

"PROSTITUTION GIVES ME POWER"

Can you set your own work hours?
Pick your clients? Keep all the profits?
These sex workers in Holland do.
Here's how they're using their bodies
to foster trust, compassion, and
happiness in the world

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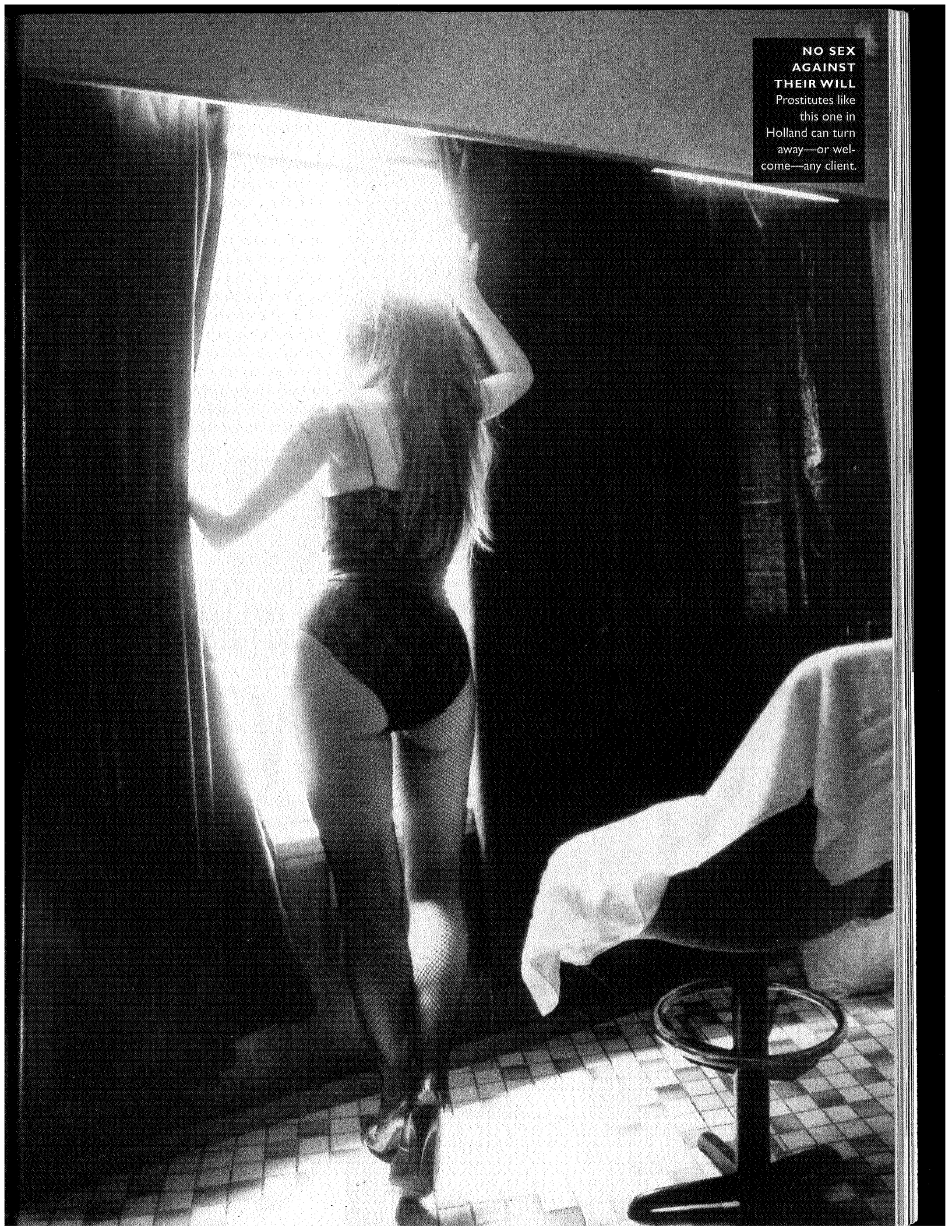
**"IN A LOT OF WAYS,
PROSTITUTION IS LIKE SOCIAL
WORK." JACQUELINE, 39**

PROSTITUTION IS DEFINITELY less about sex than people expect. I have always been fascinated by the interaction between a client and a prostitute, so 12 years ago, I contacted an escort agency.

My first client was a man who lived in a home for the elderly. We didn't

even have intercourse; we just did some snuggling and a little touching. He kept his underwear on, and it was so cute—he played the harmonica for me and gave me a cup of tea and a hug. I thought it was wonderful just to be able to give him some warmth. It made me feel confident, adventurous, and beautiful, and it felt so *me*. >>

**NO SEX
AGAINST
THEIR WILL**
Prostitutes like
this one in
Holland can turn
away—or wel-
come—any client.



»After that, I worked behind a window in the red-light district to get experience, but it wasn't satisfying. Men who come to the windows are there for a quickie—the sex is only 10 or 15 minutes long—and you need to get your clients out of the room as soon as possible to generate more revenue. But I would take more time than the other women, since I like to make a bit of a connection first.

I wasn't good at anonymous sex,

and I believe my current clientele needs more than that from me. Sometimes I can feel a person's loneliness, and I hope I can make someone feel wanted and understood for an hour or two. In a lot of ways, prostitution is like social work. I've had clients with whom I've spent seven hours, just talking. Working in the windows was like McDonald's—men go there because they have an appetite and are hungry for a snack—but working for a brothel

or escort agency is like going out for dinner. If you're there for a couple of hours, you want more than just to satisfy the appetite; you talk much more. It's a powerful experience to get people to open up in conversation.

Today, I have a few clients from a special escort agency that caters to people with mental, physical, and social disabilities. A guy who is disabled gets a lot of care and physical contact, like being washed and fed, but it's very professional contact. It's nice for a guy to have the chance to feel like a sexual being, not just a disabled person who needs care. There are many ways of helping people, but sometimes a snuggle, some undivided attention, and sex are important.

WORKING THE WINDOWS

When the red light signals a woman is available, the door is shut. She'll crack it for negotiations and admit only the men she chooses.



"BEING JUDGED IS THE PRICE I PAY FOR SEXUAL FREEDOM."

ROOS, 48

WHEN I WAS A STUDENT, I really needed money. I saw some newspaper ads for brothels seeking prostitutes, and I called one. The owner arranged an appointment with my first client.

For me, having sex wasn't sinful; prostitution was a way to communicate with other people and explore parts of myself I'd considered inferior. Until I did this, I had never exercised my ability to tempt men; I considered my personality and intelligence more important qualities. Prostitution gave me a growing consciousness of my sexuality and a lot of personal strength.

But I've found that the rest of the world doesn't think as positively about expressing sexuality. From the moment I started working, I was a disgraced person. Many of my friends and family don't understand my choice. People make judgments about my personality and morals—I'm supposed to be unintelligent, weak, lazy, unethical,



and wicked. I started working before prostitution was legal, and it was impossible to get a bank account, medical insurance, or a house. Even after legalization, banks had to be pressed to accept prostitutes as clients.

The price for breaking the rules in any society—about how women should behave, sexual freedom, how to manage sexuality—is being judged harshly. But I was proud to pay that price to fight for sexual freedom: the freedom to have no sex at all, to have sex with other women, to only have sex with the one you love, or to have sex with 1000 men.

I've tried to strengthen the position of the prostitute by being open about what I do. I regard my profession as a trade like any other, and I talk about my job freely among friends and acquaintances—and in newspaper and radio interviews. I've also been involved in discussions run by *De Rode Draad* (The Red Thread), a Dutch organization that works to organize the prostitution business so that everyone is treated fairly.

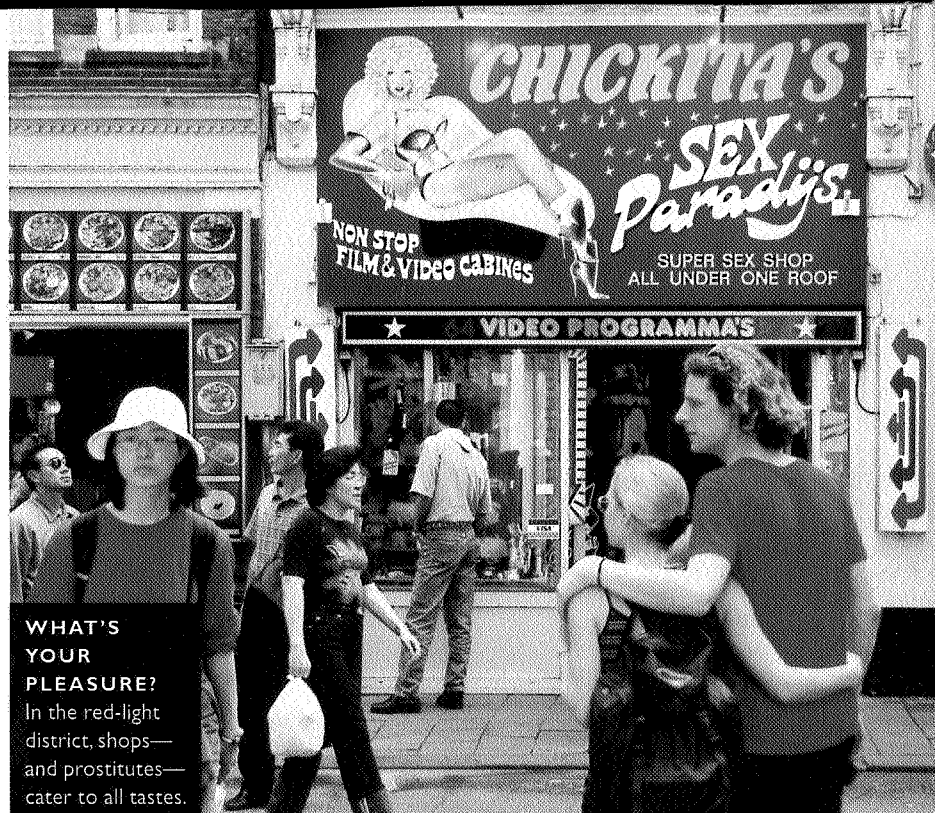
Prostitution is like any other business in many ways. I have met a lot of dull, irritating, terrible men, but so what? I have also met a lot of kind and captivating men with fascinating stories and interesting opinions, and they have made my world very wide.



"WHEN MY CLIENT TRUSTS ME, I'M TRULY IN CHARGE."
WINNIFRED, 38

I BECAME A DOMINATRIX ON A dare. After a few amateur S&M experiences at home, my husband and I went to a club and found out the management was searching for an assistant. He teased me that I wouldn't dare do it—but I did.

I hadn't known anything about S&M until a short time before I got married, but I quickly discovered



WHAT'S YOUR PLEASURE?
In the red-light district, shops—and prostitutes—cater to all tastes.

that it's a way to help people. I'm not a psychologist, but I'm good at sensing people's secret longings. I play games such as bondage, role-playing, spanking, and exploring all kinds of fetishes with my clients, but I don't have sex with them. When people come to me, they are longing for certain feelings, especially excitement and attention. For some people, S&M is like working out: Afterward, you're relieved. Your heart is dancing. You're more open, and the world feels different. It's very rewarding to make people feel good.

The power that comes from being a mistress isn't about brute force. It's only when I sense that my client has given in because of trust that I'm in charge and in control. My job is all about feelings—I can sense when someone wants to be alone in a cage and when it's enough. It's very satisfying to sense how my "slaves" feel. It's as if I'm under their skin. If it's a good session, we share energy and trust, and they feel free in their experience.

My job is also very different from what I do at home, where I am a mother and a wife. I'm grateful to have a husband who lets me play. He understands that some people need S&M and have no place else to go; he always liked S&M himself but felt like he couldn't tell anyone until he met me. We've had some serious discus-

WHERE SEX WORK DOESN'T EQUAL SLAVERY

HOLLAND is one of the few places where prostitution is openly tolerated, legal, and organized, which is one reason sex workers there have so many positive stories about their work. It's also legal in places including New Zealand and a few counties in the state of Nevada, although laws there aren't as woman-friendly as Holland's. Women in Nevada must work out of brothels, which aren't required to give them benefits.

In Holland, a prostitute who runs her own business has to obey laws regarding fire safety, hygiene, and a safe working environment, and she must pay taxes. Women running their own businesses can choose their own clients and set their own prices and work hours, and many are registered with the Chamber of Commerce. Escort agencies work slightly differently: They find the clients and contact the prostitutes, who can accept or decline the job as they like.

sions about my work—but if he complains, I have my ways of putting him back on the right track! ♦