

Victimalisation of prostitution and the shaming of exceptions: the myth of a prostitute - victim

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Prostitutes have traditionally been treated in two distinct ways. They have either been stigmatised as immoral, impure, criminal etc. or been seen as victims (of their pimps, clients, trafficking, poverty, the social environment etc.). In particular, the apparently liberal public often sees prostitution in terms of victimalisation, as if it is easier for them to show sympathy and understanding towards the prostitute if she is a »victim«. At the same time, they condemn exceptions – prostitutes who break out of the myth of a prostitute as necessarily a victim and challenge their presentations of prostitution and paid sex. The article analyses one such example of a prostitute, a non-victim, and reveals contemporary social representations of prostitutes. It further examines (the need for) victimalisation of prostitution and exposes quasi-liberal arguments that, on further inspection, often reveal old-fashioned moralism, albeit couched in terms of social responsibility, and arguments supporting Moscovici's hypothesis about mental resistance to changing established social representations. In addition, the paper explains some die-hard myths about prostitution and the state-legal approach to prostitution, which reflects the existing images thereof, as well as (co)constructs them.

Keywords: prostitution, victimalisation, (de)criminalisation, the victim, social representations, criminal law, trafficking in human beings

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