrations."<sup>36</sup> Heidi Fleiss, a heroine of "Hollywood Madam" documentary, is another example of celebrity prostitute. Not so much an activist of "sex workers" cause, she owes her fame to her own managerial skills. Today she is the owner of "Hollywood Madam" boutique.

Elite prostitutes are at the top of the hierarchy. While the former group relies on some degree of publicity, with elite prostitutes the less they are seen, the more prestigious clients they get. Their high esteem comes from the illusion of intimacy and real relationship:

promiscuity, impersonality and affective neutrality are the mechanisms separating sexual and emotional intimacy in prostitution and making it a form of service work within the regular marketplace [. . .] Those characteristics

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<sup>34</sup> Carol Leigh, "Prostitution Issues-Biography: Carol Leigh aka Scarlot Harlot," [http://www.bayswan.org/Scarlot\\_Resume.html](http://www.bayswan.org/Scarlot_Resume.html).

<sup>35</sup> Official Website for Unrepentant Whore, "Collected Works of Scarlot Harlot," <http://www.unrepentantwhore.com/>.

<sup>36</sup> "Radical Left : Sex & Society: Prostitutes Condemned with Extreme Prejudice," [http://www.radicalleft.net/blog/\\_archives/2008/5/9/3680681.html](http://www.radicalleft.net/blog/_archives/2008/5/9/3680681.html).

however are mixed with real or pseudo-intimacy in high –status form of prostitution.<sup>37</sup>

In *Gold Diggers, Silver Miners*, a book about prostitution among frontier people, the author states that the basic characteristics of prostitution like hire, promiscuity and impersonality are less visible the higher the class of a prostitute. “The less blatantly they bartered sex, the more money and esteem they commanded [. . .] the most successful prostitutes were usually the most “ladylike.”<sup>38</sup> Looking at the groups already analyzed it becomes apparent that the basic standards of street walking are forbidden and never mentioned in elite prostitution. “High status prostitutes try to convince customers (and occasionally themselves) that their activities involve intrinsic character rather than extrinsic rewards.”<sup>39</sup> With elite prostitutes, role-playing and seducing are the basic skills which make this sector of sex business resemble regular dating or marriage with the only difference being a payment:

Elite prostitutes derived their status from many of the same personal attributes and interactional skills with which respectable women achieved advantageous marriages.[. . .] The highest-status prostitutes sustained relationship resembling marriage in their privacy, lack of promiscuity, intimacy, and subtle economic exchange.<sup>40</sup>

“Sponsoring” resembles elite prostitution but the payment is often not money but gifts, favors or promise of career acceleration. It is a long-term commitment but based on material grounds. It is similar to marriage made for financial needs but is not in any way legally sanctioned. A client pays for all the aspects of meeting with a woman:

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<sup>37</sup> Marion Goldman, *Prostitution and Social Life on the Comstock Code*, (Michigan, The University of Michigan Press, 1981), 155.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Goldman, *Gold Diggers & Silver Miners*, 98.

Większość sponsorów nie traktuje swoich dziewczyn przedmiotowo. Gdyby chodziło o seks nie płaciliby tyle pieniędzy. Imponuje im to, że mogą mieć na własność piękną, zadbaną kobietę z którą mogą się bez wstydu pokazać.<sup>41</sup>

This category ends the overall look on various groups of prostitutes. However the above discussion has not addressed various fetishisms that may appear in any of these groups. Among them the aspect of sadomasochistic dominance is the one that needs special attention as being often presented in graphic narratives.

The figure of a dominatrix, a physically or psychologically dominating woman, especially in sadomasochistic relationship<sup>42</sup> is particularly interesting, since sex industry is most frequently based on male dominance. In *Loose Women, Lecherous Men. A Feminist Philosophy of Sex*, the author wonders if such superiority is not only an illusion: "pornography is both an expression of men's public power as members of the institutionally dominant gendered class and an expression of their lack of personal power."<sup>43</sup> Is the figure of a dominatrix a proof that prostitute women have power over men? Lily Fine, a professional dominatrix, explains: "I'm interested in manipulating what's in the mind."<sup>44</sup> It seems that she has some control over her client, nevertheless she later says: "I may hurt you, but I will not harm you: I will not hit you too hard, take you further than you want to go or give you an infection."<sup>45</sup> Again, as with all indoor aspects of prostitution, the basic element is role-playing performed for a client's wish. Male equivalent of dominatrix: Van, a "slave master" from Los Angeles says: "I'm an artist"<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Renata Gardian, *Zjawisko sponsoringu jako forma prostytucji kobiecej*, (Warszawa: Impuls, 2007), 52.

<sup>42</sup> "Dominatrix – Definition," Merriam - Webster Online Dictionary, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dominatrix>.

<sup>43</sup> Linda LeMoncheck, *Loose Women, Lecherous Men. A Feminist Philosophy of Sex*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 127.

<sup>44</sup> "The Pleasure of Pain," Psychology Today, <http://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/pto-19990901-000039.html>.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> *101 Rent Boys*, DVD. Directed by Fenton Bailey, Randy Barbato, Cinemax, 2000.

and speaks vividly of his artificial dungeon where his clients can fulfill their fantasies. It is all a carefully planned show. Clients are specific people having the desire of experiencing humiliation, pain and the feeling of being absolutely under someone else's control.

Sadomasochism involves a highly unbalanced power relationship established through role-playing, bondage, and/or the infliction of pain. The essential component is not the pain or bondage itself, but rather the knowledge that one person has complete control over the other, deciding what that person will hear, do, taste, touch, smell and feel.<sup>47</sup>

In such activities they seek refuge from everyday life problems and various responsibilities:

Anxieties about mortgages and taxes, stresses about business partners and job deadlines are vanquished each time the flogger hits the flesh. The businessman is reduced to a physical creature existing only in the here and now, feeling the pain and pleasure.<sup>48</sup>

Both clients with similar anxieties and dominatrix\slave masters will be examined in the next chapter of this thesis. They make an interesting part of comic books universe.

As it was said at the beginning of this chapter , prostitutes shift among various sectors of sex services. *Revolving Door* and *Behind Closed Doors* both suggest to some extent that the career of a prostitute can be highly diverse. However, prostitutes working in any category should not be analyzed separately. There are other groups involved in sex services. These include pimps, madams, police and clients themselves; they are all present in graphic narratives and complete the image of prostitution.

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<sup>47</sup> "The Pleasure of Pain," <http://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/pto-19990901-000039.html>.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

Pimps are, most frequently, males who solicit clients for a prostitute.<sup>49</sup> The relationship between both sides may seem uncomplicated and based on the business exchange but in reality it reveals different facets and strongly influences the life a prostitute leads.

In the United States structure of pimping is not unified. Many pimps work alone while others organize themselves in small groups that also run pornography businesses.

The beginnings of pimping are hard to trace, but men who gave prostitutes protection and managed their meetings with clients have been culturally present since the Middle Ages. As far as the United States is concerned, Afro-American pimps emerged after the abolition of slavery when free young Afro-American girls were able to take financial advantage of their bodies. Pimping was one of few “professions” that a black man could have been successful in.<sup>50</sup>

Pimps themselves see their occupation as pure business and prostitutes as sources of profit. Denis Hof, the owner of Bunny Ranch, calls himself a pimp and a successful businessman at the same time.<sup>51</sup> Many pimps call Hugh Hefner, the *Playboy* owner, “a legal pimp.”<sup>52</sup>

While men perceive pimping as business, prostitutes often become victims of this attitude and do not benefit from such relations. They are very often forced to prostitution through drug addiction and physical abuse. One of the pimps interviewed in *American Pimp* justifies beating up a prostitute as “thinking serious about the money.”<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, there is a large group of women willing to chose a pimp from their own free

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<sup>49</sup> “Pimp – Definition”, Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pimp%5B1%5D>.

<sup>50</sup> *American Pimp*, DVD, Directed by Albert Hughes, Allen Hughes, Underworld Entertainment, 1999.

<sup>51</sup> *Cathouse: The Series* Season 1, DVD. Directed by Patti Kaplan. George Productions, 2005.

<sup>52</sup> *American Pimp*, 1999.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

will.<sup>54</sup> Such a situation has several causes. Firstly, many pimps start as lovers or family relatives of women whom they later violently or through cunning persuasion “turn out” to prostitution: “Pimps target girls or women who seem naive, lonely, homeless, and rebellious. At first, the attention and feigned affection from the pimp convinces her to “be his woman.”<sup>55</sup> Moreover, pimping itself reminds a regular relationship or a marriage with an abusive and violent man who treats his “lady” as an object: “Pimps ultimately keep prostituted women in virtual captivity by verbal abuse - making a woman feel that she is utterly worthless: a toilet, a piece of trash; and by physical coercion - beatings and the threat of torture”.<sup>56</sup>

Such dependence is deeply rooted in the Western culture where men perceived women as childlike creatures not capable of taking care of themselves or earning money and in need of constant protection: “The prostitute pimp relationship is antithetical to the cultural idea of a strong, self-reliant male protecting a woman from pitfalls and predators.”<sup>57</sup> Moreover, many women themselves prefer to belong to a pimp, convinced that only he can give them proper protection, organize their life as a prostitute, act as a guide in the underground world, and be a supplier of a shelter, clothes and useful contacts. It is a paradox that many working girls stay with their pimps afraid of losing financial control while it is a pimp who in fact controls the earnings: “there is something so sad to me about a woman, younger or older, who goes out and works all night to make her money, and then she turns it over to some guy, who decides where it goes. There is something not right going on there”.<sup>58</sup> Abused prostitutes often do not leave their abusers since “[h]umans bond emotionally to their abusers as a psychological strategy to survive

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Prostitution Research & Education, “Abort Prostitution Research and Education.”, <http://www.prostitutionresearch.com/factsheet.html>.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Goldman, *Gold Diggers & Silver Miners*, 102.

<sup>58</sup> Urban Justice Center, “Revolving Door. An Analysis of Street-Based Prostitution in New York City”, 2003, <http://www.sexworkersproject.org/downloads/RevolvingDoor.pdf>.

under conditions of captivity.”<sup>59</sup> Fortunately, as *Revolving Door* suggests, many prostitutes were repelled by pimps and stayed away from them seeing such dependence as troublesome.<sup>60</sup>

Madams act like pimps, nevertheless, while pimp profession evokes negative connotations, madams seem more positive. They are viewed mainly as businesswomen and in the past they gained respect for running a business:

Madams gained esteem within disreputable community for the very management skills which some respectable people condemned. Running a brothel was a job [ . . . ] women who run brothels provided prostitutes and customers with tangible services which pimps did not.<sup>61</sup>

Many sex workers become madams to help other, less fortunate prostitutes: Deborah Jeane Palfrey, better known as "the D.C. Madam," became a madam, claiming that she was "appalled and disgusted by the way women in the sex business were treated."<sup>62</sup>

The relationship with the police belongs to the negative sides of prostitution. Male policemen, affected by the negative common view of prostitution and the belief in the inferiority of women, abuse sex workers, instead of protecting them. They perceive most prostitutes as “bad girls” disrupting the social order and responsible for their own life situation. Disrespectful attitudes are common: “They treat us like lowlife, they say ‘we gotta go clean up the trash.’ They still look at you the same way as when they see you on the street – ‘why should we help you?’”<sup>63</sup> So is the use of bad language:

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<sup>59</sup> Prostitution Research & Education, “Abort Prostitution Research and Education.”, <http://www.prostitutionresearch.com/factsheet.html>.

<sup>60</sup> Urban Justice Center, “Revolving Door. An Analysis of Street-Based Prostitution in New York City”, 2003, <http://www.sexworkersproject.org/downloads/RevolvingDoor.pdf>.

<sup>61</sup> Goldman, *Gold Diggers & Silver Miners*, 75.

<sup>62</sup> “Radical Left : Sex & Society: Prostitutes Condemned with Extreme Prejudice.” [http://www.radicalleft.net/blog/\\_archives/2008/5/9/3680681.html](http://www.radicalleft.net/blog/_archives/2008/5/9/3680681.html).

<sup>63</sup> Urban Justice Center, “Revolving Door. An Analysis of Street-Based Prostitution in New York City”, 2003, <http://www.sexworkersproject.org/downloads/RevolvingDoor.pdf>.



Celia and Sissy repeat that the police are also very disrespectful in their use of language. They reported that officers use a great deal of profanity when they talk to the women, calling them “bitches, hos and sluts” and asking “you’re not dead yet?” Mary concurs, “The police are nasty, sarcastic, degrading.”<sup>64</sup>

Moreover, as *Revolving Door* report on street prostitution presents, sexual and physical harassment occurs on a daily irrespective of the race or geography. It seems that violence depends only on personal character.<sup>65</sup> None of the sex workers interviewed in the New York City report declared receiving help from the police in dangerous situations.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, many attempts by sex workers to report violent crimes against them are disregarded by the legal forces:

[those]who attempted to report violent crimes were told by the police that their complaints would not be accepted, that this is what they should expect, and that they deserve all that they get. When these women experienced further violence, they did not turn to the police.<sup>67</sup>

It is clearly visible that interactions with the police fall into the negative category. The situation with clients, often referred to as “johns,” appears to be much more complicated. Clients vary depending on the position of a prostitute: call girls and elite prostitutes are treated well, many regulars are in love with them, while street walkers are often verbally and physically abused. Such scheme seems to be connected with the illusion of intimacy. The greater the illusion, the less violent and disrespectful the client is.

Street walkers have developed their own strategies of self-defense against violent clients that include relying on their instincts, never working in cars, trying to meet only

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

with familiar clients, working in small groups and in well-known areas.<sup>68</sup> The popular belief that a prostitute cannot be raped also escalates sexual violence against sex workers: “The tacit acceptance of such violence, as indicated by the indifference of both society and the police, combined with a refusal to take it seriously, encourages [it].”<sup>69</sup>

So far, clients, the police and escorts (pimps and madams) as well as the overall structure of prostitution services analyzed. However, many aspects of prostitution are connected with its mental reception rather than with the facts. The following part of this chapter will be devoted to the function of prostitution in the contemporary Western culture. This part addresses the causes of negative connotations of prostitution in the society and the discussion of its role in the modern culture.

All definitions of prostitution presented in this paper focus on the practical and business-like aspects. Ignoring the emotional dimension helps to be more specific but the definitions based on the temperamental receptions of prostitution also exist, such as one presented in *Sociology of Deviant Behavior*. It is summarized below for the sake of the next part of this chapter devoted to the fundamental question of prostitution as a condemned profession:

Prostitution is sexual intercourse on a promiscuous and regular basis, with emotional indifference.<sup>70</sup>

In this case indifference and promiscuity are seen as basic characteristics of sex-service and common people disapprove of prostitution because of these specifics. However, the issue is far more complex.

As the historical outline demonstrates, in the past prostitutes had multiple tasks in the society and in some cases were respected more than wives. Isolating and reducing the

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Urban Justice Center, “Revolving Door. An Analysis of Street-Based Prostitution in New York City”, 2003, <http://www.sexworkersproject.org/downloads/RevolvingDoor.pdf>.

<sup>70</sup> Marshal B. Clinard, *Sociology of Deviant Behavior*, (Madison, University of Wisconsin, 1974), 56.

role of a prostitute to that of a person satisfying men's carnal needs has caused the gradual outlawing and incorporation into a criminal world. Nevertheless, even in areas where prostitution is legalized, like Nevada, prostitution still causes controversy. This seems to suggest that the causes of the disapproval of the profession go further than the criminological side. Examining them may prove helpful in the analysis of the fictional image of prostitution in comic books.

Prostitution may be perceived only as a job and, in the areas where it is legalized, sex workers strongly emphasize the business side of the profession. For them it is a purely capitalistic venture with a buyer and a seller, provider and receiver, following the principles of supply and demand.<sup>71</sup> Many sex workers who chose prostitution as means of earning money perceive their occupation in a similar manner: "I use my body to earn a living. What is a difference between working with my hands and working with my pussy?"<sup>72</sup> In the HBO series *The Cathouse*, the Body Ranch brothel with its structure is presented exclusively as a company with a set of workers possessive of certain skills. Roberta Perkins, the author of "Prostitution: a work based occupation" claims that in many aspects prostitution resembles common job: it is hard and demanding and one needs to gain specific abilities to be successful.<sup>73</sup> The language of prostitution labor resembles business language: there are "customers," "working girls," "fee," "boss," and a "workplace." Prostitutes often speak of "taking their time off" just like in any regular job.<sup>74</sup> Nevertheless, people at large refuse to treat prostitution in a way described above and attach a moral dimension to the profession. Other occupations dealing with physical intimacy, such as doctors, are greatly respected. Moreover, many attempts at legalizing

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<sup>71</sup> "Prostitution : a work-based occupation [in: Working girls : prostitutes, their life and social control].", <http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/lcj/working/ch1-1.html>.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

prostitution, (Germany, South Africa) are strongly resented by the citizens. This situation stems from several reasons.

Firstly, it must be again emphasized that in modern times prostitutes have been deprived of all their social functions: spirituality, closeness to gods, respectful source of relief and wisdom. If a person's role in society is reduced to satisfying bodily needs that are perceived as low and to some extent dirty, it becomes easy to condemn such a person, especially if this person is a woman in a patriarchal society.

Secondly, the lack of sincere affection and intimacy that distinguishes prostitution from other sexual activities is unacceptable for a large part of the society, in which sex is automatically tied to marriage, procreation and so called "romantic love". In prostitution all the above elements are replaced with the need for material gratification. In other words, it is the clash of two fields: work and sexual pleasure, which is seen as offensive. The author of *Gold Diggers & Silver Miners. Prostitution and Social Life on the Comstock Code* writes: "Ideally, work in the public sphere is separated from conscious sexuality, but in prostitution, sex and work are one."<sup>75</sup>

Camilla Kronkvist, the author of "Is prostitution morally wrong?" argues that people tend to condemn prostitution according to the same patterns as they used to condemn premarital sex: lovemaking was directly connected to marriage, and any other venues was wrong. In the contemporary world sex is directly connected with romantic notion of love, thus prostitution, which deprives sex of its romantic element, is disapproved.<sup>76</sup>

Moreover, in Protestant societies, such as the United States, the condemnation of the idea of mixing work and bodily pleasures is escalated:

sex was a disruptive factor in the orderly pursuit of business and capital accumulation[ . . .] For the Christian moralist, extramarital sex is "sin"

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<sup>75</sup> Goldman, *Gold Diggers & Silver Miners*, 152.

<sup>76</sup> Kronkvist, "Is Prostitution Morally Wrong?," <http://web.abo.fi/~ckronqvi/files/prostitution.pdf>.

not deserving the dignity of being referred to as “work”. In both these instances their [people’s] responses bear a strong relationship to the Protestant work ethics, with its doctrine of work as a toil sin as pleasure and work never equated with pleasure.<sup>77</sup>

While many working girls try to defend themselves with the argument that their profession is just regular work, its connection with “pleasure” diminishes it in the eyes of many contemporaries and makes it impossible to be viewed as a regular occupation.

Prostitution is spoken against on many grounds: it involves promiscuity with strangers while in patriarchal societies each woman is expected to be a possession of one man, commercializes sex participation outside marriage, is a threat to public health; “it needs police protection in order to operate and thus reduces the quality of general law enforcement,”<sup>78</sup> and, finally, sex with a prostitute brings no possibility of marriage or procreation.<sup>79</sup> These and all the above reasons contribute to the common conviction that prostitution should be marginalized or eliminated from a contemporary society and give rise to a full set of stereotypes:

socio-cultural perceptions that prostitutes are either exploited victims or dangerous and depraved ‘bad girls’ themselves reinforce stereotypes and contribute to the perpetuation of social stigma against even legal prostitutes. These stereotypes are premised on the assumptions that: 1) sex is different than other kinds of physically embodied or emotional labors; 2) prostitution is dirty; 3) prostitutes are whores in the bad girl, negative sense of floozies who fuck with husbands and ruin families; 4)

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

prostitutes and prostitution are vectors of disease and violence, respectively; and 5) that prostitution is not legitimate work.<sup>80</sup>

Many people support these ideas in order to strengthen their morally positive position in the society by contrasting themselves with the margin. Condemning one group gives higher esteem to the other. Moreover, such stereotypes make women even more dependant on men's control by showing them that the freeing of their sexual side or making advantage of it automatically places them into the "bad girl" category.

Everything that has been described above, depriving prostitutes of additional social functions, connecting sex with romantic love, separating work from sexual pleasures, strengthening stereotypes, and connecting prostitution with criminal environment, makes prostitution perceived as a negative phenomenon, additionally making it difficult for sex workers to defend their rights and change social attitudes publicly.<sup>81</sup>

However, there are social groups that do not share this view, feminist activists being the largest. Two sexual revolutions greatly changed the receptions of sexuality. While the first wave of suffrage spoke nothing of sex liberation, not to mention the situation of sex workers, the second and the third waves of feminism faced a fundamental question: is prostitution a tool of male domination or rather a path to sexual, financial and moral liberation? This issue, pervading the feminist discourse, has found its reflection also in comic books drawn by feminist artists. A closer look at it may help in the analysis of these graphic narratives.

Catharine MacKinnon perceives prostitution as a situation where a woman is dispossessed of all civil rights. A sex worker is deprived of liberty, security and privacy.

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<sup>80</sup> All Academic Research, "What is Wrong with Prostitution? Assessing Dimensions of Exploitation in Legal Brothels" authored by Brents Barbara and Hausbeck Kathryn, [http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p\\_mla\\_apa\\_research\\_citation/1/0/5/4/7/pages105470/p105470-23.php](http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/1/0/5/4/7/pages105470/p105470-23.php).

<sup>81</sup> John Ince, *The Politics of Lust*, (Vancouver, BC: Pivotal Press, 2003), 226.

He/she also undergoes inhuman treatment.<sup>82</sup> It is a view that many feminist contemporaries share. For them prostitution dehumanizes sex workers treating them merely as a tool to satisfy the needs of (mostly) heterosexual male consumers. Such treatment adds greatly to women's subordinate position in the society:

Many radical feminists contend that dancing in strip bars, working as prostitutes, or posing for pornography reduces women to marketable sexual commodities in a patriarchal environment that legitimizes men's unconditional sexual access to women."<sup>83</sup>

It also creates the image of a female who is "craving whatever humiliation, abuse or physical violence men are willing to dish out."<sup>84</sup> Moreover, it fuels up competition among women instead of cooperation. Women, constantly competing over men, can easily be put under their control.

I viewed all girls as being threats. That's what we were all taught. You can't be friends with another woman, she might take your man. If you tell her anything about how you really feel, she'll use it against you.(...)the most important thing in life is the way men feel about you.<sup>85</sup>

Feminists also turn attention to those sex workers who appear to choose their profession of their own free will as a way of liberation of women's sex nature:

Women who „Choose” to be strippers and prostitutes under economic and psychological duress are mistakenly understood as freely and willingly performing sex work, despite the fact that such work may be

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<sup>82</sup> Catharine A. MacKinnon, "Prostitution and Civil Rights." Prostitution Research and Education <http://www.prostitutionresearch.com/mackinnon1.html>.

<sup>83</sup> Linda LeMoncheck, *Loose Women, Lecherous Men. A Feminist Philosophy of Sex*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 110.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>85</sup> "Shanel Yang - Easy Steps to Success » Interview with the Prostitute." <http://shanelyang.com/2008/01/06/interview-with-the%20-prostitute/>.

the only way they can survive or the only work they see themselves capable of performing.<sup>86</sup>

However, the last point has encountered strong opposition within the feminist group itself. Many movement activists claim that prostitution has positive sides and many women seem satisfied as prostitutes. They consciously choose prostitution for several reasons. For some the profession provides them with the feeling of being in control of their lives and of men:

The overt hustling society is the microcosm of the rest of the society. The power relationships are the same and the games are the same. Only this one I was in control of. The greater one I wasn't. In the outside society, if I tried to be me, I wasn't in control of anything. As a bright, assertive woman, I had no power. As a cold, manipulative hustler, I had a lot. I knew I was playing a role.<sup>87</sup>

For many others the world of prostitution is an escape from domestic violence<sup>88</sup> and can provide means of financial support and independence.<sup>89</sup>

In fact, sex workers who “enjoy the money, the flexibility, and the independence that their work offers”<sup>90</sup> perceive feminists who condemn their profession as the advocates of patriarchal order no different from reactionary sexual puritans. “From this viewpoint, attacking sex industry in order to save its victims is precisely the kind of patronizing moralism that feeds a patriarchy’s obsession with defining women’s sexuality in men’s terms.”<sup>91</sup> In some cases sex workers avoid meeting feminist organizations or are hostile towards them finding “feminists’ and prostitutes’ rights organizations inevitably serving

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<sup>86</sup> LeMoncheck, *Loose Women, Lecherous Men*, 111.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> LeMoncheck, *Loose Women, Lecherous Men*, 143.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.



white, middle-class interests and needs.”<sup>92</sup> “From a prostitute point of view, her stigmatization gives feminists a way to remain “good girls” who join the moral and political right in righteously condemning sex workers for being bad.”<sup>93</sup>

Feminists together with prostitutes appear to have an ambiguous way of looking at sex work. It seems that the question of positive and negative impact on womanhood stemming from prostitution will not be solved mainly because: “Women who perform erotic labor are both sexual objects and sexual subjects as they move between these categories on a continual basis.”<sup>94</sup>

The last section of this chapter is devoted to the examination of the role of a prostitute in contemporary society. Although being perceived as a negative element, a sex-worker is not deprived of her impact on the social order and is not dispossessed of her presence in graphic narratives.

The influence of social views concerning prostitutes starts as soon as early teenage years of any child. Many children take specific actions to avoid being identified as a “bad girl” or “a slut”<sup>95</sup> while others are impressed by the media image of a prostitute.<sup>96</sup> After the age of puberty some of them will participate in sex services for several reasons.

Firstly, a regular relationship with a girlfriend or a wife often does not fulfill a man’s sexual needs. The “good girl” model, based on the Middle Age “virgin” deprived of sexual drive, will not, in many cases, satisfy a man’s needs:

Seen as uninterested and submissive, heterosexual women’s sexuality was viewed as in the service of her husband. Religious and patriarchal discourses promoted women’s chastity thereby making the idea of

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>94</sup> Danielle R. Egan, *Dancing for Dollars and Paying for Love. The relationships between Exotic Dancers and their Regulars*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 93.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., XIII.

<sup>96</sup> Judith Hahn, “Loving a Prostitute.”, Religion On-line.org, <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=832>.

women's sexual autonomy an oxymoron and any woman who liked sex, suspect.<sup>97</sup>

A prostitute, presented as a contrast to the respectful wife, is the one to dwell in the world of bodily pleasures, thus able to appease sexual hunger.<sup>98</sup>

Another factor is that contemporary culture often imposes certain values and requirements in sexual life and some men desperately try to fulfill them: "The general culture stimulates the importance of sexual values in life and the satisfaction of these values may be difficult for many of the unmarried and some of the married."<sup>99</sup> In this case, turning to a prostitute may both satisfy the needs and enrich the knowledge of *ars amandi*. In the HBO series *Cathouse*, working girls had regular lessons with their clients to teach them various "tricks". Many men were visiting the brothel with their spouses, to improve their sexual side of relationship.<sup>100</sup>

Some sources claim that it is only natural for men to have sex deprived of any commitment with a professional woman:

Something is lacking in a man who has never awoken in a nameless bed, and not seen on his pillow a head that he will not see again, leaving at any moment and leaving him feeling so content, swarmed with a tingly sensation of release and fulfillment for the corruption he has indulged in impulsively, knowing he will not regret his choice with memories of new realms he has tasted.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Egan, *Dancing for Dollars and Paying for Love*, 3.

<sup>98</sup> Goldman, *Gold Diggers & Silver Miners*, 140.

<sup>99</sup> "Prostitution : a work-based occupation [in: Working girls : prostitutes, their life and social control]." <http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/lcj/working/ch1-1.html>.

<sup>100</sup> *Cathouse: The Series* Season 1, DVD. Directed by Patti Kaplan. George Productions, 2005.

<sup>101</sup> "History of prostitution," Sydney Outcalls Network, [http://www.sydneyoutcalls.com/sydney\\_outcalls\\_history\\_of\\_prostitution.asp](http://www.sydneyoutcalls.com/sydney_outcalls_history_of_prostitution.asp).

Others, on the other hand, attend sexual services for the need of feelings, such as love or friendship.<sup>102</sup> Many understand a brothel and a prostitute as institutions in the presence of whom they can show their immoral desires and fulfill them without risk of being despised by their families and partners:

Some men paid for sex THEY felt was deviant. They were paying so that nobody would accuse them of being perverted or dirty or nasty. A large proportion of these guys asked things that were not at all deviant. Many of them wanted oral sex. They felt that they couldn't ask their wives or girlfriends because they'd be repulsed."<sup>103</sup>

Moreover, visiting a prostitute will not result in pregnancy and is thus less risky than other extramarital intercourses. It also should not be forgotten that "prostitutes give relief to armed forces personnel and for those who have to work far away from their families."<sup>104</sup> However, as it was mentioned earlier, clients pay mainly not for bodily pleasures, but for fantasies. Fulfilling these dreams seems to be another facet of prostitutes' role in the society.

Role-playing in prostitution starts is already marked in the vocabulary used. Sex workers and clients have working names.<sup>105</sup> Both groups can hide beneath this artificial construct. If working in sex industry is only part-time, both sides of a barter can keep everyday life and the work apart: "when I'm at home, I'm at home, when I'm at a club, I'm at a club."<sup>106</sup> Many sources present prostitution mainly as acting out the client's wishes. It is present in the world of strippers and erotic dancers:

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<sup>102</sup> Egan, *Dancing for Dollars and Paying for Love*, 139.

<sup>103</sup> "Shanel Yang - Easy Steps to Success » Interview with the Prostitute."  
<http://shanelyang.com/2008/01/06/interview-with-the%20-prostitute/>.

<sup>104</sup> "Prostitution : a work-based occupation [in: Working girls : prostitutes, their life and social control]."  
<http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/lcj/working/ch1-1.html>.

<sup>105</sup> "Shanel Yang - Easy Steps to Success » Interview with the Prostitute."  
<http://shanelyang.com/2008/01/06/interview-with-the%20-prostitute/>.

<sup>106</sup> Egan, *Dancing for Dollars and Paying for Love*, 60.

A stripper provides her customers with fantasies of real sex because she is a sexually enticing woman often no more than an arm's length away.

Prostitutes are paid to give reality to their customer's sexual imaginings.<sup>107</sup>

This also has a basic role in the profession of a call girl whose success depends heavily on her appearance of a regular high-class companion:

The myth is that it is a social occasion. You're expected to be well dressed, well made up, appear to be glad to see a man.[ ... ]There is a given way of dressing in that league – that is to dress well but not ostentatiously. You have to pass doormen, cabdrivers. You have to look as if you belong in those buildings on Park Avenue or Central Park West.<sup>108</sup>

In the *101 Rent Boys* documentary about independent male prostitutes, all respondents presented themselves as actors and displayers of clients' fantasies. It must be emphasized that in prostitution what client buys is not a physical intercourse but “the power over another person, or the power not to think of the prostitute as another person. [...] the right to treat the prostitute in a way he would not ordinary treat another human being.”<sup>109</sup> Unfortunately, both clients and sex workers often lose themselves in the world of fantasies. Prostitutes become unable to lead a different life, as Scott Black from *101 Rent Boys* :

You become your job. I became what I did. I became a hustler. I became cold, I became hard, I become turned off, I became numb. Even when I

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<sup>107</sup> LeMoncheck, *Loose Women, Lecherous Men*, 132.

<sup>108</sup> “Shanel Yang - Easy Steps to Success » Interview with the Prostitute.” <http://shanelyang.com/2008/01/06/interview-with-the%20-prostitute/>.

<sup>109</sup> Kronqvist, “Is Prostitution Morally Wrong?,” <http://web.abo.fi/~ckronqvi/files/prostitution.pdf>.

wasn't hustling, I was a hustler.(...) People aren't built to switch on and off like water faucets.<sup>110</sup>

Clients confuse acting with a real character of a person. This “emotional consumption” leads to the situation where “stuck in the paradoxical position of being customers while feeling like lovers, regulars were mired in the dissatisfaction (and masochism) of paying for love.”<sup>111</sup>

To sum up, there are multiple facets of the prostitute profession that must be taken into consideration before examining the world of the profession in graphic narratives. A brief look at the position of a prostitute in the ancient cultures of the Mediterranean shows that her place in contemporary society is very different from that from the past while graphic narratives draw ideas from both. The definition and a brief look at the structure will enable the deep analysis of various characters described in the next two chapters. Additionally, the presentation of the perceptions of sex work, the common view and the feminist approach, will make it easier to understand specific circumstances and conditions of the society under which protagonists of the analyzed graphic narratives act.

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Egan, *Dancing for Dollars and Paying for Love*, 145.

## Chapter two

### The Representations of Prostitutes and Prostitution in Cartoons and Short Forms of Sequential Art.

“It’s by caricatures that foreigners judge us.”

François Mauriac

Having described history and character of the profession and the role of the prostitute in the social realities of the USA, I will now discuss her representations in the vast world of sequential art. The following chapter discusses various short forms of comics that appeared in the history of comic books and focuses on three of them: cartoons appearing in periodicals considered the first proto-forms<sup>1</sup> of comics by many critics and authors, comic strips, which in this paper are further divided into press and online comic strips, and the ephemeral phenomenon of Tijuana Bibles. These forms of sequential art are discussed jointly in one chapter because their short form and high simplification of both plot and characters makes them closely related as far as the type of conveying message is concerned.

There is a grave difference when it comes to short forms of sequential art and long ones, like comic books or graphic novels. Having at their disposal scarcity of space and means, the authors become very brief in their themes and often reduce characters, places and events to merely symbols or stereotypes. The communication is brief, very often taking the form of situational and concise humor or satire. This radically affects the picture of the world in such short forms and provides a different point of view from that in longer forms of comics. In the case of short comic formats the artist focuses on contemporary

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Witek, *Art Spiegelman: Conversations* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), 106.

issues and clear message more than on the insights of protagonists. As William Garland Rogers says about the artist who produces cartoons: “Facts rather than eternal verities are his stock in trade. Instead of a philosophy, he holds an opinion – maybe a grudge, a fondness, a prejudice, a wish, a fear.”<sup>2</sup> The main role of cartoons or comic strips is not to entertain, although they may well be entertaining, but to attack and pinpoint social illnesses, criticize injustices, wars, oppression and the state of affairs of society within which context they were made: “They are works of art; they are also exposes,”<sup>3</sup> Garland claims. From the point of view of this paper it will be interesting to observe how the image of the prostitute is conveyed in such concise forms and how her picture and social receptions of the profession are mirrored in them.

Cartoons are the first group analyzed in this chapter. Although still controversial as proto-comics, they are regarded by many academics and comic book artists as the form of art closely related to early manifestations of comics, not yet even sequential in many cases. They are rooted in the most primordial form with one illustration and the single textual description underneath, the form widely used until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when the form of a comic strip with narrative told in a sequence of pictures and with text incorporated into pictures in speech balloons evolved. Cartoon as a form of graphic art was used since the early 1840s as a pictorial parody utilizing caricature, satire, and usually humor. Today cartoons are “used primarily for conveying political commentary and editorial opinion in newspapers and for social comedy and visual wit in magazines.”<sup>4</sup> Their humor is “of its own time and age, reflecting life in its own environment and current situation.[. . .] It’s purpose is immediacy.”<sup>5</sup> This role of cartoons as a concise commentary to contemporary

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<sup>2</sup> William Garland Rogers, *Mightier Than the Sword: Cartoon, Caricature, Social Comment* (New York: Harcourt, 1969), 15.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica, “cartoon (pictorial parody),” Encyclopedia Britannica eb.com, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/97515/cartoon>.

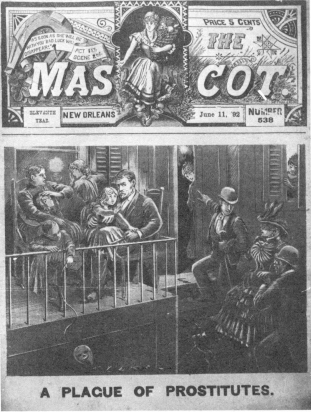
<sup>5</sup> Nick Meglin, *The Art of Humorous Illustration*, (New York: Watson-Guptill, 1973), 11.

life influences and conditions the form and character of the message. A number of political and purely entertaining cartoons that were analyzed for this paper provide an interesting insight into social perceptions of prostitution.

Prostitutes were present in political cartoons since the earliest times. They were depicted as one of social evils or the effects of poverty, a problem to point out to and a profession to condemn. In this 18<sup>th</sup> century work of George Cruikshank they stand as one of social evils which pervade society when times are hard and people are unable to find proper work.



In the USA prostitutes were generally depicted as social outcasts that should be avoided or eliminated. In the anonymous illustration below they are presented as a group of women that should be hidden from public view as their profession was shameful.





Vintage cartoons depicted prostitutes realistically as far as the form is concerned and there was no oversimplification in details in the realm of medium,<sup>6</sup> However, in the accompanying narration these women were presented in an extreme oversimplification as a homogenous group of “fallen women” and social dropouts. The ways to becoming a prostitute were very often depicted as cautionary tales for decent girls, warning them against becoming such a “woman adrift.” The representations of prostitution served as an anti-example and condemnation of negative phenomena in the society. In this respect, American cartoons had their roots in English satirical illustrations. It is among them where a perfect example of an image and role of a prostitute in vintage cartoons can be found. A *Harlot's Progress* by William Hogarth is a set of six illustrations presenting the scenes from the life of a prostitute, from her beginnings in the profession till her death. The example, kept in form of chronologically arranged illustrations, perfectly demonstrates the connection of the realistic form with highly biased, stereotypical and moralistic content. In all vintage cartoons the depicted prostitutes serve as a symbol with a very narrow semantic range. This also excludes the possibility of incorporating any role of a prostitute described in the first chapter, except for the evidence of patriarchal norms influencing the society and stigmatizing prostitutes. The oversimplified pictures of a woman of light manners reflected social patterns and stereotypes of their times and shaped political and social views on prostitutes placing them in the category of “fallen” as opposed to “good girls.”

In contemporary cartoon the form and the imaging of prostitutes differ radically. The artistic manner of depicting, often highly simplified, reflects concurrent fashions in caricature and reflects the rise of abstractionism in the 20<sup>th</sup>-century art. The

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<sup>6</sup> Vintage cartoons often reflected “mainstream” manner of painting of their times. For example, American vintage cartoon selected for this work reflects accordingly the technique of academism and realism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

oversimplifications of facial expressions also make cartoons widely readable for contemporary reader<sup>7</sup>.

As far as the looks of prostitutes themselves are concerned, their outfit is often codified. Clothes serve as a clear symbol of the profession and allow the readers to immediately recognize who the character is. These include the most obvious elements that are commonly associated with prostitution. These are: characteristic black stockings, tight mini-skirts and high heels. Breasts and buttocks are also exposed and emphasized. Dominating prostitutes wear characteristic black latex outfits with metal elements. If depicted sex workers wear more varied outfits, their role as prostitutes is then implied by characteristic poses of the body or the locations where they can be found: on the street or under the lamp. When young and fresh, their great shapes and full lips are emphasized, but an old prostitute is almost always extremely ugly, which reflects the social stereotype that the profession exploits both physically and mentally.



As far as the role of sex workers is concerned, their function varies in contemporary cartoons. The content changes slightly, depending on the kind of audience the message is directed to. More worldly political cartoons from newspapers are addressed to the intellectually sophisticated audiences whereas cartoons focusing on everyday life situations

<sup>7</sup> Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (Harper Paperbacks, 1994), 17.

operate on simple stereotypes and humor. There is no difference in depicting sex workers depending on the sex of the author. Both men and women cartoonists rely on similar forms and stereotypes. Moreover, the situation in which all the characters in cartoons seem to be merely illustrations and symbols and serve as transmitters of a certain message imposes one fixed perspective on the portrayed world and simplifies it.

Taking all the facts presented above into consideration and analyzing several dozen cartoons from various sources, a bipolar image of the prostitute's role becomes visible. On the one hand, the prostitute and her profession are used as a parable of a social group or phenomenon. This is most apparent in political cartoons. The figure of a sex worker is used as a symbolic image of those groups or activities that are to be condemned or negatively stigmatized in the eyes of the author and the reader. It seems characteristic of the American society that their government and politicians are often depicted as prostitutes or even as individuals far more disgraceful than them<sup>8</sup>.



Such practice is used to emphasize the craving for money and extreme materialism of those groups. Moral corruption is commonly associated with prostitution, and portraying another

<sup>8</sup> In many cartoons the reader can observe a situation when a prostitute caught while or after serving a politician or a celebrity is ashamed and considers the situation as the ruin of her "good name." To cite one of the prostitutes from Steve Kelley cartoons: "Caught with Jimmy Swaggart. There goes my reputation" (<http://www.cartoonistgroup.com>, accessed 14 June 2009). This suggests that in the American society politicians and many public persons are perceived as deprived of any decency and the lowest group in the nation judging by moral standards.

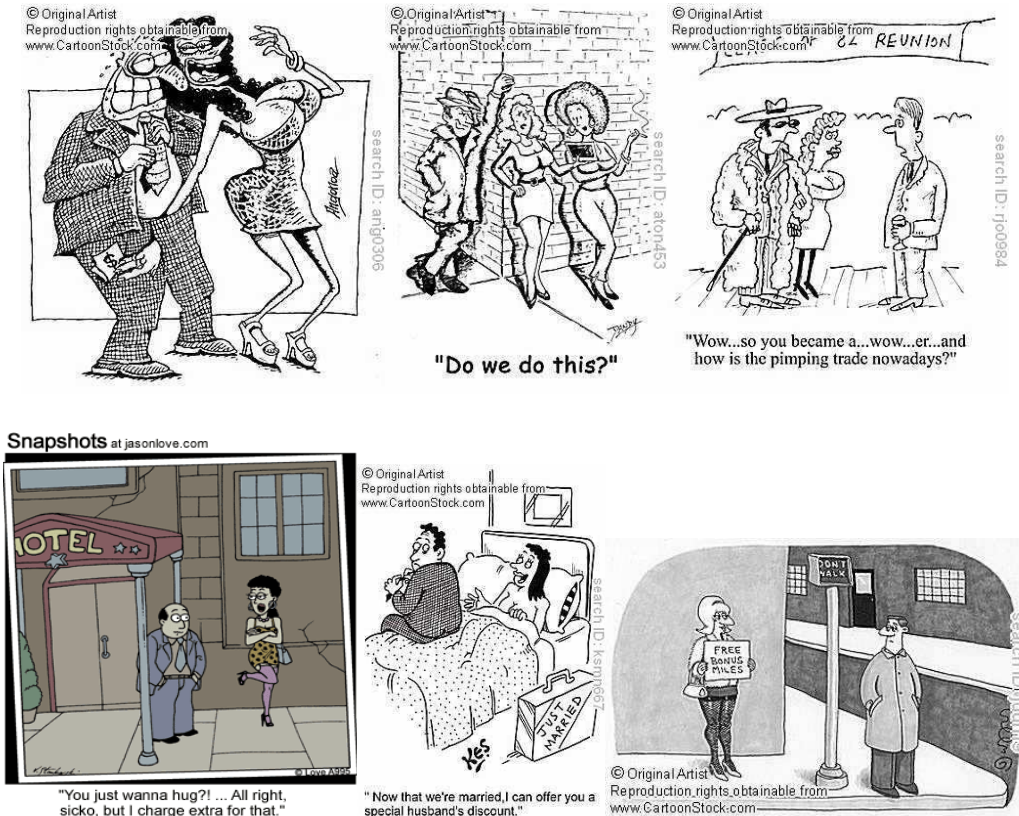
social group through the figure of a prostitute causes in the reader's mind automatic transposition of this negative characteristic. The figure of a prostitute in political cartoons symbolizes the willingness to do anything for money and politicians and celebrities put into street walker's "costume" are linked with the same desire. The role of a prostitute herself is in political cartoons minimized to the economic aspect of the profession and focuses on the most visible and characteristic group - street walkers. It seems that at least on a symbolic level, prostitution in cartoons is still a parable for many social evils.

On the other hand, there is the image of a prostitute in the world of cartoons reminiscent of jokes about everyday life. A sex worker presented in them is still highly stereotypical, but she is no longer used as a symbolic disguise for other professions or social groups. In this group, her image becomes symbolic for the profession itself. This group of cartoons mirrors social stereotypes of sex workers. In most cases, cartoons depict street walkers and escorts who await clients at home. Girls are used to illustrate or cause some humorous situation.



There is, however, a large group of cartoons that are concerned with the characteristics of prostitution as an occupation. Also in this group prostitutes are depicted as money-craving and ready to do anything for "bucks." Their calculation of everything as a paid service is a source of humor in many cartoons. However, they are also presented as women who can fulfill fantasies which men cannot perform at home with their wives or

partners. Social harmfulness of the profession tends not to be emphasized and moralistic accents are largely absent. Prostitutes' clients are depicted as average, middle-aged men, dull, obese and often ugly whose naiveté makes them victims of prostitutes's predatory nature. They are contrasted with pimps portrayed as affluent, mostly young and successful.



It seems that image of a prostitute in cartoons is highly stereotypical and biased. Social realities of the profession are not reflected in this medium. However, taking into consideration that the inner reality of cartoons is a caricature of the real world where all its flaws and characteristics are exaggerated, the analysis of cartoons provides a great deal of valuable information considering general social perceptions of prostitutes as well as and the stereotypical image of the profession and its role in contemporary society.

Comic strips may be seen as a kind of escalated cartoon from which they derived their "caricaturiness." They use similar artistic tools and are presented mostly in the same media: newspapers and magazines.

Today's comic strip is the lineal descendent of the nineteenth century humorous drawing that accompanied the serial publications of novels like that accompanied the serial publications of novels like those of Dickens and Thackeray.<sup>9</sup>

The form of comic strip is rooted directly in cartoons that were often placed in series depicting one story.

In the early period there were two principal forms: a series of small images printed on a single piece of paper (narrative strip proper) and a series composed of several sheets of paper, with one image per page, which when displayed on the wall of a house formed a narrative frieze or picture story.<sup>10</sup>

As early as in the 1890s several US newspapers featured weekly funny drawings and stories similar to cartoons, without text inside illustrations. The first newspaper "funnies" that revolutionized the genre were illustrations from Richard Outcault's *Hogan's Alley* (widely known as *Yellow Kid*) from 1896.<sup>11</sup> In 1897 Rudolph Dirks's *Katzenjammer Kids* featured in *New York Journal* became the first comic strip in the chronologically paneled form of comics known today.<sup>12</sup> Soon afterwards speech balloons and chronological panels were introduced in other cartoons. People who introduced comic strip to newspapers on a mass scale were Joseph Pulitzer and Randolph Hearst. Strips like *Hogan's Alley* were popular and contributed to good sales.<sup>13</sup> In the beginning funnies were entertaining and light, trying to appeal to general public. Many of them, like *Dick Tracy* or *Flash Gordon*,

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<sup>9</sup> Robert C. Harvey, *The Art of the Funnies: An Aesthetic History* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), 4.

<sup>10</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica, "comic strip :: The origins of the comic strip," Encyclopedia Britannica eb.com, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/127589/comic-strip/13705/The-origins-of-the-comic-strip>.

<sup>11</sup> Bradford W. Wright, *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America* (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 30.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Harvey, *The Art of the Funnies: An Aesthetic History*, 4.

offered sheer action. Even nowadays every daily American newspaper publishes funnies. The only exception from the rule is *New York Times*.<sup>14</sup>

Comic strips, although more “spacious” than cartoons and capable of presenting a simple plot through the sequence of panels, in terms of the message generally use similar simplifications and stereotypes of social roles of prostitutes as cartoons. Their communiqué is still concise and very often directly linked to current problems, trends and events. They are usually arranged horizontally, designed to be read as narratives in the chronological sequence. “Words may be introduced within or near each image, or they may be dispensed with altogether. If words functionally dominate the image, it then becomes merely illustration to a text.”<sup>15</sup> In a humorous comic strip, words sometimes carry more than their share of the burden in making the strip’s point.<sup>16</sup>

Several panels give new range of possibilities of conveying message and speech balloons make the text element of a visual part. The text may be however more important than the illustration in a humorous comic strip, the words sometimes carry more than their share of the burden in making the strip’s point.<sup>17</sup>

Contemporary comic strips are present in almost every periodical and online. There are virtually no limitations as far as the themes are concerned. Thanks to their short form, they are created quickly and can illustrate every field of life and all current issues. Both amateurs and professional artists create comic strips and both mainstream and underground authors are occupied with this form as well.

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<sup>14</sup> William Garland, Rogers, *Mightier Than the Sword: Cartoon, Caricature, Social Comment* (New York: Harcourt, 1969), 241.

<sup>15</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica, “comic strip :: The origins of the comic strip,” Encyclopedia Britannica eb.com, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/127589/comic-strip/13705/The-origins-of-the-comic-strip>.

<sup>16</sup> Harvey, *The Art of the Funnies: An Aesthetic History*, 9

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

The first comic strips appeared in the periodicals. Since the earliest times of their history, weekly or daily comic strips like *Mutt and Jeff* by Bud Fisher or *Bringing Up Father* by George Mc Manus were widely read and had to appeal “to everyone – high-brow, low-brow, man, woman, and child.”<sup>18</sup> Thus, although their characters and protagonists were not examples of morality and proper conduct, social outcasts, not to mention prostitutes, could not be depicted so as not to stir up the indignation. The depiction of cabaret dancers was as far as the artists could go in portraying sexual liberty. The situation has not changed much over time . Comic strips in popular periodicals deal mainly with everyday life of average people, while comic strips in erotic magazines like *Playboy* offer the readers insights into sexual adventures of common men and women where prostitutes are absent or function merely as an accessory.

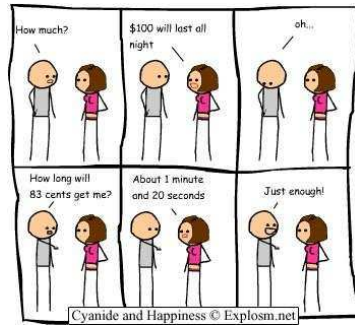
The situation is different in the case of online comic strips. With the spread of the Internet, literally everybody can put their comic strips online. Although contemporary readers face a flood of online comic strips, prostitutes appear seldom and only episodically. My discussion of online comic strips will be divided into two parts: that of strips in which a prostitute is only a part of the world where the protagonist lives and that of strips where she is the protagonist herself.

In the first group, the reader faces a similar situation as in cartoons. Prostitutes are presented as stereotypical females connected directly with issues of sexuality and money. They are also typically dressed in tight, short outfits and gaudy colors, but in comparison to the highly codified outfits from cartoons, there is some variety. The below example from *Cyanide and Happiness* show how far stereotypical oversimplification can go.

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<sup>18</sup> Bud Fisher, “Seven Tips I Have Picked up In the Way”, *American Magazine*, (1920): 20.





The profession is no longer treated as a social evil. It is portrayed as a part of the protagonist's world, without any moral commentary. If such commentary appears, like in the *Sinfest* strip presented below, it is done in a humorous and satirical manner that ridicules moralistic approaches.



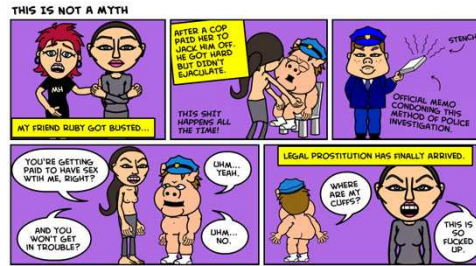
The image of the prostitute is much more complicated and far from stereotypical in online comic books where she is the main protagonist. Here, the focus on a sex worker as a person can be observed. The best and probably the only example of an online comic strip where a prostitute is the protagonist is *The Modern Hooker* created by the artist under the pen name of Modern Hooker. The strips are updated weekly on carnalnation.com, an internet portal aiming to sexually educate people and make their sex lives more fulfilling. The idea of sex as a positive and normal activity pervades the entire series of comic strips. Its message is radically different from those presented in cartoons and comic strips discussed earlier.

*Modern Hooker* series present the image of a prostitute as far from stereotypical. In terms of appearance, *Modern Hooker*'s outfit is not symbolic as the case was in cartoons

or some comic strips. In fact, her looks do not differentiate her from common girls appearing throughout the series. She does not wear high heels and her dress covers most of her body. Her buttocks and breasts are small. The overall appearance seems far from sexy or provocative.

The differences go much deeper than her looks. She is not a street walker and tends to take clients home or goes to their homes, which technically makes her a call girl. Many strips emphasize her preparations before a meeting with a client or everyday endeavors for improving her looks. In some strips she describes her work equipment such as a cell-phone, computer, or sexy lingerie. All such details are completely absent from all other comic strips featuring a prostitute. It seems that the author is trying to show as many elements from her life as possible to counterbalance the stereotypical image of a sex worker pervading the media. Modern Hooker has kids, but they do not know about her job as she lies to them about her occupation. Afraid that her children may catch her with a client, she mostly does “outcalls.” The protagonist emphasizes the fact that her work is well-paid and she has plenty of time for her children. She even states that being a call girl is better for one’s overall mood than working in an office.

Additionally, *Modern Hooker* comic strip presents an accurate illustration of many aspects of prostitute life described in the first chapter. Ms. Modern Hooker cannot be described as an exclusive prostitute but she is a well-situated call girl with a thriving business. Her everyday life and dealings with clients are very similar to the realities of call girls discussed in the first chapter. The protagonist has a network of friends in business with whom she exchanges contacts, clients, experience and warnings about bad clients or troublesome policemen. Police officers are depicted with pig-faces, thus showing the character’s attitude towards policemen who, although prostitution is a crime, often demand service from sex workers or simply abuse them.

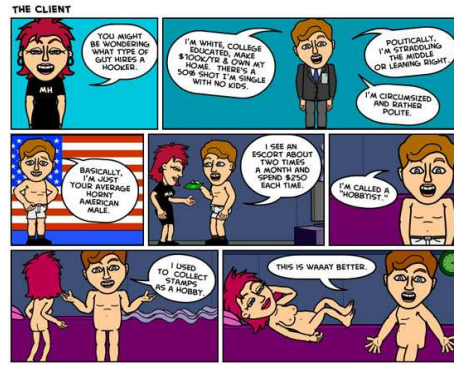


This situation mirrors fears and situations from the *Revolving Door* and *Behind Closed Doors* projects concerned with New York sex work. In *Modern Hooker* the fear of being arrested is often emphasized and contrasted with the desire for being perceived in contemporary times comic strips accompany cartoons in periodicals.

This situation mirrors fears and situations from the *Revolving Door* and *Behind Closed Doors* projects concerned with New York sex work. In *Modern Hooker* fear of being arrested is often emphasized and contrasted with the desire of being seen as a respectable person doing respectable job.

In her imagination Ms. Modern Hooker compares herself to the ancient goddess Ishtar, sacred temple priestesses, or Venus of Willendorf. These references to the history of prostitution give her higher self-esteem and self-respect. She feels as if her profession had its own noble history. As it was emphasized in the first chapter, prostitutes, who were often a highly-respected part of ancient societies, were deprived of their social status with the rise of Christianity. .

Modern Hooker's clients are depicted as average men, often old and grey. They seem to come from different social backgrounds, representing various needs and fetishes. Although one strip is especially dedicated to the description of an average client, his overall picture is not stereotypical at all.



Various needs that men fulfill by visiting a prostitute, described in detail in the first chapter, are also enumerated in *Modern Hooker*:

Sex work isn't about sex. It's about human connection. Everyone deserves intimacy. Some of my clients haven't held a woman in their arms in years. Others do not have anyone to listen to them or give them pleasure...or not shame them around their curiosities.<sup>19</sup>

However, the main issue addressed repeatedly in the series is the idea that a sex worker is a common, average girl who should have the right to legal work. The support for civil rights for sex workers is intensely visible throughout the series.



<sup>19</sup> Modern Hooker, "Someday," Carnal Nation, <http://carnalnation.com/content/5684/10/someday>.

There are several strips showing the ideal world for a prostitute where she is respected and her work made safe. Through the contrast the reader can imagine how tragic and hard the situation of a prostitute is now. Other strips show sad consequences of banning sex work by moral authorities. The artistic character of the comic strip also contributes to the above message. The series is completely devoid of obscenity. Although almost every aspect of prostitute's life is depicted, none of that is sexually stimulating. The bodies are simplified in a pleasant way, with the soft lines and bright colors giving the comic strip a positive look.

This weekly ongoing series may serve as a contrast to cartoons and comic strips described before *Modern Hooker*. Although still serving a brief, concise message concerning the issues in question, it fails, in a positive sense, to present stereotypical image of a sex worker. Instead, it provides the reader with authentic problems and aspects of prostitution, combined with humor but without grotesque exaggerations. In *Modern Hooker* the image of the prostitute reflects the authentic needs and problems of American prostitutes while in cartoons and other comic strips the depiction was dominated by stereotypical views and social prejudices against prostitution in America.

It must be mentioned that the protagonist of *Modern Hooker* has no proper name. It may indicate that although to some point personalized, Ms. Modern Hooker serves as a symbol of all American prostitutes that do not want to be perceived through popular stereotypes and harmful oversimplifications.

The last type of material discussed in this chapter is an interesting although long-gone phenomenon of Tijuana Bibles, short erotic comic stories, usually sized 10cm x15cm and containing eight pages, which existed the United States between the 1920s and the 1960s. Later, these "*fuck-books*" vanished from the market, probably because of the Sexual Revolution of the 1960s and the end of the ban on sexual materials. Sold "under the

counter” in barber shops, garages and even schools, Tijuana Bibles peaked as a social phenomenon in the times of Great Depression

They began appearing in the late twenties, flourished throughout the Depression years, and began to peter out after World War II. (...)They were clandestinely produced and distributed small booklets that chronicled the explicit sexual adventures of America's beloved comic-strip characters, celebrities, and folk-heroes.<sup>20</sup>

Comic book pamphlets,<sup>21</sup> as Art Spiegelman calls them, were short and similar in form to comic strips, although their main role was slightly different. As “pornography and cartoons are both about the stripping-away of dignity; both depend on exaggeration”<sup>22</sup> using visually appealing sequences of pictures as tools to sexual arousal. Such material became highly popular, especially in hard times of 1930s in America.

part of the early Tijuana Bibles' appeal lies in their peculiar combination of debauchery and innocence. Perhaps because the blue-collar sexual environment they were hatched in was so oppressive, they didn't usually venture into the truly outré and kinky sado-masochistic domains that pervade much of today's popular culture, let alone contemporary hard-core pornography. They seem to marvel at the very *idea* of sex.<sup>23</sup>

Although not designed as a social commentary and almost devoid of the plot, this form of sequential art may be very interesting from the perspective of this paper because it gives a glimpse of the world as seen exclusively from men's point of view and the place of a prostitute in such erotic fantasies – Tijuana Bibles were drawn by men for men.

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<sup>20</sup> Bob Adelman, *Tijuana Bibles: Art and Wit in America's Forbidden Funnies, 1930s-1950s* (Erotic Print Society, 2006), 5.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

As it was observed in the discussion of comic strips in magazines devoted to sexual fantasies, such media rarely feature a prostitute as part of pornography/erotic industry. It seems as if a prostitute, a woman intended for fulfilling male fantasies in reality, in the realm of erotic fantasies was to be nonexistent. Tijuana Bibles are no exception from this rule, but there are examples of prostitution in them as projected by male fantasies.

In the world of male fantasies presented in Tijuana Bibles, as in pornographic movies, sexual intercourse is performed by people who are not in any way connected to sex business. The more decent the woman is, the more worthy of seduction she seems to be and the more sexually attractive in the eyes of a male reader she becomes. Prostitutes, whose sexuality is explicit and commercially available, were not, in fact, interesting as objects of fantasies for the authors of these materials. However, sex for money is possible in the world of Tijuana Bibles. In the short story titled "Tillie the Fire Woman," a young girl meets a female friend who initiates her in the activities bringing financial prospects, namely - paid love. For young, pretty girls it seems to be the best way to make extra money for jewelry and expensive clothes. "Just take a walk down the project and flirt with the boys. They'll pay ten bucks for a lay."<sup>24</sup> The protagonist becomes so popular among men that they form lines to get her. Both females are not sex workers and they treat the whole enterprise as a way of spending free time. Although they perform sex for money and by definition their activity can be classified as prostitution, they are not stigmatized as prostitutes and still play part in male fantasies. They are common, pretty girls who, in the end, appear as the embodiment of naiveté - the protagonist provides her body "on credit."

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<sup>24</sup> Michel Dowers, *Tijuana Bibles Vol. 1* (Fantagraphics Books, 1997), 19.



Consequently, a naïve girl is used by men and the word “prostitution” is not even mentioned. It may reflect a one of the characteristic of the world of male fantasies, in which all women are free to give themselves to men.

The analysis of short forms of sequential art and cartoons conducted in this chapter provides the image of a prostitute that is in most cases extremely stereotypical. In some isolated cases this type of material may reflect to a certain degree many real life issues and problems of prostitution but this does not happen frequently. In general, the portrayal may seem oversimplified, but its simplicity may be ascribed to the conciseness of the form and the characteristic message which is often only a brief social commentary.



## **Chapter three**

# **The Representations of Prostitutes and Prostitution in Underground “Comix.”**

This chapter is devoted to the analysis of the representations of prostitution in comics produced under the banner of sequential art. Underground comics, different both in content and modes of distribution from the mainstream offerings, offer the reader a peculiar view on the world, an outlook unconstrained by the restrictions, limitations and requirements of the economic market and public opinion and morality. Drawn under such circumstances, as the most unfettered form of all scrutinized in this thesis, underground comics may be an excellent source of the view of prostitution.

According to Mroczkowski, every thirty, forty years any culture, no matter how developed and stabilized, faces a time of political unrest and awareness of social, economic and political problems in society, a period when the established images of “culture” no longer fit the times.<sup>1</sup> He claims that for example the “roaring twenties” and the 1960s that brought counterculture were such eras. The counterculture movement influenced the entire society and all fields of life in the United States, especially in the realm of cultural activities. The world of comic books, extremely restricted by the CCA<sup>2</sup> in the mainstream, as an underground medium appeared to be an excellent agent to convey countercultural message. The need to address minority rights, freedom from sexual constraints and political and social protest found its way of expression in underground “comix” – self printed or small-pressed comic books, described by Charles Hatfield as “produced on

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<sup>1</sup> Mark James Estren, *A history of Underground Comics* (Ronin Publishing, 1993), 8.

<sup>2</sup> Self-regulation attempted by the comic book publishers in 50's to avoid the outsider scrutiny of political and moral authorities over the content of comic books. The „witch-hunt” started after the publication of Dr. Frederick Wertham's book „Seduction of the Innocent” published In 1954 in which he presented the „facts” proving that the comic books contributed to the delinquency and sexual perversion of teenagers.

cheap paper, short stories, everything was done to cut costs”<sup>3</sup> with exclusively adult content. “To differentiate these types of books from other comic books, an "X" was added to the end of "comic" changing it to "comix." This "X" was also used to show that it often had X-rated material.”<sup>4</sup>

Underground comics were launched in San Francisco around 1965 and rapidly gained popularity among younger readers.

Originally self-published and small-circulation experiments in rendering the new consciousness inflamed by the Vietnam War, they took as their subjects drugs, psychedelia, kinky sex, and mockery of and rage against authority. The underground comics (often spelled “comix”), marketed with titles such as *Zap Comix* and *Snatch*, soon attained national and international celebrity among rebellious youth.<sup>5</sup>

This popularity was an effect of both the novelty of style and messages that reflected emotions, language and expectations of the younger generations, thus giving underground comics a tool for effective communication. As Mroczkowski states: “The underground cartoons were a totally unique art form that went beyond what the cartoon really was. And they were an extremely powerful medium of communication.”<sup>6</sup> Moreover, given the unlimited liberty of expression in both the subject and graphic form, the artists involved in drawing and writing underground comics could concentrate on their personal visions. In his book describing the history of the underground comics, Mark Estren says that “The artists were driven to do what they do, sometimes demon-ridden by their own ideas and

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<sup>3</sup> Charles Hatfield, *Alternative Comics: An Emerging Literature* (University Press of Mississippi, 2005), 8.

<sup>4</sup> About.com ComicBooks, “Comix - Definition of the Comic Book Term Comix,” <http://comicbooks.about.com/od/glossary/g/comix.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica eb.com, “Comic strip - Britannica Online Encyclopedia,” <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/127589/comic-strip>.

<sup>6</sup> Estren, *A History of Underground Comics*, 7.

needing to bring them out.”<sup>7</sup> Many sources emphasize the specific situation in which comic book artists found themselves in: the world of “underground creation” and the outside world of drugs and sexual revolution. According to Charles Hatfield comic books were “a vehicle for the most personal and unguarded revelations. [. . .] [they] conveyed an unprecedented sense of intimacy, rivaling the scandalizing disclosures of confessional poetry but shot through with fantasy, burlesque and self-satire.”<sup>8</sup> The most notorious figures of the “comix world” warped by a desperation triggered by the artist’s use of psychedelic drugs, which had become part of their personal language, offered the reader original and deeply personal visions. One of the best-known comics producers Robert Crumb presented introverted works with a form and plot “on a knife-edge between the grotesque and real, sexual extremism and social anxiety, the absurd and the philosophical. [. . .] Crumb often seemed above all to be exorcising his personal demons.”<sup>9</sup> Other notorious figures from the underground were Rick Griffin, S. Clay Wilson, and Gilbert Shelton, “whose sex-and-dope-hungry pseudo-revolutionary”<sup>10</sup> works circulated widely and have been regularly reprinted. Their intensive and untrammelled works soon enjoyed wide above-ground popularity, and their effect was long-lasting.

The origins of underground comic books can be traced to Eight-Pagers: in other words, the same Tijuana Bibles described in the second chapter, which, although “being carefully tailored to adolescent sexual fantasies [were also] promoting nihilistic, anti-authoritarian points of view, not exactly satirizing the forces of goodness so much as placing them on the same level as the forces of evil.”<sup>11</sup> Other sources of influence included animated cartoons such as Bugs Bunny or Duffy Duck, which commented on the state of contemporary society, and comic strips both in form and content. Even mainstream comics

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Hatfield, *Alternative Comics: An Emerging Literature*, 7.

<sup>9</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica eb.com.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Estren, *A History of Underground Comics*, 27.

influenced underground, especially the practice of collecting stories of similar genre in magazines prevalent in mainstream. Horror stories collected in *The Vault of Horror* comics magazine or detective stories gathered in *Crime Suspense Stories* reflected in underground comix through the tendency to create similar magazines such as *Insect Fear* gathering horrors or SF, or fantasy magazines such as *Realm* or *Psychotic Fantasies*.

The mentioned above characteristics of the underground artist: the freedom of subject and form in the situation where there are no restrictions coming from the market or social restraints characteristic for both mainstream and comic strips, the fact that the underground comix made comic books an adult commodity, make them a valuable medium for observing the presentation of such social phenomena as prostitution.

The picture of prostitutes in the world of underground artists' visions will be scrutinized in this chapter in two groups of texts facilitating the analysis. As mentioned in previous chapters, the image of a prostitute when she is only a fragment of the protagonist's world differs considerably from the vision in the works where she plays the main role. This division seems practical also in the case of underground comics as the differences dependent on the above categories are also visible in this group of comic books. However, before it is done, the general overview of the role of women in underground comics is needed.

Most underground comic books' authors have been male. This fact, together with the situation where the author's fantasy can be freely expressed, makes for very peculiar visions of women. The comic itself, both in the form and the content, becomes sheer illustration of male fantasies and visions about women. After analyzing several works of underground artists two important facts emerge.

First of all, any reader who comes across even a small sample of underground comics immediately sees that sex plays a major role in their fictitious worlds and most

messages are related to it. There are no exceptions – regardless of the character of the plot, protagonists or genre, sexual situations and connotations are always present, and in most cases are a major driving force in the story. The reasons for the omnipresence of sex in underground comics are numerous. The rebellion against the CCA and social norms and the constraints of the market may be the one. The freedom of portraying of artists’ fantasies also plays a major role. There is also the need of showing something shocking, as Gianluca Constantini believes: “the main topic of the underground was sex because it was something scandalous.”<sup>12</sup> The need to shock the audiences and authorities also leads to the overwhelming amount of violence in underground comics, especially visible in the context of sex. As Estren emphasizes in his book: “Sex is violent over here – sexuality is violent – by definition in these comics sex is violent.”<sup>13</sup> This combination often takes grotesque forms, for example in the works of S. Clay Wilson with his works “filled with orgies and brawls, molestations and mutilations. His characters are usually pirates, lesbians, motorcycle gangs, or horned demonic monsters. All his characters are drawn in anatomically correct detail, complete with warts, nose hair, sweat, saliva, and wet rubbery genitalia.”<sup>14</sup>

Secondly, seen through the prism of sexuality women begin to resemble prostitutes in some respects. In almost all works by male authors, female protagonists not related to the flesh trade on purpose or unconsciously emphasize their carnal side. Their voracious, violent sexuality, when they are portrayed as strong characters, and ceaseless readiness for sexual encounters even when they play part of victims causes them to appear similar to sex workers. Moreover, their scant, provocative outfits often share characteristics with the

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<sup>12</sup> “Gianluca Costantini: 'the main topic of the comic underground was sex - now it's politics',”The European magazine Cafebabel, <http://www.cafebabel.com/eng/article/30754/gianluca-costantini-italian-comic-art-underground.html>.

<sup>13</sup> Estren, *A History of Underground Comics*, 144.

<sup>14</sup> Book Rags, “Underground Comics History,” <http://www.bookrags.com/history/underground-comics-sjpc-05/>.

outfits stereotypically associated with prostitution, such as stockings or black high heels. In the works of S. Clay Wilson, prostitutes and other female characters are impossible to distinguish. In most cases, common women, judging by the outfits and general patterns of behavior, are very difficult to distinguish from prostitutes. The easiness of sexual encounters, provocative outfits, the readiness for sex and their erotic behavior make female protagonists prostitute-like. A selection of illustrations of prostitutes taken from the background of some of the stories demonstrates this clearly.:



when compared to a similar selection of various female characters not connected with the flesh trade:





It seems that the only element differentiating both groups is the street lamp which serves as a symbol of the infamous occupation. A woman herself, no matter the scenery or genre, seems to share most of the physical characteristics with prostitutes. The consequences of such way of portraying females, with the emphasis on the carnal side and promiscuity, may be very interesting for the analysis of the image of prostitutes because in other media only this occupation is associated with such characteristics. Thus, how will the profession be portrayed, what role will it have in the fictitious world where all women possess such characteristics?

The analysis will be conducted according to the method used in previous chapters. This chapter will first focus on the role of the prostitutes in works where they constitute parts of the background for the protagonists.

Underground comic stories deal with all possible subjects and genres. Prostitutes as characters are not presented frequently, but they do appear in all possible types of narration: in SF, crime stories, suspense stories, grotesque, comedies and “slice of life.” When only a part of a scenery or experiences of the main hero, a prostitute to some extent adopts the characteristics of the story. Her role and image differs according to the type of narration and the story itself.

In several stories prostitutes appear as a part of the protagonist’s everyday experiences. The types of prostitutes that appear in this context are street-walkers and nude dancers. Probably because they are frequent and easy to trace in real life, they are used as

tools to show the decadence of big cities or the hero's life. In the story "New York Journal" written and drawn by the author of famous *Maus*, the protagonist, who shares the name with the author himself, comes to New York City. Everyday routine, presented to the reader through a sequence of square panels accompanied by dispassionate descriptions emphasizes the monotony and meaninglessness of everyday shallow existence in which the protagonist is unable to engage. The meeting with "buddies" in a bar with nude dancers and the activities performed both by men (sticking money, laughing, watching) and the dancer (erotic dance) seem mechanical and devoid of any deeper meaning. This incident is probably repulsive for Spiegelman because figures of cockroaches swarming on the pages of the story concentrate around the panels with a nude dancer. These insects also appear as a part of the narration – the protagonist kills them every day in his squalid apartment. Their omnipresence forces the reader to associate this kind of life with repulsive, dirty creatures. The insects, together with the scene with an "exotic dancer" are to emphasize the negative sides of existence. Similar situation, where role of a prostitute amounts to the element emphasizing carnal and depraved side of life, can also be observed in the story "Enoch Yip", a short tale about everyday existence of a lonely alcoholic. All elements in the story serve to emphasize Enoch's pathetic existence: cluttered, dirty place he lives in, sickness, language he uses, and bars he goes to. A prostitute is an only woman he can get. Negative aspects of the sexual act are emphasized by the prostitute's concentration on money and Enoch's despise of a woman right after their sexual act: "Havin' to pay for it like meat on a rack stinks as their pussies!"<sup>15</sup>

If prostitution is used in such a way it means that the profession is regarded as "dirty" from the protagonist's point of view. Such feeling may not be related to women themselves but the very presence of such underhand dealings in the city and life.

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<sup>15</sup> Dave Geiser, "Enoch Yip", *DTs*, December, 1974, 11.





However, as the underground comics are personal visions of the authors, different visions also appear. A very interesting example of looking at a prostitute from a "romantic" and aesthetic perspective can be seen in a short story "What a Pair of Eyes Can Promise" by Cliff Carper. The act of prostitution parallels the rhythm of Charles Baudelaire's *Les Promesses D'un Visage*. The artwork is focused on the sexual act in a car and the beauty of a female body. Such a poetic approach excludes words and money exchange from the vision of the reader.



This exception seems to prove the rule. It contrasts with the overall picture of not only prostitution but also of the overall style of underground sequential art, which is crude and slipshod.

The statement that the picture of prostitution in the background of comix serves only to emphasize negative sides of life is untrue. Moreover, underground artists, experiencing untrammelled freedom in the field of subject, often express their critique of prostitution not present in mainstream comics.

Many stories stress the objectification of a prostitute and emphasize the treatment of a woman as a material commodity in a very direct and shocking way.<sup>16</sup> One of the great examples is the story “Sin City Showdown” by Peter Pontiac. It is a story of a hooker taken from a bar which serves as a brothel by a masked man Arma De Fuego. The mysterious man takes her to the streets and sells her body. The first client she takes that day strangles her to death. During the whole story she never speaks a word and her face seems devoid of any feelings. She remains absolutely passive and never speaks a word. Her acting, both innocent and seducing seems empty, as if it was only a set of mechanical gestures. What is more, she stays completely passive to what is happening to her, even in the face of death she does not defend herself. She is treated like a doll by other men, utterly objectified. The picture of a prostitute in this story, although clad in a bit supernatural disguise, seems to be a tragic protest against flesh trade.

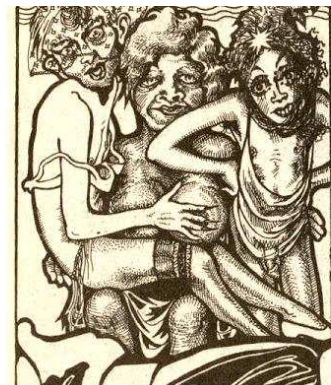
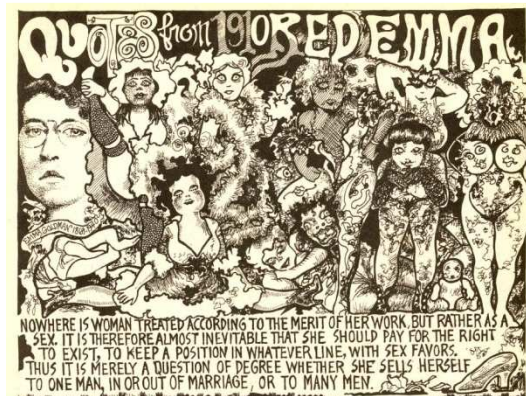


Another, more direct protest against the role and status of a woman in society is presented in the second issue of *Anarchy*. The author of “Quotes of 1910 Red Emma” illustrates in a form of a short comics story the most important feminist manifestos. The first one concerns issues of sexuality and prostitution saying that a woman is forced to sell her body either to her husband or to strangers, which makes marriage also a form of

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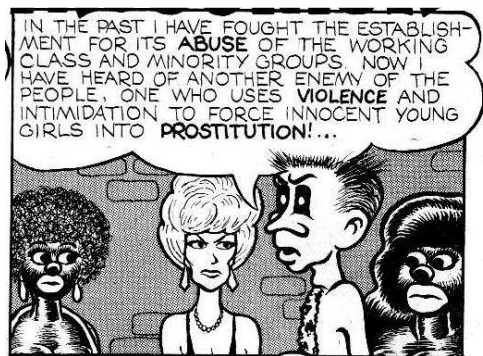
<sup>16</sup> Such treatment of a woman’s body is perfectly illustrated in the series *Doll* by Guy Colwell in which men several times kidnap and abuse a sex doll specially created for one of the protagonists.

prostitution. A sequence of shocking illustrations emphasize how unjustly a woman has been treated in society. The metaphor with man taking place and role (in both social and biological way) of females is shocking and additionally demonstrates how degrading womanhood may be in the world dominated by men. In this case a critique of prostitution becomes a critique of the woman's role in the society.



The question of the ambivalent attitude of feminists towards flesh trade as discussed in the first chapter is also taken into consideration in underground comix. In the story "Free Enterprise" two feminists establish a bookstore with publications concerned with the feminist subjects. However, the enterprise does not bring any profit. After a debate, girls decide to make a porno movie to raise funds for their movement. The porn movie brings them desired benefits. The story may be an attempt to raise a question from the first chapter: can a flesh trade have positive sides? Maybe, through selling her body a woman can have a way of exercising power over men and use them and their money for her purposes? The story does not give any evident answers, leaving the reader with an opportunity to find the resolution. The story can also be a splendid illustration of the close connection between common women and sex workers mentioned in this chapter. The easiness with which the protagonists become porn stars seems to indicate that it is a natural activity for them. They feel no shame or regret that they sold their sex-life.

Prostitution can also be found in “Projunior,” a story of a self-appointed superhero who tries to make the world a better place. One day he takes on prostitution as an evil institution forcing women to sell their bodies. While it is true that he defeats the pimp, his idea of a “free woman” means that the ladies are forbidden to sell their bodies but they have to give themselves to men for free instead. Through this deed, simple and honest, Projunior shows the darker side of his views. At this point the reader asks a question of the true nature of prostitution. Maybe the exploitation of women is not grounded in the fact that they take money for the service but in the fact that the female body is seen by men as a commodity.



Also in “Projunior,” like in “Sin City Showdown,” prostitutes resemble voiceless, obeying dolls, totally subordinated to what men decide.

The above presented stories do not go into the details of the profession, however, showing the flesh trade from a general and a somewhat stereotypical perspective. They still emphasize important questions concerning flesh trade. The image of a prostitute seems tragic as the reader gradually realizes that a sex worker may be treated as a symbol of male domination over a woman and reducing her to the carnal aspect.

The image of a prostitute as an element of the story has several more facets. Different in mood and significance from the works presented above is the representation of a prostitution used as a comical element in humorous comix. When a sex worker is used by

an artist as a source of humorous effect, their role and image show other sides of a profession.

In the issue no. 2 of *Good Jive* the reader may find two short and funny stories featuring prostitutes. In both of them the characters of prostitutes are used for a comical effect. In a story titled “Stupid Stud” the protagonist, who got wounded in a war and lost his penis, has a friend Stud generously endowed by nature. Stud takes care of the protagonist so the hero wants to return him a favor. Once, walking down the street he overhears a conversation of two street walkers: the business is so bad that they would pay for “getting laid by a big one.” The protagonist offers to introduce them to Stud. The comical effect is the strongest when the two hustlers, after seeing Stud’s “equipment,” are ready to pay for sex they would perform. Girls are presented as street-wise females, although dressed in common clothes, without exaggeration or emphasis on their sexuality. The fact that they want sex so much forces the reader to believe that they in fact enjoy their profession. This characteristics – that a prostitute is fond of performing sex – is a major feature differentiating the character of a prostitute used for a comical effect from the grim picture present in the stories that criticize it.



In the story “New Comer,” a young boy observes (his naiveté and innocent-eye are the source of humor here) how various men go into a house of a pretty woman, stay there for a short time and go out really happy. Intrigued by what happens inside the boy decides

to try it also. The lady promises to let him on the secret for 10 dollars but the kid has only 75 cents. She agrees on this sum. The humorous effect is the most visible when a boy leaves the house and this time it is the prostitute who is satisfied and happy. Also in this case the sex worker seems to have positive attitude towards both clients and her work, no abuse is visible, and all sides participating in the flesh trade are satisfied. She is also presented with a dose of innocence - in a girlish skirt and pleasant face.



Underground comix suggest that prostitution, or the very fact of selling body, can be used as a source of humor in several ways. In “Tweedle’s Big Sister Myrna,” a call girl working at home is so excited that her brother became “a pro” in the world of sequential art and started publishing his comic stories that she gives her body for free to celebrate the occasion. In “Doping Dan,” the dance of a nude dancer is transformed by the author into an occasion to create a story of excited male audience fighting over the erotic dancer’s accessories.

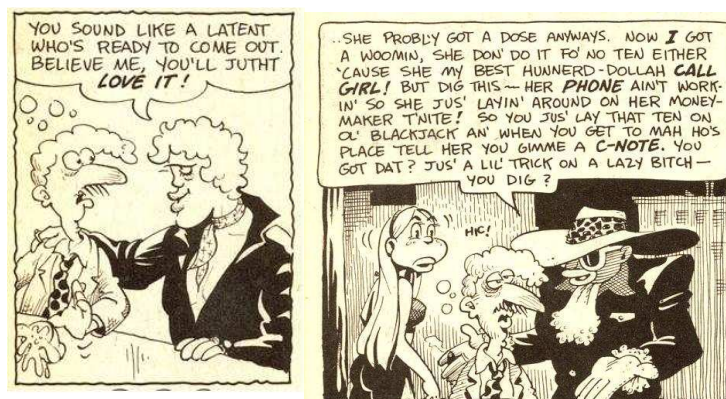


As it will be presented further in this work, the interaction between the audience and a nude “exotic dancer” is often a subject of underground comic stories and a similar situation in a more realistic and serious perspective may be a source of tragedy.

Nude dancers appeared several times in other short stories from underground, the most interesting being “Suzie’s Savage Romance” from *Knockabout Comics*, where the female protagonist, a dancing stripper dressed in bananas, seduces, uses and then contributes to the fall of a ruthless gangster.

In all cases described above prostitutes are presented similarly to common young girls not engaged in flesh-trade. Also from this point of view both groups – sex workers and other females are presented as similar, though in the case of humorous stories prostitutes tend to be compared to the other group.

In “Tom Comes Out,” a greedy pimp and both male and female prostitute harass a man who hates homosexuals and thinks of himself as totally straight. Through a set of coincidences he becomes convinced that he is in fact gay. This story creates an occasion to observe how male prostitutes (extremely rare in comic books) and pimps are presented through the humorous prism. The male prostitute is strongly built, however his face is endowed with female characteristics such as full lips and long lashes. Pimps in such stories are presented as cunning and enterprising. Very interesting is the fact that their faces are portrayed in a manner visible in *minstrel shows*, with characteristic facial features and white, round lips. Both clients and prostitutes seem to be the victims of a pimp. The above mentioned “Projunior” can be an exception in this matter as the pimp is shown as completely helpless in encounter with a white-man hero.





In all the above cases the clients are presented as males driven by their instincts, often as victims of their desires. In *Zippy Stories* the reader can come across an epilogue with the main hero Zippy visiting “massage parlor” called “Nude Encounters.” His whole visit is highly humorous as he mistakes the list of “specialties” with the menu in restaurant and when he stays alone with a prostitute he starts to talk about his family life and after four minutes (from eighteen designated for the encounter) he runs away in panic. He can be a perfect example of a client as portrayed in humorous stories whose naiveté makes him unable to use the services.



It seems that both the image of a prostitute and that of her client fall far from the realities described in the first chapter. Nevertheless, flesh trade seems to be a perfect source of humor.

Underground stories often mock the schemes and stories well known from the mainstream comic books or culture as general. Comix show in false mirror the hackneyed schemes from well known literature and film or enrich them with elements that could never



be presented in the mainstream media. Prostitution seems to be one of such elements. The mockery does not exclude any of the genres and the readers can encounter science fiction stories, horrors, crime stories and romances. Placing a prostitute in such an environment provides an additional grotesque and humorous effect and adds new facets to the image of the profession in underground comix.

In a story “Dan Maniac,” a sexy assistant of a mentally unstable scientist (the reader realizes from the first panel that he reads a pastiche of suspense and horror stories), exhausted with dangerous events in the lab, decides to go back to her previous occupation – a street-walker, which she considers less dangerous. The story “Good Listener,” both in graphically and plot-wise, resembles suspense stories from comics magazines published in the USA between the 1930s and the 1950s. The plot revolves around the monologue of a man who speaks to a woman lying motionless on the floor. The reader is convinced that she is a victim of a murderer, possibly the man sitting beside her, speaking to her with raised voice full of resentment. It is not before the very end when she gets up and takes money from the man. She turns out to be a prostitute hired not to have sex but to listen. It is a perfect example of what was described in the first chapter - prostitutes are hired not only to fulfill male sexual fantasies but often fantasies not related to sex. In the issue 3 of *Arcade* in the series *Crucified Classics* (as the title may suggest concerned with shocking pastiches of well known literature classics) concerned with *Crime and Punishment*, Sonia, in fact a prostitute also in the original, plays an important role as the element of farce. In “Green Lampburn” a parody of super hero comic books such as Superman, a superhero chasing a super-villain uses a street-walker’s abilities (fellatio) to gain strength and attack his enemies. The last example from this group is the story titled “Mister Pons vs. Robot Head.” Designed to parody the famous scientific programs of the 1950s, it illustrates, as if for TV spectators, the function of “reason” and “desire” in the life of an average man.

These two forces are depicted by a giant robot and prostitutes respectively. The story takes the form of an instructional movie in which two street walkers seduce “brain stem man” - a symbol of a human nervous system. A giant mechanical robot tries to defend ‘brain stem man’ from street walkers. The battle of the two forces is left uncompleted.

In all the above examples prostitutes are treated as elements used to emphasize parodist character of the stories. However, the majority of all pastiche stories are connected with the world of SF. In this group there are numerous stories concerned exclusively with Martians. SF stories with prostitutes in them show that even after the earth is invaded by Martians prostitutes still play their role. In the story “Making Lovsky” combining the elements of *film noir* and science fiction the main subject of the investigation – a Martian official of high rank on Earth is suspected of being involved in “some sordid interspecies sexual perversion.”<sup>17</sup> Prostitutes from Earth, especially a dominatrix, make come true the sexual fantasies of a Martian, who otherwise leads a settled down life with a wife and child. In *Super Science Wonder Stories* magazine in the story “Roger of The Academy,” Roger Wright, a cadet in the third class of Space Academy, has an intercourse with a prostitute who belongs to extraterrestrial race showing her “extra” abilities during sexual encounter but also turns out to be a chief recruiter for the Martian mob led by a cockroach. During sexual intercourse Roger accidentally kills the cockroach and becomes a hero. In the story “Commie Crime” in the fifth issue of the magazine under the same title, the members of the Martian invasion force have difficulties with getting jobs on earth. Consequently, they undertake marginal activities that can bring them profit such as drugs, crime, and, of course, prostitution.

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<sup>17</sup> Jon Rich, Making Lovsky, *Commies From Mars. The Red Planet*, 1982, 11.



Pastiche of various genres



Science fiction pastiche

When it comes to satire, the role of the prostitute is reduced to the most basic functions and becomes strongly stereotypical both in her appearance and function. In all the above cases a sex worker serves only as a token of the profession and an element that strengthens the humor and becomes very close in function to the image from political and satirical comic strips and cartoons described in chapter two. Additionally, Gray Diggs, one of the

underground authors, imitates in his works the style of newspapers and newspaper cartoons and uses image of prostitutes in a similar way to real cartoons, using them as a satirical commentary for contemporary reality.



It seems that the image of a prostitute differs depending on the point of her presence in the story. In the case of humorous comix the overall image seems to be to some extent positive; prostitutes give the impression of being simple, pretty girls with an occupation that brings them much more pleasure than worry. Their desire to fulfill male desires is emphasized and often presented in the context of a prostitute's own pleasure. An opposite situation can be observed in comix which criticize the profession. Such negative picture consists of emphasizing the manifestations of female exploitation and leads the reader to the conclusion that prostitution is connected to the general mistreatment of women in the society. Unfortunately in many pastiche stories the role of a sex worker is simplified and stereotypical, similar to the one presented in cartoons.

As it may be expected, more complicated image of the prostitute can be observed in those underground comix where she plays the leading role. Such stories are few, however. In the case of comics with a sex worker as the main hero, the characters seem to fall into two categories. The first one overlaps with one of the categories from the previous part of this chapter – tales trying to emphasize the social injustice and the fate of prostitutes. Surprisingly such stories are in majority humorous or at least narrated with satirical distance. The other group are tales created for the sheer entertainment with heavy erotic or

even pornographic overtones. Here the reader faces a more pleasant vision of prostitution where the profession is often an pleasurable occupation.

One of the stories in which the author tries to attract the attention of the reader to the hardships of prostitutes' life and the social connotations of the profession is a short story titled "Over and Under." This short fiction printed in *Big Apple Comics*' second issue presents a story of two women – very similar physically but taking different life paths. Each page of the issue consists of two columns of panels. The left column presents daily routines of a probably middle-class girl named Bev, working as a secretary in a big city. The right column presents analogous situations, but the protagonist is a prostitute. Similar faces of protagonists intensify contrast and make the reader wonder how little separates both fates. The main line of criticism towards the profession lies in the comparison. Almost all important moments of everyday existence are compared: attitude of friends and neighbors, work and free time, partners and bosses. Bev's life seems familiar to the average reader, while in the neighboring column of panels, the reader can observe the hardships of the prostitute's life. Her morning starts with a brutal wake-up and complaints about violent pimps (Fast Freddy, the heroine's boss is known for painful treatment of his "ladies") and problems both with clients and health. She lives together with another prostitute in a cheap, dirty apartment. They start the day early, and are greeted by indecent remarks on the street while, in the right column's panel, Bev is welcomed with respect by other people while going to work. The contrast also directs the reader's attention to the social perception of prostitutes. A woman who seems as unentangled in sex is respected, while those engaged in flesh trade are regarded as low. Again in this story, the issue of "paying" policemen for tolerating the sex business is strongly emphasized. The police are portrayed as violent and utterly disrespectful towards prostitutes. This portrayal mirrors the findings of reports about prostitution in big American cities examined in the first chapter.

However, in a neighboring panel the author shows the moment when Bev has to have sex with one of the directors in her company. It may indicate that women of all professions often have to “pay” with their bodies to retain any kind of favors. “Over and Under” is yet another voice in the group of comics criticizing prostitution not only as a profession but also the overall situation of women in today’s society. In the moment described above both women are “hookers.” This message is emphasized when in the panels below the pimp and Bev’s boss are compared. The last field of comparison are close relationships. As expected, Bev’s partner is a white-collar employee who takes her to a fashionable club, while the nameless prostitute meets a lesbian and has sex with her in a squalid storehouse.



The overall picture is tragic, although there are a few funny moments, too. Prostitutes are portrayed as victims of both social order and brutal males. “Over and Under” portrays the lowest of ranks, street walkers, as part of the social margin involved in drugs and street violence. It also seems that such sex workers, tired, afraid and despising men, look for women as close partners.

*Going Back* by Peter S. Conrad is another interesting story demonstrating in a realistic manner the life of a young prostitute, probably a call-girl working on her own.

Unlike many underground artists, Conrad is a well known writer and illustrator . His comics have appeared in numerous anthologies and newspapers. As he admits, the idea of creating *Going Back* appeared when he found out that one of his friends is an “exotic dancer” and asked her to tell him a few stories about her profession. She provided him with interesting and authentic information about sex workers’ world and gave contacts to prostitutes whose experiences he wanted to use in his comics as well. These encounters shaped his views on prostitution.

I learned that a very close friend had worked briefly as an exotic dancer. Her family doesn't know, but she told me a few stories. I thought there might be other people out there with something to say.[. . .] it's a job. There are people who hate the work and are tremendously unhappy; there are people who don't hate the work and are not tremendously unhappy. There is a community. There is a lot of diversity among sex workers, in terms of how they ended up in sex work, who they are, personality, everything. It's a mistake to try to categorize sex workers too broadly.<sup>18</sup>

As far as the form of Conrad’s work is concerned, illustrations are black and white and lines crude, as if the author focused on avoiding any embellishing of reality. Stylization emphasizes everyday unpleasantness of being a prostitute. The protagonist is nameless, as is the city she works in. Supposedly the story takes place somewhere in California. This lack of any specifics may give an impression that the protagonist is to represent all sex workers of her group – independent call-girls. Her looks are not stereotypical in the slightest, her dresses are not provoking and she has the face of an ordinary girl. The narration and the descriptions come from the heroine so the reader can see the world with her eyes and have access to her dreams. She wants to be loved and she

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<sup>18</sup> Susanna Breslin, “The Reverse Cowgirl: Fast and Dirty: Interview: Peter S. Conrad,” on Blogger, <http://reversecowgirlblog.blogspot.com/2008/01/interview-peter-s-conrad.html>.

has a boyfriend to whom she confesses about her profession. She is entranced that he does not reject her: “I’m lucky to have someone who does not despise me for what I’ve done.”<sup>19</sup> Her boyfriend seems to stand in deep contrast to her clients. They all are portrayed as ugly and, although they all seem non-violent, the reader can realize that physical relations with such people can be hard.



The relations with clients occupy most of the story, but the reader gets to know other characters connected with flesh trade. One of them is Miguel, a male sex worker and her friend. He is “fucking old men who pretend to be respectable and straight.”<sup>20</sup> The heroine also has a female “friend” who thinks that sex work is a noble thing to do, and calls it “ultimate feminism.” She attends “sex work festivals.” She is rich and was never forced by life circumstances to do such a dirty job. This situation, probably based on an authentic testimony, is yet another voice in the complicated relations between prostitutes and feminists. It seems that both groups do not understand each other’s situation and expectations.

The overall picture of the profession, although limited to a narrow range of a few experiences of only one prostitute, seems very realistic and personal probably because it is

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>20</sup> Ibid.



based on true statements. The only example of similar work can be the famous *Melody* by Canadian female author Sylvie Rancourt.<sup>21</sup>

“Tales of the Golden Age America” provides yet another critical voice about the profession. Concentrating on the example of a decent girl from a small town who comes to the city, the story provides an insight into the reasons for engaging in prostitution. The stupidity of a girl who becomes addicted to drugs through constant partying is contrasted with her desperate looking for money to spend on forbidden substances. Prostitution seems, as it was shown in the first chapter, “perfect” occupation for those who need money immediately and their addiction makes them unable to apply for any other job. The contrast between the scenes and the warm letter to the protagonist’s mother gives both tragic and, paradoxically, humorous effect.



A similar story – a young naïve girl escaping from a small town to a big city and, forced by the craving of drugs, becomes a street walker – is illustrated in the story “Little Greta Garbage.” This comix gives a much broader picture of such situation than the short story described above. It must be emphasized that the story shows both the characteristics of comix criticizing prostitution and those eroticizing the profession. The overall critique of the flesh trade comes together with multitude of erotic scenes and constant emphasizing of Greta’s nymphomania, which makes her a prostitute enjoying her occupation.

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<sup>21</sup> *Going Back*, although much shorter, may be compared to Canadian title *Melody* created by Sylvie Rancourt. Also illustrated in black and white and based on a real-life testimony, *Melody* is a multipart story of a sex worker from Quebec. The length of a tale enables the author to present authentic and in-depth image of life of a prostitute and the characteristics of a profession.

The first issue of the comix starts with the author's statement in which he claims that with the character of Greta he does not want to offend women through presenting girls like her – naïve nymphomaniacs. The author emphasizes that Greta is only a figment of his imagination. He also stipulates that “these so called ‘bad girls’ are very intense and complicated people and no one of them is Greta Garbage – she is a composite of the worst traits – infidelity-selfishness-drug addiction- and is not intended to present anything but that.”<sup>22</sup> However, in spite of the stipulation that the story of Little Greta is highly fantastic and impossible, the reader faces an intense, credible story that in fact may have happened anywhere in the USA. Greta, a girl from a small town, earning the reputation of “a slut” by giving herself to an older boy and his “pals”, runs away to the big city directly after her father, mad about her nickname attempts to rape her. In the city she meets a young artist. He takes care of her. Although she seems to be hurt by her past, she soon proves to be a nymphomaniac. Greta must have sex all the time, as if she was addicted to pleasure. After a while she is caught by her boyfriend with another man. However, Greta feels no regret, only anger at her boyfriend's middle-class prejudices towards “free love”. Alone on the streets she becomes an easy prey for a pimp – Daddy Fuckbucks. His apparition is similar to the picture presented before in this chapter – he is an Afro-American with minstrel show-like face. He addicts Greta to drugs and forces her to earn money by street walking.

The image of flesh trade in these series seems critical towards the profession. Clients are either thugs who call Greta names and treat her brutally or quiet people with perversions. However, the picture is far from tragic. A considerable dose of humor and Greta's faithful dog, which always protects his lady in distress, make the overall picture rather humorous. The source of humor is often contained in the author's comments, for example: “And so Greta embarks upon a new career and habit – it is a much different

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<sup>22</sup> R.L. Crabb, “Introduction,” *Little Greta Garbage*, June, 1990, 02.

world than the avant-garde art scene, although most artists end up prostituting themselves. At least here you know when you're getting screwed!"<sup>23</sup>

After engaging in flesh trade Greta's life in the city deteriorates. She spends all her money on drugs and lives with another prostitute in a shabby house with hardly any furniture. They cooperate with each other and stick together, but the constant need of drugs destroys interpersonal relations and they fight and are suspicious towards each other most of the time. They split when things became violent between them. Despite all the hardships Greta does not want to lead another life, and when her ex-boyfriend meets her and asks her to come back to common life, she rejects his offer. Greta enjoys prostitution too much to crave another career. Her attitude emphasizes fictitious and humorous character of the whole series. At some point Greta even directly addresses the reader saying: "So just come over here, lie down and relax! –It's only erotic escapism anyway, baby,"<sup>24</sup> reminding him of the real aim of reading such stories.



Little Greta Garbage is an interesting example of the tendency of comix to mix tragedy with humor. Greta's story, her addiction to drugs, clients' attitude and conflicts with another prostitute and pimp all seem probable and show the reader glimpses of the harsh world of flesh trade. However, Greta's nymphomania and luck together with omnipresent parody make the story a light erotic comics.

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<sup>23</sup> R.L. Crabb, "Introduction," *Little Greta Garbage*, June, 1990, 20.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

The remaining part of this chapter will be concerned with underground stories that go further towards humorous and pornographic content rather than realistic and critical view over the profession. Traces of such attitude are apparent in “Little Greta Garbage,” where sexual encounters of the protagonist were frequent and always illustrated in detail although the story as a whole seemed realistic. Slightly similar situation can be observed in the famous underground erotic story by Reed Waller titled *Omaha the Cat Dancer*.

The series created by Kate Worley and Reed Waller gained some recognition and popularity among readers of underground comics. One of the readers described it as “pornography with literary meat on its bones or a graphic narrative with an impudently sexual slant.”<sup>25</sup> Indeed the story is filled with erotic and sexual scenes but the plot and characters are well developed and complex. The story is interesting from the point of view of an adult reader. “OMAHA rises far and away above most contemporary attempts at ‘adult’ entertainment by virtue of careful attention to plot and characterization.”<sup>26</sup> This highly erotic story can be seen as a source of knowledge about the life of exotic dancers. However, it is more pornographic than “Little Greta Garbage” and most readers receive it as erotic story.

*Omaha the Cat Dancer* is the account of life of the famous nude dancer Omaha. What is important, all characters in the series are zoomorphized, Omaha is portrayed as a cat, just like her boyfriend. Other characters are dogs or birds. It is difficult to judge why the author decided to use zoomorphism. Probably the aim was more aesthetical than, as it is with Aesop’s fables, moralistic.

Omaha is a star in the nightclub “Underground.” One night the club is demolished by Andrew DeRoc, a man who wanted Omaha for himself. Many people die during the attack, but Omaha manages to escape with her boyfriend. The rest of the story evolves

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<sup>25</sup> Reed Waller and Kate Worley, *Omaha the Cat Dancer* No. 2 (Minneapolis: Steel Dragon Press, 1986), 2.

<sup>26</sup> Reed Waller and Kate Worley, *Omaha the Cat Dancer* No. 3 (Minneapolis: Steel Dragon Press, 1986), 2.

around various adventures that happen to her. In this respect the series resembles a TV show, although their overtone is strongly erotic.

Omaha loves her work, as it is a rule in the erotic stories with sex workers. For Omaha dancing naked and giving herself to men is an art, not a form of prostitution. She puts great effort to create interesting choreographic part and spends hours practicing. Omaha strongly believes that erotic dance is a fascinating job that has “gotten me recognition and appreciation and fans”<sup>27</sup> and she is fulfilled in what she does: “That’s me! I love the lights and the loud music! And the crowds of guys cheering! And just being myself alone on my stage... and being a hit!”<sup>28</sup> No matter the audience, she treats her show like art. Her attitude corresponds to some point to what many exotic dancers feel in reality, as it was presented in the first chapter. Real life nude dancers also treat their work in a similar manner as Omaha and do not feel degraded as they are not directly touched by men. However, Omaha seems utterly deprived of any moral dilemmas of her profession, while “exotic dancers” face many moral dilemmas concerning their occupation. The only problem Omaha has is her subconscious anxiety of the male audience and fear of her influence on them. Her fears become justified. Once, during the performance she is attacked by a crowd of males from the audience. As far as the series is concerned this is the only situation when the drawbacks of being an erotic dancer are shown.

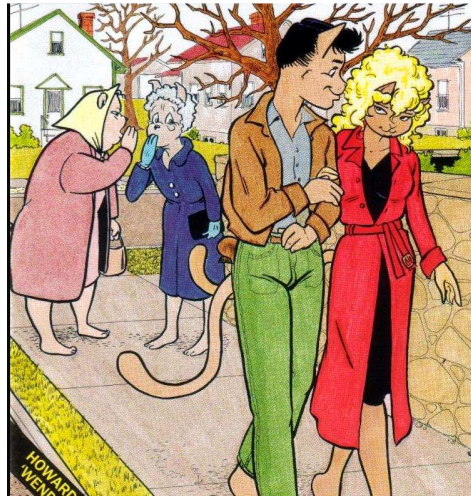
In her private life Omaha is a cheerful and honest girl. She has several sexual relationships and encounters although many men are afraid or shy to make out with her because of her stunning looks and occupation. She prefers living in a big city because in a small town where she performs once for a while, everybody immediately knows who she is, and talk about her: especially women treat her with disrespect. Her stage friend CeeCee

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<sup>27</sup> Reed Waller and Kate Worley, *Omaha the Cat Dancer* No. 9 (Minneapolis: Steel Dragon Press, 1988), 42.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

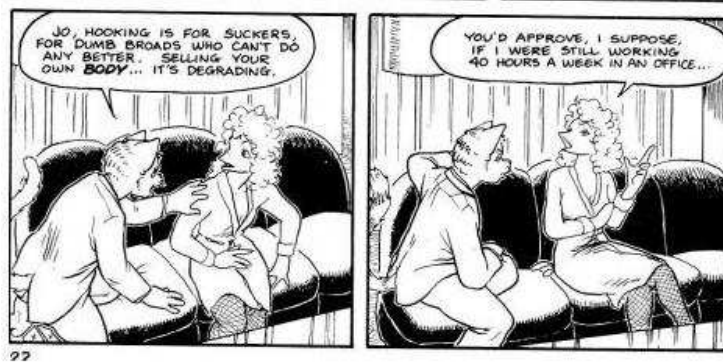
also has similar problems and looks for a quiet place to live, but much more “warmer” towards people connected with flesh trade.



One of important characters in the series is Joanne Follet. She is a prostitute, an exclusive call-girl presented as a bird. As it was said in the first chapter, exclusive call-girls are to behave and look as elegant woman, superficially not related to the flesh trade . Joanne fulfills all the requirements. She dresses and behaves like any woman, though she seems much more attractive than the average. She wears provocative clothes only during sex, usually underwear. She lives in an exclusive apartment. Her attitude to sex is an affirmation of freedom but also wisdom, far from any social restraints or artificial standards. In the second issue of the series she has sex with both Omaha and her male lover and she cannot understand their feeling of guilt over what happens. She takes sex as s very natural and pleasant activity, not associated with negative emotions. After that she starts a romance with Omaha’s ex-boyfriend. However, she lives with him in the same apartment she meets with clients. They have conflict over this situation as Chuck wants her to quit the profession while being with him. He is jealous, Joanne does not treat him seriously on that matter because she thinks all men are “handicapped by their hormones.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 13.



Prostitution for her is better than working in an office. She prefers sex work from being “cussed by the boss.”<sup>30</sup> Her views on the profession are similar to those of Modern Hooker from *Modern Hooker* comic strip, perhaps because they both are call-girls and not street walkers. She throws Chuck out after quarrel and his offering to pay her back for sex they had.

As far as clients are concerned she dislikes them. During the encounters she fakes feelings as well as orgasms but in a way so the clients are convinced that she is honest. As one client says: “That’s what I like about you Jo. You do not fake like most hookers.”<sup>31</sup> However, that’s part of her job, to give an illusion that a man is not with a sex worker. Clients are mostly rich businessmen or white-collar workers.

There are also a few similarities between Joanne, an exclusive call-girl and other groups of prostitutes. She shows a tendency to become addicted. In her case these are not drugs but alcohol. The story indicates that she drinks out of loneliness. Another common trait are the connotations with the police. She also serves policemen, although it seems that it is her who uses them, not the other way round. She exploits policemen using the tool of sex.

<sup>30</sup> Waller and Worley, *Omaha the Cat Dancer* No. 3, 8.

<sup>31</sup> Reed Waller and Kate Worley, *Omaha the Cat Dancer* No. 4 (Minneapolis: Steel Dragon Press, 1989, 7.



Chuck's character provides one trait interesting from the perspective of this work. He has a relationship with both Joanne and Omaha. However, he is unable to accept Jo's occupation while Omaha's dancing in front of the crowds of men does not seem to bother him at all. He even has the habit of sitting in the audience, among excited men, and drawing his girlfriend. While both women engage in some form of prostitution, Omaha even does it in front of Chuck's eyes while Joanne does not, but Chuck cannot accept only direct sex encounters performed by Joanne.

Generally, the series *Omaha the Cat Dancer* provides a positive and highly eroticized vision of the profession, in Omaha's case portraying it almost as art. The narration gives the illusion that the story is realistic, but it omits almost all negative sides of the flesh trade. The reason behind that is the aim of the series - these are erotic stories and are to evoke positive feelings in the reader.

The most extreme example of prostitutes in erotic stories is represented by the series "Horny Biker Slut." As the name indicates the story is very graphic and can be called a hard porn in the comic book form. The style of illustrations built of thick lines corresponds with the story of the world of biker gangs, punks and social margins. In the series created by John Howard sex encounters play a major role. However, the series is



filled with auto irony and offers the reader utterly different image of both a woman and a prostitute from all the other analyzed comic books in this work.



The unnamed protagonist dresses like motor riders - in leather jackets, heavy boots and Nazi accessories. She has many features commonly associated with men, both physical (facial lines, strength) and mental (total independence, brutality, self-confidence, roughness) but she is also big-breasted and long-legged. She is strong both mentally and physically, and she rules her fate. Such a woman performs prostitution only when she needs money or she feels like doing it. It is always a pleasure for her. She is not anybody's sex slave and never falls into submission. When a client pays her less than she thinks he should, she hits him and takes money for herself. Through her prism sex for money seems a powerful tool a woman has over men, an affirmation of freedom and power. In her "free time" she often saves other girls from trouble, as a male hero would do. In the issue 4 she takes a job of "exotic dancer" and except for dancing she masturbates on the scene for money and, like Omaha, takes pleasure from the attention and reactions of the audience. "Free grub, good money and all the drugs and nasty sex I can handle.[. . .] An'I love my work!"<sup>32</sup> She is at the same time a sex worker and a bodyguard for a group of

<sup>32</sup> John Howards, *Horny Biker Slut. The Smell of a Weasel*, (San Francisco: Last Gasp, 1992), 4.

musicians. In another story she works as an escort of another “slut” and wins a contest for being the greatest “hooker.” In a tribute to the original series the roots of the protagonist are revealed: a girl with sex addiction, unfortunately living in a small American town where all the men went to war except a few, was having sex with them all the time (and some women too). She rapidly got an opinion of a “slut” in the town. Taking it as a compliment she coined her own philosophy and established her own bike gang: “To be horny I knew I had to be like a soldier, kick ass and take names.”<sup>33</sup> She started “Bikers” - the gang of those who believed in American freedom. It is an interesting and unique case when a woman takes “a bad-girl” stigma as a label to be proud of. Patriarchal moral order means nothing to the protagonist.

This comix is an utterly pornographic story and a satire on biker gangs. Prostitution in “Horny Biker Slut” is also influenced by these factors and the image is consequently far from reality. However, showing a prostitute as a strong, almost masculine personality is an exceptional and interesting example. In all other comic books prostitution was associated with female submission.

This chapter analyzed prostitution in underground comic books. In the medium where freedom of artist vision is the most unfettered in the world of sequential art, the image of prostitution presents some unprecedented characteristics. The image and depiction of the profession varies depending on the role of each story. In comedies and erotic series the image is idealized and optimistic. Prostitutes seem to enjoy their work while violence and other negative aspects are omitted. When a prostitute serves as yet another element in stories parodying some mainstream styles, the image of a prostitute becomes simplified and draws closer to the one observed in cartoons. Only in the comix

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<sup>33</sup> John Howards, *Horny Biker Slut 3*, (San Francisco: Last Gasp, 1991), 26.

which criticize the profession, some elements are presented to present the reader the reality of flesh trade and stigmatize the unjust treatment of a woman in society.

The most interesting representations can be found in the series when prostitutes play the major role. Stories criticizing the profession and society such as “Over and Under,” “Going Back” or “Little Greta Garbage” provide insights into the realities of the profession while predominantly erotic series like *Omaha the Cat Dancer* and “Horny Biker Slut” shed a new light onto the depiction of prostitutes.

## **Chapter four:**

### **The Representations of Prostitutes and Prostitution in Mainstream and Alternative Comic Books.**

The following chapter is concerned with the analysis of representations of prostitution in the most visible and the widest category of sequential art – mainstream and alternative comic books. Both classifications are placed in one chapter for several reasons. They use similar modes of production and distribution. Although their audiences differ considerably, they exchange themes and characters and undergo similar shifts in overall characteristics. Moreover, depending on the definition of mainstream or alternative comics, some comic book titles change their classification or fall under both categories.

The definition of the mainstream in this paper is based on the publisher of particular titles and the manner of their production. According to Matthew Pustz, mainstream comics are those published by the two largest American publishers, Marvel and DC Comics, or by companies that are considerably smaller but imitate the content of the two. Their main aim is to release stories that sell the best or will probably sell, with story or genre playing no role whatsoever.<sup>1</sup> Mainstream comics have always been products seeking profit. Between the 1930s and the 1960s the audience of comic books consisted largely of adolescents and children. Therefore, their content was constructed along simple lines while their plots were predictable and full of repetitive gags, endless fight scenes and stereotypical characters.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew J. Pustz, *Comic Book Culture: Fanboys and True Believers*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999), 10.

Another important characteristic of the American mainstream sequential art is that all characters are corporately owned and the process of production of every comic book issue is “assembly-line like with several people working on the same comic book with each person restricted to one part of production i.e.: inking, coloring, sketching, inventing story.”<sup>2</sup> The above characteristics differentiate the American mainstream from other categories of sequential art and are especially helpful when the mainstream must be distinguished from alternative comic books.

Historically, mainstream comic books mark the beginnings of comic book culture in the 1940s, when approximately 95% of all readers were children. Comic books began to be designed in such a way as to make young audiences identify with the characters and especially superheroes. In the 1940s the main aim was to instill in teenage boys the desire to combat the Nazi or Japanese foes. Mainstream comic books “matured” together with their readers and when soldiers returned from the battlefields of World War II and those who stayed at home front grew up, publishers shifted to adult themes and expanded their products from superhero stories to romance, criminals, horror and SF.<sup>3</sup> However, this tendency ended with the introduction of the CCA code mentioned in the previous chapter. Strict control over the content of mainstream publications marked the return to “safe” subjects such as “innocent” superhero stories. According to Matthew Pustz, since that moment the mainstream audience has reverted to that comprising mostly children, mainly boys. Currently, the audience for mainstream comic books consists of “boys from 10-20 years of age, older readers devoted to comics of their childhood and some women.”<sup>4</sup>

Alternative comics trace their origins to the underground “comix” movement of the 1960s and 1970s, which, brought to life by the grand social and political changes of those

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., XI.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., XXI.

times, took a different form from safe, soothing conventions of commercial comics of the mainstream and provided new possibilities and models for comics creation.<sup>5</sup> Alternative comics draw their characteristics both from the mainstream – market and distribution, and from the underground – innovative ways of expression, and the “idea of comics as acutely personal means of artistic self expression.”<sup>6</sup> Additionally, “alternative comics run the entire gamut of communication,”<sup>7</sup> which becomes apparent in the decreased fear of taboos. As far as the audience is concerned, alternative comics benefited from the maturation of the mainstream audience. As Pat Mills says: “In the very early days, what you might call the more perceptive readers did not come through in large numbers, so we had to cater to the bulk audience. But in time, as they got older, so their tastes changed, and we as creators were able to introduce less simple minded content.”<sup>8</sup> Pustz adds to this, saying that “most alternative comics tell stories that are aimed at adults: these publications deal with real life situations, realistic characters.”<sup>9</sup>

As far as the overall characteristics of the audience are concerned, alternative comics are radically more diversified in their themes and preoccupations. “Working in an opposition to their mainstream counterparts, alternative comics are aimed at an educated adult audience that is willing to read what are often realistic stories in a medium normally devoted to heroic fantasy.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Charles Hatfield, *Alternative Comics: An Emerging Literature* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), IX.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Pustz, *Comic Book Culture*, 12.

<sup>8</sup> Roger Sabin, *Adult comics: An Introduction* (Routledge: Taylor & Francis, 1993), 58.

<sup>9</sup> Pustz, *Comic Book Culture*, 10.

<sup>10</sup> Pustz, *Comic Book Culture*, X.

Alternative comic books frequently take the form of graphic novel,<sup>11</sup> a book-length project with the narration conveyed in a comics form.<sup>12</sup> Will Eisner and Frank Miller both used this form in order to gain recognition of comic books as “art.”<sup>13</sup>

The last characteristic of alternative comics and at the same time the feature which distinguishes them from the mainstream is the fact that “these comics are usually produced by a single person who has total control over what happens to the characters. Because of this artistic freedom, alternative comics can be very political.”<sup>14</sup>

Consequently, both categories represent different attitudes towards comics and audiences, which will also influence the representations of prostitutes in the medium. Thus, the following part of the paper compares the role and image of the profession in both groupings.

Since the introduction of the CCA, mainstream comic books have been targeted exclusively at children and teenagers. Because of this fact, the content is controlled in order to prevent displaying any features that could be judged as immoral or could raise any controversy. In this light it seems obvious that the prostitute as a character is not really appropriate. However, after analyzing several mainstream comic book series it becomes apparent that in comics produced after the 1980s many social phenomena that were considered controversial in previous decades started to appear. Prostitutes, almost entirely absent before that time, can be nowadays observed not only as elements of the background

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<sup>11</sup> The term is still not strictly defined and usually used to differentiate between a complete story in one book-form or collection of short stories collected in one book and an ongoing series.

<sup>12</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary Additions Series*. OED Online, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

<sup>13</sup> Hatfield, *Alternative Comics: An Emerging Literature*, 13.

<sup>14</sup> Pustz, *Comic Book Culture*, X.

of a story, but often closely engage with the protagonist's actions. What is the most surprising, many heroines from the Marvel heroes universe<sup>15</sup> were prostitutes in the past.

A very interesting example of the situation in which prostitutes become an important part of the story can be observed in two issues of *Batman* released in 2007 entitled "Three Ghosts of Batman" and "The Black Casebook." In the story Batman is investigating a series of brutal murders of prostitutes. Murders are not publicized and the police have a quiet agreement with the pimp who supplies "girls" to a mysterious "monster." It is noteworthy that policemen are shown as corrupt and do not protect but use these women. Such image of the police prevails in all categories of sequential art analyzed in this paper and mirrors the findings from the reports on New York City sex-work realities.<sup>16</sup> The story from the *Batman* series supports this image. In this case policemen sacrifice prostitutes to appease the aggression of a "monster" hiding in one of the desolate buildings of Gotham City. They act as if these women were merely tools, not human beings. Policemen are portrayed at the same level as the pimp De Shawn, who perceives his "girls" only as merchandise.

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<sup>15</sup> "The Marvel Universe is the fictional shared universe where most of the comic stories published by Marvel Comics take place. The Marvel Universe actually exists within a multiverse consisting of thousands of separate universes, all of which are the creations of Marvel Comics and all of which are, in a sense, "Marvel universes". In this context, "Marvel Universe" is taken to refer to the mainstream Marvel continuity, which is known as Earth-616." Babylon Translation @ a click, <http://dictionary.babylon.com/Marvel%20Comics%20Universe>.

<sup>16</sup> Urban Justice Center, Sex Workers Project: *Behind Closed Doors: An Analysis of Indoor Sex Work in New York City* (2003), *Revolving Door: An Analysis of Street-Based Prostitution in New York* (2005), <http://www.sexworkersproject.org/downloads/RevolvingDoor.pdf>, <http://www.sexworkersproject.org/publications/reports/behind-closed-doors/>.





Stereotypically, colorfully portrayed prostitutes, among them a pregnant woman and a small girl, find the only protector in Batman. He seems to be liked by these vulgar, simple women: “You want, I’ll do you a freebie,”<sup>17</sup> suggests one of them. They do not treat him with hostility with which they treat the policemen. Moreover, Batman is also concerned about street walkers’ fate and offers them opportunity for “decent” work.

The story is a very interesting example of placing prostitutes in the role of victims of males. After venturing into the hideout of the “monster,” Batman emphasizes the smell of testosterone in the air. The reader can see brutally killed and butchered women. The ones that are alive are drugged and scared of cruel treatment that awaits them. The “monster” looks like a huge male and is extremely strong: “Steroid enhanced – sweating – snorting engine of flesh and bone [ . . . ] protecting his women, protecting territory.”<sup>18</sup> He is described in such terms to emphasize that the character of the crime is the effect of his overdeveloped masculinity. The phrase he uses, “See what you made me do,”<sup>19</sup> is characteristic of different narratives of male abuse. Although prostitutes are portrayed as victims in this situation, one of them, Roxy, helps Batman when he is injured. It seems that sex-workers are presented not only as victims but also the allies of the hero.

<sup>17</sup> Grant Morrison (w), Andy Kubert (p), Jesse Delperdang (i), *Three Ghosts of Batman*, *Batman* #664. (National Comics Publications, DC Comics, May, 2007), 14.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>19</sup> Morrison (w), Kubert (p), Delperdang (i), *Three Ghosts of Batman*, 11.

The above example suggests that prostitutes in the mainstream do not have to possess negative traces – they are presented as victims of the patriarchal order. The idea that sex-workers are not seen as morally corrupt may be supported by the fact that many heroines from the Marvel Universe have been prostitutes.

The characters presented below never feature prominently in the main plot and contribute mostly as the background for the main hero's actions. Female villains are also among them, but their former profession is not presented as a feature that makes them negative characters.

Tanya Sealy aka Black Mamba, featuring in *Iron Man*, *Captain America*, *Avengers* and other Marvel series, is a professional call-girl. The superpowers she possesses are the effect of a cerebral implant placed in her body. Tanya rejects sex-work only after she realizes that working for the organized crime provides them with money. In the comic books she is presented as a woman open about sexual issues: she embarrasses other criminals by revealing their sexual fantasies, sometimes homosexual in nature.<sup>20</sup> If she kills her opponent, the act is also sexually marked. Tanya's victims die in ecstasy.



It seems that her past as a prostitute determines her nature. Sexual openness is also visible in other heroines with the past marked by sex-work. The best example may be Rapture from the *Savage Dragon* series, who appears in the fourth issue of the series. Observed by

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<sup>20</sup> Black Mamba (comic book character), Comic Vine, <http://www.comicvine.com/black-mamba/29-30719/>.

another female superhero Ricochet, Rapture tries to get revenge on her former pimp for brutal treatment of her friends. It seems that before she gained superpowers, she worked as a street-walker. Although after this incident she becomes part of Dragon's team and aids the police, her looks and behavior remain connected to her former occupation. Like Black Mamba, she presents openness towards sex issues and nakedness. Rapture seduces the main hero of the series and assumes the leading role in their relationship. Other female characters that appear in the series act much less daring towards men.



Kate Godwin is a prostitute that gains her superpowers (coagulating and dissolving liquids at her own will) during an encounter with one of her clients – Rebis the radioactive hermaphrodite. Adopting the nickname Coagula she becomes a member of the Doom Patrol. This male-to-female transsexual is a character for whom sexuality is the defining feature. Yet another example of a prostitute becoming a person with superpowers is Electric Eve from the *Morlocks* series. Her tragic story seems stereotypical: being drugged by her boyfriend she is sold into prostitution and kicked out of home by her parents. Similar stories about entering the profession can also be observed in underground comics. In both groups the connection between sex-work and drugs is emphasized. Electric Eve does not realize what powers she possesses until she electrocutes one of her clients. She is

also another example of a super heroine who, thanks to her powers, can leave the profession, like Rapture, Coagula and Black Mamba. However, her character remains deeply marked by her past experiences. Electric Eve is cold and bitter towards others, being deeply hurt by her sex-work experience. She mercilessly takes revenge on her boyfriend electrocuting him in the tub. Like Coagula, she wears characteristic clothes used when depicting prostitutes: short, tight skirts, stockings, and high-heeled shoes.



Coagula



Electric Eve

Among the heroines of the Marvel universe, there are also ex-prostitutes who seem untouched by the profession as far as their character is concerned, but their past leaves different traces. Mia Dearden, introduced in *Green Arrow* #2 in 2001, was the second sidekick of the protagonist Green Arrow. A blonde girl with modest appearance and slim body build does not look like a prostitute. However, Mia's history is similar to Electric Eve's. Abused by her father, she runs away from home to the city. Unfortunately, unable to support herself, she has to become dependent on a boy named Robbie, who turns out to be a pimp and forces Mia into prostitution in exchange for shelter. Her misery ends when Green Arrow rescues her from an abusive client, a high-powered politician. As in the case of Rapture or Black Mamba, close engagement with the world of superheroes becomes an

opportunity to leave the profession. She uses it and out of gratitude becomes Green Arrow's sidekick. Her outfit and behavior are modest but later in the series it is revealed that the girl is HIV-positive. Mia is one of very few characters in mainstream comics to have the condition.<sup>21</sup> This aspect of prostitution, exposition to the threat of AIDS, is almost absent from comic books. It is surprising to find an example of such a character in the most restricted group of sequential art.



Other super heroines who used to be prostitutes seem unaffected by the fact that in the past they performed sex-work. An example of such a character may be Mantis from the *Avengers* series. Her real name is Mandy Celestine. Born in Vietnam and raised in the tribe of Pama, she is skilled in martial arts. She was brain-wiped by the tribe elders to be sent to the city to gain life experience, where she becomes a prostitute in a Vietnamese bar. After meeting one of the Avengers Mandy joins the team and regains her self-respect. In the subsequent episodes Mantis's acts do not bear the stigma of sex-work.

All female characters described above are not portrayed as prostitutes during their actions in a superhero or supervillain team. In all cases, the profession is part of their past and is used to emphasize their cruel fate before entering the path of a superhero. It seems

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<sup>21</sup> Robert Greenberger, *Mia Dearden, The DC Comics Encyclopedia*, (New York: Doring Kindersley, 2008), 143.

that superpowers manifesting one day present them with an opportunity to leave the profession. After gaining extra abilities and strength both Rapture and Electric Eve take revenge on men who added to their misery: pimps.

There are, however, a few examples of super heroines performing sex-work as part of the plot of the series. In *NYX* series, one of Marvel's limited series about X-men, the reader may observe the early life of a mutant girl X-23 possessing similar abilities to Wolverine – she can extrude long claws from the palm and fight with them. She becomes a prostitute at a very young age although how she became a part of the sex business is not revealed. Still, X-23 is not a common street-walker. She specializes in serving masochistic men whose fetish is to be cut with knives. Her attire does not seem stereotypical although she is dressed in characteristic stockings. She wears heavy boots and black leather and lace outfits, strongly reminiscent of the gothic style. Such attire is probably the consequence of the tastes of her masochistic clientele.



She uses her deadly weapon only to satisfy her clients. Except for that, she seems to have forgotten her true nature and past. She is utterly passive and does not speak. She passively fulfills all wishes of her pimp, who in exchange treats her well while being very brutal towards other prostitutes. As with other females presented above, the moment she

realizes her powers, she leaves the profession and after being attacked by Zebra Daddy she kills him.

The image of a prostitute performing sex-work only because she is forced by men to do it or deprived of other life opportunities is central to the portrayal of female sex-workers as victims in mainstream comics. As in the example from *Batman* series, prostitutes seem oppressed and used by men. When given an opportunity, they leave the profession, often taking revenge. The reader is also usually presented with their history of their sex-work. The accounts also emphasize female victimization: girls are always forced to prostitution by men. Consequently, this is radically different from underground comic stories such as “Greta Garbage” or *Omaha the Cat Dancer*, in which prostitutes enjoy their profession.

The oppressors are mainly pimps but also clients. Johns appear rarely as performing profession is scarcely and carefully depicted. When they are portrayed, they are either men with unusual sex fetishes or brutal and corrupted politicians. X-23 serves a young man who eventually cuts himself to death in front of the girl. Mia Deren is saved by Green Arrow from a brutal politician. Generally it seems that mainstream comics avoid depicting clients as average, ordinary men (as it was emphasized in *Modern Hooker* comic strip).

What is emphasized instead is the role of pimps as the oppressive and violent men. Mostly they are depicted as black men, like in “Three Ghosts of Batman” or in “Rapture and Ricochet.” Rapture’s pimp is accused of killing one of her co-workers and Mia’s is brutal with women. However, the most extensive picture of a pimp in mainstream comic books can be found in the *NYX* series.

Zebra Daddy calls his prostitutes “merchandise” and is very violent towards them, with the exception of X-23. He is white but his behavior and his clothes make him similar to Afro-American pimps. He treats women with superiority and fake sympathy. Even the

smallest sign of disobedience from his prostitutes is punished with beating. Later in the series he becomes the main adversary of X-23, trying to retain psychological domination over her. As long as X-23 is nice, quiet, submissive and brings profit to Zebra Daddy, he treats her well, but when she tries to free from him, he is ready to kill her.

In general, the image of pimps in mainstream comic books is utterly negative. They are rarely presented humorously, as, for example, in “Three Ghosts of Batman,” but this does not affect the overall portrayal of pimps as ruthless male oppressors.



Alternative comic books may provide a much more excessive and less stereotypical image of prostitute and the realities of her profession. As alternative comic books are less corporately controlled and they mirror rather artist’s concept than market’s demands the reader may expect more varied vision of sex work. Moreover, in this category of sequential art active prostitutes become main protagonists of the series. However, this variety may not at the same time reflect social realities of the profession.

The majority of prostitutes portrayed in alternative comics appear when being a part of the protagonist’s environment. However, the closer they are to the main protagonist, the more complicated and complete their portrayal is.

Sex workers who appear only in the background serve to emphasize the character of the city in which the protagonist lives. In many alternative series such as *Chicanos* and *Fell* their portrayal contributes to the general mood of the series. In the *Chicanos* series by



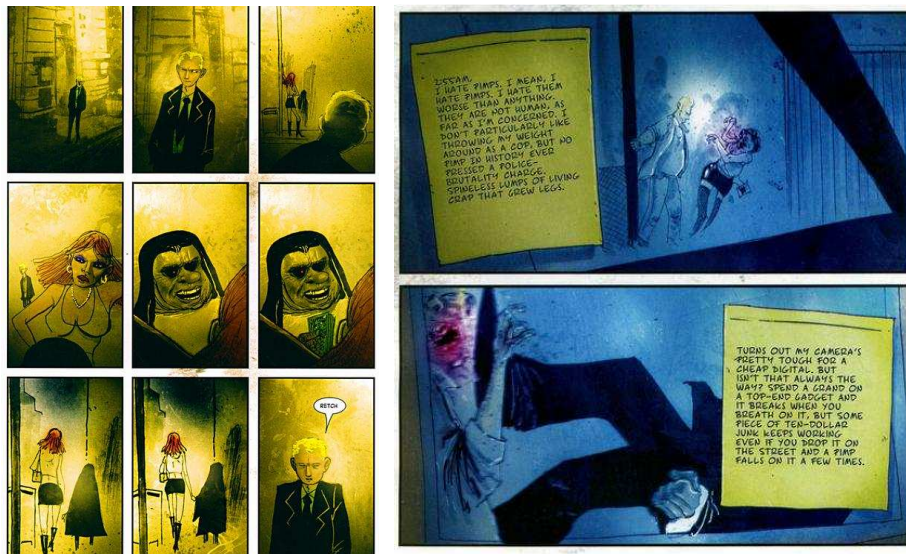
Carlos Trillo and Eduardo Risso prostitutes of Latin American origin are representative of the Hispanic community. In the series, sex-workers, mostly street walkers, are portrayed very stereotypically, dressed in scant clothes, black stockings and high heels. They usually stand on the street or in front of brothels or under street lamps. Their behavior and appearance is similar to the prostitutes from other ethnic groups. However, Issue 3 features a rare example of the male prostitute. Alehandrina, the protagonist of the series and a private detective, receives a commission from a wealthy woman to follow her husband. Alehandrina observes the man as he has sexual encounters with several affluent women during the day. Satisfied with finding the proof of adultery Alehandrina shows the findings to her client. To her surprise the client is satisfied and relieved – the man does what he should – earns money from sex. Although male, he manifests many characteristics of an exclusive prostitute described in the first chapter. The fact that the author put a male into such a role may indicate a new interpretation of the “Latin lover” stereotype.



*Chicanos*, concerned mainly with serious themes of life of ethnic minorities in America, is at the same time humorous with prostitution as yet another source of humor. Apart from the above investigation Alehandrina interprets the prostitute’s encounter with a

man as a rape and “saves” a street-walker from a rich client. Such situations in *Chicanos* are more funny than tragic.

Prostitution in *Chicanos* contributes to humorous aspects of the series but in other comic books prostitution may as well emphasize tragic and dark side of reality. In the graphic novel *Fell* all the elements of the background are used to emphasize the decay of the neighborhood the main protagonist lives and works in. In this case prostitutes are presented as women who fulfill “dirty” needs of the people but also as victims of pimps who are presented as brutal and cruel. “I hate pimps. I mean I hate pimps. I hate them worse than anything. They are not human as far as I’m concerned.”<sup>22</sup> says the main protagonist of the series. In *Fell* the worst aspects of sex-work are emphasized: brutality towards women, and dangerous and perverted clients. This procedure adds to the depressive and murky image of the main protagonist’s environment.



In both examples analyzed above prostitutes are only elements of the background. Depending on the author’s intent their profession may have humorous or tragic overtones.

<sup>22</sup> Warren Ellis (w) and Ben Templesmith (p), *Feral City #8, Fell*, (Berkeley: Image Comics, April 2007), 9.

However, their image is highly stereotypical and based only on looks and simple performance – actions a trespasser may observe. Nevertheless, it is enough for the author to make the protagonist involved with some aspects of sex work to get a closer look on the profession. The closer to the main protagonist sex workers become, the more complex their image becomes. Such situations can be observed in the series *Madam Xanadu*, *Hellblazer*, *The Preacher* and in the graphic novel *Watchmen*.

In *Madam Xanadu* series in Issues #7 and #8 the protagonist, the immortal and forever young Oracle of Xanadu, tries to stop the killer of London prostitutes, infamous “Jack The Ripper.” The prostitutes Xanadu encounters are vulgar and coarse but it is emphasized that they have to perform sex work out of extreme poverty. Xanadu witnesses their suffering from malnutrition and lack of medical care. With the protagonist investigating the sphere of prostitution, the range of atrocities present in life of sex worker extends. Females themselves become personalized: Mary Kelley is incorrigible optimistic while another nameless prostitute seems aggressive but gruff.

Although colorful on the illustrative level, the overall picture of prostitution is grim. Also here, men, especially Mary Kelley’s alcoholic husband, are pointed out as the cause of female misery.



In the *Hellblazer* series prostitutes play a complex role. The protagonist Constantine is often their client. He turns to prostitutes because his way of life prevents him from establishing a stable relationship. During the encounters he treats them well, as persons who provide relaxation and pleasure for him. Sex encounters are in no way vulgar and except for the moment of money exchange they resemble regular love-making. In this perspective sex workers are portrayed as women who can bring sexual fulfillment to those who, for various reasons, are unable to find it elsewhere. However, the other, brutal side of the profession is also portrayed.

In the story arc “Rake at the Gates of Hell” Constantine meets Helen, his friend he hasn’t seen in a long time. It turns out that she became a street walker. Dressed in characteristic clothes she awaits her clients on crowded streets. When Constantine tries to take care of her it turns out that she is drugged as her pimp drugs her to have complete control over her. For the substances to take effect faster Hanna is forced to apply the dose through the eyelid. After beating up the pimp Constantine takes Helen to his friends. The reader observes the painful process of cleaning her from drugs. Unfortunately, Helen’s pimp Phil tracks her down and beats her almost to death. Phil’s brutality is strongly emphasized. He is depicted as capable of torturing and killing others.



In *Hellblazer*, prostitution as providing sexual services is portrayed positively. It seems that drugs and violence present in sex-work appear together with pimps who, trying to utterly control their “merchandise,” use drugs and violence.

*The Preacher* series is a crossover of genres, a mixture of comedy, western, horror and grotesque, and provides the reader with well-outlined images of prostitutes. The story revolves around Jesse Custer, a Texan preacher who by accident becomes a host for a new spiritual entity, as powerful as God himself, called Genesis. It gives him the power of “voice of God” by which he can order anybody to do anything. Unfortunately for Jesse his new powers and the whole incident do not go unnoticed and the religious organization called “The Grail” starts to follow him in hope that he becomes the second Messiah.

In the series, prostitutes do not play main parts in the comic book and do not appear as fully drawn characters with unique personalities. However, they are visible as a group. They are often hired by some male characters to perform sexual acts. What is the most important is that they play significant part in the life of the antagonist in the series - the head of the paramilitary-religious organization called “The Grail”- Herr Starr.

Herr Starr is a person who worked for the military in special forces dealing with hijackers and terrorists. Seeing children and innocents die he decided that the world should be changed, no matter the means. This thought brought him into “The Grail,” where he gained the position of Sacred Executioner, second only to the Grail's leader. His character is well described psychologically and prostitutes play a significant role in his private life. He has got no family, devoting his whole life to the organization – thus, there are no deep relationships in his life. Having no close ties to people, his intimate life revolves around sex.

*The Preacher* is said to be mocking many of comic book stereotypes. Herr Star as the main adversary of the protagonists is at the same time dangerous and weak, horrifying

and funny. His sexual life is also grotesque. For him, sex is “a merely coital”<sup>23</sup> issue. He treats women only as tools to play out his fantasies. When, of course, “regular” women feel humiliated by such behavior, prostitutes who say and do anything for money seem perfect. For him, the total control of sexual act is the only way to be satisfied. He tells the girls exactly what to do and what to say. He goes so deep in his fantasies that he seems to believe in words he paid for. At one point he says: “I have enormous penis. I tell women to say so.”<sup>24</sup> The objectification of women becomes the basis of his self-esteem. The first “normal” encounter with a prostitute, “normal” meaning that they just had sex, is totally disappointing for him. This sexual, exclusively biological act deprived of any decorum was Her Starr’s first time and great disillusion. However, he needed it to realize that what he craved was the illusion of total dominance over another human being.



With such knowledge Herr Starr tells every prostitute he has sex with to call him “lord and master”<sup>25</sup> and themselves “scums” not deserving him. Only when he is in good mood does he let a prostitute be on top and to act as “she felt like it.”<sup>26</sup> Filtered through his biased visions, prostitutes seem dull and deprived of any personality. Everything can be

<sup>23</sup> Garth Ennis and Steve Dillon, *Preacher Vol. 6: War in the Sun*, (Vertigo, 1999), 65.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>25</sup> Garth Ennis, *Preacher Vol. 2: Until the End of the World*, (Vertigo, 1997), 37.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

imposed on them as long as they are paid. For Herr Starr, the role of a prostitute as a bringer of some sort of fantasy and mental projection of sexual act, as it was broadly described in chapter one, is the most important one.

When Her Starr's female assistant confesses love to him, he straightforwardly admits that she would be a bad lover because she would be unable to fulfill his visions. He is not interested in the personality or even the body of the woman. He is only interested in his visions of himself during sex. Such role of a prostitute as merely a tool needed to fulfill men's sexual dreams is most visibly seen in the scene in the last novel of *The Preacher* titled "Alamo." One of the creatures fallen from heaven tastes earthly life (meaning sex and drugs that were unfortunately lacking in Paradise). During sexual acts with prostitutes he is overwhelmed with his fantasy, ecstasy coming from the visions in his mind. His eyes are closed and he is not even looking at the woman he is with, not even caressing her, totally engaged in his own world.



Generally, the overall presentation of prostitution in *The Preacher* is multifaceted. The reader is given a glimpse of the cheapest prostitutes working in squalid, smelly places with dead rats, scraped walls and dirty sheets. They perform sex in public toilets with their clothes on. Probably they are the representatives of the lowest rank, street walkers who concentrate on fast sex without any decorum to get as many clients as possible. They seem to be deprived of any personality and remain fixed on money only. Street walkers are not always ugly or old, and their looks are not stereotyped. In other parts of the series the reader can see better-off street walkers or call girls who come to the houses of male characters and spend time there, often the whole night. They are beautiful women fixed on gaining money but also on satisfying men. They are focused on pleasing men not only with their bodies but also by creating some sort of atmosphere. However, they are also presented only as figures fleetingly present in lives of main characters.

An utterly different aspect of the phenomenon of prostitution is presented in the famous graphic novel *Watchmen* by Allan Moore. One of the protagonists Rorschach often remembers his mother who, when he was a child, was selling her body to men. Rorschach was brutally treated by his mother, who saw him as an obstacle to successful “business.” She probably became part of the profession out of deteriorating financial situation, but Moore’s graphic novel concentrates rather on the effect sex work has on a child of an active prostitute than on the sex worker herself. Rorschach is called by other children “whore son” and often bullied. He responds with violence. His mother’s profession and the cruelties of the criminal world are presented as the main causes of mental problems of the superhero.

Prostitutes are also present in various comic book series that take place in the fictitious future world. As a part of the background their profession adds to the science fiction decorum. However, the change is restricted to the outfit of sex workers while



mechanics of the work stay similar to those the reader knows from the reality. The depiction narrows down to street walkers and nude dancers. The relationship with the police and pimps is still presented as negative.



However, it is the science fiction series *Transmetropolitan* that provides the reader with one of the most disturbing images of prostitution in comic books. In the issue titled “Business” the protagonist Spider Jerusalem meets a pair of young boys that perform child prostitution in public toilets. Shortly before Spider’s appearance the reader has the opportunity to observe the act of serving a male client in a squalid latrine. Both the place of sexual encounter and the customer are depicted as ugly and repelling. Spider takes both boys to a bar and provides them with food. From the monologue of the boys the reader gets to know how these children found themselves in the streets. Shocking stories about fathers who beat their children and mothers feeding them with vinegar and soap are revealed. The stay in a children’s home is a story of rape and violence as elder boys force younger ones to perform sex work on the streets for money. Boys smoke and take drugs, although they are only eleven years old. They look at the world in a cynical way, although they still have the desire to play with toys. “You can let yourself forget that they’re just kids so easily”<sup>27</sup> says Spider to himself.

<sup>27</sup> Warren Ellis (w) and Darrick Robertson (p), *Transmetropolitan* # 40, *Business*, (DC Comics, January 2001), 6.



The boys take Spider to the K-road, a center of child prostitution in the city. There they meet working girls. They all, like the boys, are addicted to drugs and are heavy smokers. A violet-hair girl speaks about her mother who cares for her prostitute-child the way she is able to: “She knows she can’t stop Tamika working[. . .] so she keeps Tam company between (sic!) jobs and writes down the license plate of the cars she gets into.”<sup>28</sup> The girl’s story is similar to this of the boys. Abusive parents leave her on her own and she is taken into a children’s home. The fourteen-year-old pimpled girl proudly admits that she has had four thousand men since she started to prostitute herself.

Spider also visits one of the children’s houses. The caretaker in the institution admits that he is unable to stop his wards from prostitution. He even blames the police for giving fines to the children: “The cops try putting them in courts and fining them. So the kids stay out twice as long to sell themselves to pay off the fines.”<sup>29</sup>

In general, “Business” may serve as an SF parable of the realities of contemporary children’s prostitution in American cities. Under the veil of SF apparatus the story presents a painfully realistic picture of child prostitution present in big American cities.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>29</sup> Ellis (w), Robertson (p), *Transmetropolitan* # 40. *Business*, 12.

All the titles described above attempt to present prostitution with a dose of realism. They, in fact, try to mirror to some extent the realities of sex work. However, the world of alternative comics offers the reader works that portray the profession from a unique point of view that conceals the references to reality under a thick veil of artistic vision.

One example of such work is without any doubt Frank Miller's *Sin City* series. The corrupted and dangerous world of the fictitious Basin City, although different from contemporary world, can be interpreted as a parable of many problems of the modern society. In the murky metropolis prostitution is a widely visible profession. The majority of female characters in the series are prostitutes. Although the image of the profession offers an alternative vision to all described above, it still reflects some realities of the profession.

Prostitutes play an important role in Basin City. They in fact own for themselves one part of the metropolis called the Old Town. In the fictitious world of *Sin City* series, the establishing of the Old Town is traced to the times of Gold Rush: "top hookers from France and places like that"<sup>30</sup> were imported to Basin Town. The place that offered the best prostitutes in America soon became notorious and almost all citizens profited from sex work. At an indefinite point in Basin City's past prostitutes claimed the neighborhood they worked for their own. Passing the arts and traditions of sex work from generation to generation: "Old town's kept its traditions handed down from gorgeous mother to gorgeous daughter,"<sup>31</sup> women created their own community within the boundaries of the neighborhood.

"We're in a quiet neighborhood where all the sounds of passion and violence are locked away behind closed doors,"<sup>32</sup> describes the Old Town one of the main characters. The Old Town developed its own characteristic laws. Prostitutes employ their own

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<sup>30</sup> Frank Miller, *Sin City*, (Dark Horse, May 1998), 137.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Frank Miller, *Sin City: Dame to Kill For*, (Dark Horse, May 1998), 33.

lawyers, doctors and are able to protect themselves. They train their own warriors led by female leaders. Armed teams attack clients when their behavior threatens life and health of any prostitute. Sex workers from the Old Town have an agreement with the police. In exchange for free service, policemen never intervene in the activities on the Old Town streets. Police cars have no right to enter this neighborhood: “The girls of old town have their own laws... and they don’t take kindly to cops.”<sup>33</sup>

The cop shuts up his siren, not sure how to play it. He knows he’s not the law, not in the Old Town. The ladies are the law here, beautiful and merciless. If you’ve got the cash and you play by the rules, they will make all your dreams come true. But if you cross them you are a corpse.<sup>34</sup>



This unwritten law seems to be observed by both sides. However, in “The Big Fat Kill” the fragile peace is on the verge of being shattered. A group of prostitutes accidentally kill a policeman. This tragic mistake, if revealed, may be a prelude to very tragic events including the pacification of the entire neighborhood. One of the prostitutes, realizing the possible consequences, says: “The cops, the mob... things are gonna go back to the way they used to.”<sup>35</sup> This dangerous situation is after all prevented. The plot reveals

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>35</sup> Miller, *Sin City: Big Fat Kill*, (Dark Horse, May 1998), 71.

how the mafia, led by males, tries to use the accident to take over the Old Town and enslave the women. The fear of pimps and violent police among prostitutes is also emphasized. The Old Town is safe for females who live in a non-violent commune. Deprived of male surveillance, prostitutes seem healthy and beautiful. There are also no drugs and alcohol in the Old Town. On the Old Town streets women and gays without fear present a variety of outfits that symbolize their “specialization.”



The area seems the most peaceful place in the crime-ridden Basin City. All the brutalities are associated with male supremacy over sex workers, which is absent in the area. Such presentation is similar to that in many comics series described above – men bring with themselves all negative aspects of the profession.

Throughout the series the reader witnesses several stories in which prostitutes from the Old Town play significant part. The story “Family Values” presents the past of one of the prostitutes. Carmen ran away from her abusive father when she was twelve years old. To survive in the city she became a prostitute. This typical beginning of a teenage sex worker observed also in other comic stories, like for example underground “Greta Garbage” or the mainstream *Green Arrow*, has a surprising finale. When Carmen becomes part of the Old Town community, she receives protection and love. She finds a lesbian

partner – Daisy, one of the Old Town “protectors.” When Carmen dies tragically during one of mafia shootings, Daisy gets revenge for the death of her lover on a rich businessman from Basin City. This story presents lesbian relationship between prostitutes as equal in value to heterosexual families.



Prostitutes in *Sin City* are presented as strong women. Wendy, one of the twin sisters in charge of the Old Town “protectors,” ferociously conducts an investigation into who murdered her sister. To receive needed information she tortures a man. Gail, one of the most important prostitute warriors and a dominatrix, is presented while conducting attacks on clients who threaten the peace in the area. Power and inner strength of the Old Town’s prostitutes is contrasted with the weakness of women who are sex workers acting independently in other parts of Basin City. The reader can observe the old prostitute Peggy, who lives in one of the bars. She is an unkempt alcoholic struggling with debts and taking care of a small child. Deprived of any protection and care Peggy seems to be condemned to poverty and life on the social margins.

The vision of prostitution in *Sin City* series is by all means presented from the male perspective. The emphasis is put on female sexuality and physicality. The author’s vision

of prostitution as an organization led by females themselves may also be classified as a male fantasy about the profession. It is difficult to confront this portrayal with an equal one depicted by a female comic book author because there are few women creators in the field of sequential art. However, one of the works of Elaine Lee provides such example. The *Vamps* series created in 1994 provides a glimpse of the female view of the profession.

The action of the series revolves around one of the vampires, Howler, known as Jenn in her human life. Being a blood-crazed vampire she still seeks revenge on the society for taking away her only child. Jenn, born in Nevada, tried to live by prostitution which is a legal and well-paid profession in the state. Jenn started as a nude dancer in a strip bar but when she got pregnant she was not able to dance anymore. It was then that she started to work in a brothel. A short glimpse of Jenn's path does not offer the reader insights into the functioning of the profession in legal environment. However, when Jenn, depressed after losing her son, starts to drink and take drugs she is automatically discredited as a prostitute and fired.



The supervisor of the brothel seems to be the least concerned about Jenn's life situation. Like pimps, although non-violent, madam is concerned only about the profits. It seems that the legalization of the profession has not changed sex-work into a job that

would be gratifying for women. The legalization did not transfer their status in the society into more positive one.

After becoming a vampire named Howler, Jenn gains strength to find her son and, most of all, to free herself from the restrictions of the society. “Until the first light breaks I’m as free as a bird on the wing.”<sup>36</sup> All women from Howler’s “pack” seem to be strong and independent, free from male supervision and restrictions of moral order. Seen through unique female perspective, a prostitute is firstly a mother. The profession is only one of the aspects of her life, not determining who she really is. Such presentation may be contrasted with the image from *Sin City*, where women were perceived mainly through the prism of the sexual implications of their profession.

The image of a prostitute as a part of the background in alternative comics may be completed by two interesting cases where the authors reach to the historical roots of the prostitution described at the very beginning of the first chapter. The first chapter started with a short history of prostitution and its mythological roots. Although in vast majority of comic books prostitution is shown in the contemporary context there are a few authors who explore the character of a prostitute as a mythological creature.

The personification of Whore of Babylon, another name for goddess Ishtar, is presented in Garth Ennis’ series *Chronicles of Wormwood*. Ennis’s main motif is religion. In many of his series, especially in the most notorious of his works *The Preacher*, he strongly criticizes Catholic church and organized religion. Ennis’s comic books are characterized by extreme violence and obscenity. *Chronicles of Wormwood* present Christian myths in a very controversial, brutal and scatological view. The characters of God, Jesus, Antichrist and Satan are portrayed as ordinary humans with human

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<sup>36</sup> Elaine Lee (w) and William Simpson (p), *Vamps* #6, (Vertigo, January 1995), 25.



weaknesses, lusts and physical needs. This is the context in which Whore of Babylon is depicted. Her embodiment in contemporary world is a beautiful, young model, so voluptuous that men around her can think only about sexual acts. She is aware of her role and supernatural identity and calls herself “the mother of harlots.” As many prostitutes described above, she is cynical about the world and very open as far as sexuality is concerned. She emphasizes that sex is not a sinful activity and the Bible and Christian religion treats females as subordinate to men and their needs.



In Neil Gaiman’s “The Sandman: Brief Lives,” the incarnation of Ishtar also lives on Earth and enjoys earthly pleasures. She is a nude dancer in a club. She lives in a shabby place in a deteriorating neighborhood. Such living conditions seem to be her choice as she is still a powerful deity. One night she discusses the phenomenon of prostitution with one of her coworkers. The female human being sees the profession as the manifestation of male domination over women continuing since ancient times. Short after listening to that story Ishtar enters the stage and destroys the go-go club with the power of her singing and dancing. During her act, men seem to fall under the spell of a beautiful sex worker not the other way round.



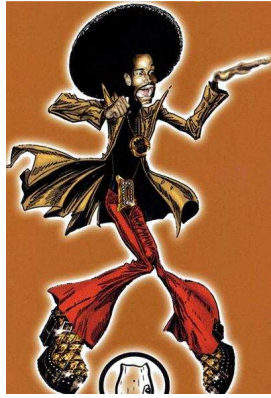
The deities in both stories seem to be powerful, wise and independent from male surveillance. Such depiction may symbolize the historical facts presented in the first chapter of this paper: in the ancient times, before Christianity, prostitutes had high position in society and received power and respect.

As it was mentioned in the first part of this chapter, the analysis of prostitution in alternative comics will be followed by a short discussion of the image of pimps. Their portrayal seems to be similar to the one presented in all other groups of sequential art: as violent oppressors of women. However, among alternative productions the reader may find two series that seem to present pimps in a very positive way.

*Super Bad James Dynamite*, the series mocking blacksploitation movies of the 70s,<sup>37</sup> tells a story of a pimp who is a vigilante fighter protecting his “hood” from negative characters. Although such negative characteristics as greed, lack of respect for any moral values or bad language, are emphasized, Dynamite is presented as a positive character. Prostitutes adore him because he is never violent towards them and protects them. He is also little clumsy and brings comical effects to the series.

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<sup>37</sup> Zimbio, “Wayans Bring Comic Book To Screen – Super Bad James Dynamite,” Zimbio.  
<http://www.zimbio.com/Super+Bad+James+Dynamite/articles/2/Wayans+Bring+Comic+Book+Screen>.



The second example of a similar approach may be observed in the series *The Return of The Superpimps* by Richard A. Hamilton. Designed as a pastiche of superhero series, Hamilton's work features a team of ex-pimps with various superpowers that decide to protect their "hood." Also portrayed as superheroes, pimps are source of positive values and humorous effect.



Nevertheless, both series are pastiche and seem to mock the profession of pimps rather than reflecting any realities of it.

At this point it seems apparent that the image of the prostitute and sex work is more varied in alternative comics than in the mainstream works. However, the picture of the profession in alternative comic books will not be complete without the analysis of the works in which the prostitute is the protagonist. Less rigorous moral restrictions enable the artists from this sector of the market to include prostitution at the centre of their works.

The first analyzed example differs from all the others from the selection. Catwoman is an example of the character that is presented in a different light in different groups of comic books. In many comic book series from the mainstream Selina's character was never associated with the profession. Only when she appeared in alternative comic books is this aspect of her figure emphasized.

Catwoman is portrayed as a prostitute mostly when the protagonist is Batman, like in *Batman: Year One* or *The Dark Knight Returns* graphic novels. This most well known adversary of Batman, created by Bob Kane and Bill Finger, starting from her first appearance in *Batman* # 1 in 1940, had, in a few versions by many authors, been associated with flesh trade. Her past profession, like her outfits, were to make the feline protagonist more sexy and interesting in the eyes of male readers. However, only the graphic novels by Frank Miller openly emphasize sex work in Selina Kyle's life. *Batman: Year One* portrays the beginnings of Selina's life as a feline antihero while *The Dark Knight Returns* sheds light on the final period of her life.

In *Batman: Year One*, which has been proclaimed "not only one of the most important comics ever written, it's also among the best,"<sup>38</sup> and ranked at the top of the list of the 25 greatest Batman graphic novels,<sup>39</sup> Bruce Wayne takes up a surveillance mission in the dilapidated quarter of Gotham City. During the assignment he is propositioned by Holly, a teenage prostitute. Holly lives with Selina in a small apartment crowded with Selina's cats. In fact, Selina can watch her young friend closely because she works in one of the buildings nearby as a dominatrix. From her words it seems that she means what she does – she despises men and enjoys bringing them pain and humiliation. It seems that to a large extent her behavior is not an act.

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<sup>38</sup> IGN UK Edition, "IGN: Batman: Year One Review," <http://comics.ign.com/articles/626/626667p1.html>.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.



She observes how the man to whom Holly presented herself in hope to get a client is, surprisingly, engaging in a fight with Holly's pimp. Though it may be uncommon, other prostitutes, together with Holly, attack Batman in defense of the pimp. When Selina sees her friend hurt, she comes to the rescue. Her short fight with Wayne is the first encounter between Batman and Catwoman. Later on, impressed with the masked hero and his uncompromising behavior, Selina decides to break with the profession and start a new life as a masked vigilante. Like Rapture, before leaving she beats her pimp Stan almost to death. Also in this case, like in most cases from the mainstream, wearing a costume (although she has no superpowers) is a way to escape the profession. Portrayed as a strong, young girl, Selina finds strength to defy moral codes of the society. By becoming a thief she frees herself completely from the male supervision, which she so deeply despises.

The second work by Frank Miller where Catwoman is portrayed from the perspective of sex work is *The Dark Knight*. This graphic novel was to be a revisionist story about the most well known comic book heroes: Batman and Superman. Miller included in his work the macabre of 1930s Batman and his 1980s sensibility.<sup>40</sup> "It remains

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<sup>40</sup> DC Univers The World's Greatest Super Heroes, "Batman: The Dark Knight Returns," DC Univers, [http://www.dccomics.com/dcu/graphic\\_novels/?gn=1279](http://www.dccomics.com/dcu/graphic_novels/?gn=1279).

an undisputed classic, one of the most influential stories ever told in comics, and is a book cited by the filmmakers as an inspiration for the most recent Batman movies.”<sup>41</sup>

The story line takes the reader to the times when Batman, like other super heroes, became an aging man already in his retirement. Together with the aging of his body, Gotham City also seems to be sinking deeper and deeper into lawlessness and moral decay. In this context, Selina is portrayed as an old woman who stopped fighting crime and owns a call-girl agency called Kyle-Escort. She hides her wrinkled face under heavy makeup. Her strong, athletic body fattened and weakened. She is powerless, resembling common women. She is beaten up by Joker and dressed in a circus costume, as if Joker was mocking her former self – a masked vigilante. Old Selina Kyle is only a helpless victim. As far as the profession is concerned she transformed from a violent dominatrix into a mother-like brothel supervisor.

Catwoman is connected with flesh trade only before and after her engagement with the world of superheroes and super villains and never when she stays at the centre of the story. Nevertheless, alternative comics deliver many examples of women who are main heroes and prostitutes at the same time.

*Black Kiss* written and illustrated by Howard Chaykin was published by Eros Comics, a publishing house specializing in erotic comics. This erotic story challenges the reader with a complicated form and fragmented narration. The story resembling *style noir* presents the reader with everyday life of Dagmar – a prostitute closely connected to the world of crime. The protagonist is a negation of the stereotype of a prostitute as a victim of males presented in many works described earlier in this paper. Dagmar has strong character and high position in the world of crime. She works alone, has her own connections and is so strong physically that can defend herself from aggressive men. In

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

one of the episodes Dagmar is even asked to assault and batter the pimp Chilly Claude, who is acting brutally towards other prostitutes. Policemen also do not constitute a problem for her business. Such presentation of the prostitute is a far cry from what was presented in the first chapter of this work. In reality, there may be groups of influential prostitutes such as like Dagmar, but their close connection with the world of crime may prevent any social analysis from being conducted.

Dagmar's house is decorated with SM and erotic accessories. She often works together with her partner Beverly. Apart from sex-work the sisters blackmail people to get money. Dagmar uses her clients as a source of money. It is her who is in charge of the situation with johns. If she has no time for them or is unsatisfied with any situation, she disposes of the client immediately. Dagmar's johns are mostly masochists, but it is emphasized that no matter the client she is in charge.



This seducing, voluptuous and predatory character may have been an example of a strong and independent woman performing prostitution with the profession not as a sign of female weakness and subordination but as a mark of self-reliance and strength but the last chapter of the novel changes this picture. The author surprises the reader by revealing that

Beverly is in fact a transsexual and Dagmar – a vampire. This procedure shatters the image of a strong woman – she is in fact a supernatural being and makes the picture of such prostitute too fantastic to have its counterpart in reality.

However, a portrayal of a strong female prostitute may be still observed in the series written by Dan Simmons, a former KISS member, entitled *Dominatrix*. The heroine is Dominique Stern, a professional dominatrix. Her job seems well paid, bringing enough profit to provide Dominique with a decent lifestyle. Like Dagmar, she is an independent sex worker, finding clients on her own and administrating her business. As she does not perform direct sexual encounters, only sado-masochistic actions, she does not feel degraded or used by men. In one scene of the comics a female friend of Dominique’s makes a remark that a dominatrix is not the same as a prostitute. It seems that this way of pleasing men, without physical penetration, is less degrading in the eyes of the public than the activities regular prostitute performs.

Before Dominique becomes a fighter with superpowers, her everyday routine is presented. As she describes it: “Lunch with friends. Dinner at home. Dress to work. Beat the hell out of some submissive jackass. Sleep like a baby.”<sup>42</sup> Dominique treats her occupation like any other job. She has friends who do not condemn her profession; on the contrary, they are interested and fascinated by the way she conducts her affairs, though their interest is just a shallow fascination with a life so different from their own. “To my friends my life is a game. Something to laugh about and then go to their vanilla worlds where good girls find strong men and get married and make fat, happy babies.”<sup>43</sup> Though Dominique meets with friends occasionally, she is alone in her private life, aware that her job does not allow anybody to get close to her. She does not want to explain her lifestyle to

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<sup>42</sup> Gene Simmons (c), Sean Taylor (w), Flavio Hoffe (p), *Dominatrix #1, A Very Good Place to Start*, (IDG Publishing, San Diego, August 2007), 3.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.



anyone. In general, the picture of her everyday life seems surprisingly common. It seems that her duties do not affect her as a person.

Dominique's outfit is classic – it seems even stereotypical. The leather surface reveals sexually important parts of the body, while covering the face. Another characteristic elements are stockings and high heel boots.



As in *Black Kiss* or with Catwoman, a strong female protagonist assumes the form of a dominatrix. Such a role is associated with aggressiveness, strength and power. In Dominique's case she gains superpowers only after taking a specially produced pill. Without its effects and outside her outfit Dominique reveals female passivity. For example, she is kidnapped naked by the military. In the *Dominatrix* series the main heroine is designed to attract male readers and this tendency makes the portrayal more a fantasy than the mirror of contemporary realities.



On the other hand, the scenes in which the relationship of the dominatrix and her clients is emphasized are a very interesting part of the *Dominatrix* series. They interestingly illustrate problems identified in the first chapter: the male-female relationship in the situation of female domination.

Dominique despises and laughs at her clients, both male and female. There are some with the needs so weird that she herself is scared, but she treats her job seriously and never shows such emotions. Dominique understands clearly who is a submissive side: she divides her clients into two groups. The first one is those who treat “sessions” as a role-playing game. In such situation she is a person who fulfills client’s wishes and, although through dominating, she brings him pleasure at the command given just before. After the “session” the client pays her, remaining in charge. “I am their puppet, they pull the strings.”<sup>44</sup> says Dominique. However, there is the second group of clients who believe that what happens in the “dungeons” is the reality. In this case, in their inside reality the dominatrix is really a dominating side and they are her actual victims. Dominique admits that to a certain extent such clients scare her. In general, Dominique describes her clients as common people: “most of my clients are pretty normal. Bankers and copy writers and

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<sup>44</sup> Simmons, Taylor, Hoffe, *Dominatrix* #6, *Game, Set and Match*, (IDG Publishing, San Diego, January 2008), 21.

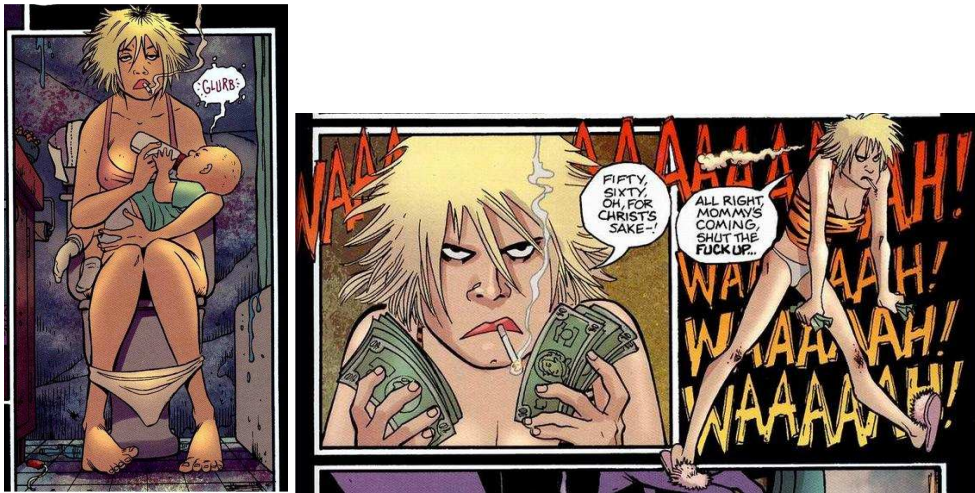
small business owners who don't get all the excitement in their normal lives or saw some cheap porn and got interested in the real deal."<sup>45</sup> It seems that Dominique realizes that her role as a sex-worker is to fulfill fantasies of other people.

Dominique and Dagmar may seem to be good material for super heroines, associated with strength and active not-submissiveness. At this point a question arises: can a prostitute, a submissive street walker - despised and pitied "hooker," be a super heroine? Garth Ennis's work *The Pro* provides an example of this situation.

In *The Pro* Ennis presents as the protagonist a representative of the lowest group of prostitutes: street walkers. The heroine works on the streets for little money and in squalid conditions. She has no defense from any dangers and is a victim of violence from clients and policemen. She dresses as any woman and she is not especially attractive. She lives in extremely poor conditions and has a baby. It also seems that she has no family or friends. What is interesting is that she and her surroundings seem to be unaesthetic on purpose. The ugliness of her small baby, his constant cries of hunger, dirty diapers, and the mess in the apartment are emphasized. The protagonist's body has imperfections such as pimples on her buttocks and breasts (important erotic areas) and scratched knees (probably from working on them.)

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<sup>45</sup> Simmons, Taylor, Hoffe, *Dominatrix #5, Friends and Neighbors*, (IDG Publishing, San Diego, December 2007), 14.



However, although the realities of the profession seem to be harsh, the protagonist respects herself and her job. Her attitude towards it seems to be devoid of any moral aspect, and her approach is practical and simple: “That’s why there’s hookers. For all the guys that aren’t getting any.”<sup>46</sup>

The comic series portrays in detail only one of the main protagonist’s clients. He is an average man, but his mediocrity may serve as a symbol of all johns. He is stingy and violent, treats prostitutes as objects to satisfy him, and despises them. As in the case of Rapture from *Savage Dragon* or Catwoman, superhero abilities enable the nameless protagonist to get revenge for being so unfairly treated by the clients.

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<sup>46</sup> Garth Ennis, Amanda Conner, Jimmy Palmiotti, *The Pro*, (Berkeley, Image Comics, 2007), 33.



Although the protagonist initiates the vengeance, all street walkers from the area have their share in taking the revenge for the degrading treatment they receive from males every day. This violent retribution performed on one john becomes a symbolic act – a gesture towards all people who disgrace or are brutal towards sex workers.

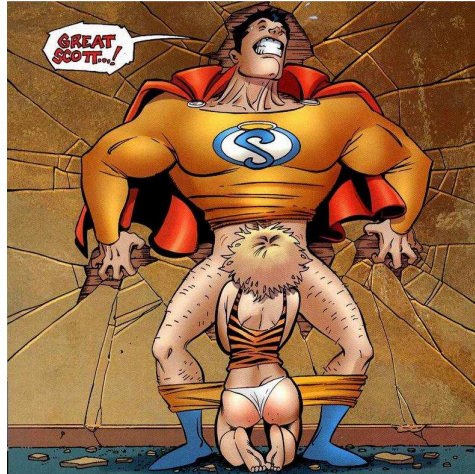
Like Dominique from *Dominatrix*, the protagonist of *The Pro* is not born with superpowers. She is a result of an experiment by some aliens who tried to prove that anyone can become a superhero. They intentionally choose the lowest human being, from their perspective – a street walker, and endow her with super strength and ability to fly.



*The Pro*'s main theme is the contrast between everyday realities with the idealized world of superheroes. The protagonist becomes part of the League of Honor – a team of morally flawless superheroes as soon as they sense that a new superhero is “born” to “fight the omnipresent evil.” Still, she is the antithesis of the rest of the team. While they are part of the League out of the sense of duty towards the society, she joins the team only because they are paid to be heroes and that “The battle for everything what is right. Sounds better than sucking cocks.”<sup>47</sup> Moreover, she uses her superpowers in a very pragmatic way, for example to perform 1000 fellatios during one night and collect a great deal of money. Her ways of behavior during the battle with super villains also differ from the artificially heroic behavior and courtesies on the battlefield performed by the League of Honor. She engages in conflicts the way normal people do – her fights are violent, messy and disgusting (peeing on the adversary’s face), which provides a sharp contrast to elegant fights of the others from The League, who rarely even touch their adversaries, not to mention wound them. Her attitude towards fighting villains seems also disturbing for the rest of the team: use whatever method it takes to win, to be ready to fight terrorist and be as ruthless as them seems unacceptable. The rest of superheroes are also concerned with her “bad language.” When the protagonist introduces the superman Saint to the concept of what fellatio is, she is accused of degrading him. The League seems to reject the idea that they have the same sexual needs as the rest of humanity.

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<sup>47</sup> Ennis, Conner, Palmiotti, *The Pro*, 16.



It seems that in the case of Garth Ennis' *The Pro* a prostitute becomes a tool to expose the artificiality of the superheroes' behavior and their inconsistency with the reality. As far as the image of the profession is concerned, *The Pro* emphasizes the realities of everyday life of a street walker and a single parent at the same time.

To sum up, mainstream and alternative comic books present very diverse images of the profession that reveal many different facets of the prostitute. Although mainstream and alternative comic books have different audiences and consequently present the reality from different perspectives, the analysis of several titles reveals that there are many similar traits connecting the image of prostitution in both categories.

Mainstream comic books do not contain direct depiction of prostitution, but from the 1980s sex workers are present in this category. Portrayed as victims of male oppressors such as pimps and policemen, prostitutes are not presented negatively as women performing sex work. Similar traits can be also observed in alternative comics, in which the realities and aspects of prostitution can be depicted more comprehensively, with women still presented as victims of brutal males. Both categories of sequential art also share the emphasis on the role of the prostitute as a person who fulfills male fantasies,

although alternative comic books devote much more attention to this aspect, as for example *The Preacher* series.

However, although alternative comic books present a more multifaceted image of prostitution and, additionally, offer their readers visions of protagonists performing sex-work. It is also the group in which the image of the profession is in many aspects the farthest from the reality described in the first chapter.



## Conclusions

Prostitution has been represented in numerous films and literary works so it is only natural that the world of sequential art has also taken interest in the issue . Since the times of the first cartoons prostitution has featured consistently as a subject of comic books and graphic novels. The purpose of this thesis was to examine to what extent and in what manner the social situation of sex work in America has been reflected in the fictitious worlds of American sequential art.

Prostitution has been present in human societies since the ancient times. Depending on the character of society, prostitutes could acquire contradistinctive roles. These functions varied from positive and respected like those of high priestesses in Hindu or Egyptian temples to the lowly provider of bodily pleasures, isolated from the rest of society in the late Christian era.

The first chapter of the indicated paper analyzed prostitution as:  
a business transaction understood as such by the parties involved and in the nature of a contract in which one or more people pay an agreed price to one or more other people for helping them gain sexual gratification by various methods,  
describing its structures, classification of sex workers and delivering outlook of relationships between prostitutes, pimps, clients and the police. The chapter also focuses on the roles of prostitutes in the contemporary society, which include not only satisfying others' needs but also teaching the secret of *ars amandi*, fulfilling the need of affection and closeness to men and women deprived of it in everyday life, and role-playing in fantasies that for various reasons cannot be performed in regular relationships. All the above enumerated issues were described according to the sociological data to form a factual basis

for the findings from the chapters analyzing contents of various forms of sequential art. The results varied according to certain factors.

The prostitute, a person still on the margins of the society, is not on the margins of sequential art. Her figure is present in almost all forms of the medium and provides ample opportunity for analyses of the connections between fictitious representations and reality.

As far as cartoons are concerned, it seems that their focus on presenting facts and opinions rather than more general truths influenced the way they re-present reality. In vintage cartoons the portrayal of prostitution serves particularly as an anti-example and focuses on negative features of the profession: the moral fall, poverty and violence. The division into “good” and “bad” women who do not follow the routes of patriarchal norms is emphasized, leaving sex workers only negative examples.

In contemporary cartoons, on the other hand, the image of a sex worker, although still treated as a tool to emphasize or satirize some social problems and phenomena, does not possess a morally wrong message. The moral judgment of the profession itself is withheld. Oversimplified and codified on the graphic level, the characters of prostitutes are reduced to a symbolic level. In the category of political cartoons the realities of the profession are almost no mirrored at all, except only for the division into indoor and outdoor prostitution. Nevertheless, the stereotypical perception of prostitution is perfectly illustrated. The outfit, the work surroundings, the style of speaking and behavior presented in cartoons perfectly portray how most Americans perceive prostitution while not being in direct touch with its realities.

Comic strips seem at first sight to reflect the realities of sex work on a similar level to the cartoons, with the exception of strips present in periodicals which do not touch upon the problem of prostitution. Nevertheless, among the Internet strips, which seem to be free from any constraints as far as themes are concerned, the reader may come across series of

periodical featuring strips that present the realities of the profession accurately. The *Modern Hooker* series serves as a great example of a comic strip that mirrors with accuracy everyday work routine of an escort. The outfit as well as the relationships with the clients and police seem somewhat oversimplified, but authentic and mostly agreeing with the findings from the first chapter. Moreover, as a character the Modern Hooker seems individualized enough to resemble an authentic person. She serves as a symbol of the profession, being at the same time presented as an individual.

In underground comix prostitution is frequently portrayed with all crudity and brutality, as the medium was not in any way censored or its content controlled. This lack of restraints has created a unique opportunity to present the extent of sexual and physical abuse in the profession, which can be observed in several underground works, at the same time allowing the artists to slip into the world of symbolism and grotesque.

A large number of underground comix artists use the realities of prostitution, such as sexual abuses, drug overdoses or poverty, in a humorous way. The realities are mirrored, but the image is distorted by the humor. Individual authors use the image of a prostitute as a tool of pastiche and satire. In other underground stories sex workers are portrayed in openly erotic works, but their presentation is multifaceted. The prostitute's role as a woman who helps men fulfill their fantasies is emphasized but comix also stress that, dominated by men, prostitutes are basically women who become "dolls" treated only as disposable flesh .

Mainstream comic books, for a long time conforming to the Comics Code Authority, until recently didn't portray any sex workers . In contemporary mainstream superheroes series prostitutes appear mostly as the background – a part of a morally-decayed American city. Nevertheless, it must be emphasized that fictitious worlds represent them as victims of depraved society. Mainstream comics presents clients and

pimps as oppressors and bringers of evil while women as victims of the flesh trade and male brutality. The overall analysis of mainstream comic books demonstrates that detailed realities of the profession are omitted and the politically correct view of the profession is implemented. There are also cases where heroines, before becoming superheroes, were part of the flesh trade – the most notorious example being Catwoman. The reoccurring theme in case of ex-prostitutes is that gaining superpowers is the only way to become free from sex work.

Alternative comic books, as generally addressed to a mature reader, portray realities of the profession in a more detailed and multi-faceted way. Many other alternative books, like *Going Back* series, are based on true stories from life of prostitutes. Nevertheless, pastiche and grotesque is also present in many works. For instance *The Pro* ridicules stereotypes and political correctness present in mainstream superhero comics, using a character of a coarse street walker as a tool. In other cases, the prostitute is a basis for presenting the history of the profession and connecting contemporary sex workers to their past as priestesses and almost godlike creatures (*Sandman* series). It seems that alternative comics take the portrayal of a prostitute as mirroring the realities of the profession most seriously, even mocking the stereotypes that accumulated around sex work and presenting the feminist view on prostitution (*Vamps*).

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