



What's wrong with consensual prostitution?

It's a criminal act. It shouldn't be legalized.

WHAT CANADIANS REALLY BELIEVE

From the death penalty to same-sex relationships, a new poll shows huge shifts

BY KEN MACQUEEN • An Ontario court judge will soon decide if Canada's prostitution laws should be struck down. In British Columbia, the Supreme Court will decide if laws prohibiting polygamy can still be enforced. And in the House of Commons, a private member's bill would make it legal for the profoundly ill to seek a doctor's help to commit suicide. As a nation we are reinventing, refining—or undermining—our morality in dramatic fashion. In some instances we are asking the courts to do our thinking for us. But in most cases we forge a national sense of right or wrong in the millions of individual judgment calls we make every day—increasingly without the

guidance of organized religion.

With so many moral issues at a crossroads, Angus Reid Strategies undertook a national survey last month asking Canadians to consider 21 ethical issues. Their answers—on issues as diverse as animal rights, prostitution, homosexuality and illegal drug use—show some profound divisions by gender and region. But taken together, they seem to reveal a rather astounding liberal tilt in our morality, albeit with some exceptions. Each Canadian steers by his and most certainly her moral compass, and the wonder is we don't bump into each other more often.

Consider these six sticky moral situations. Which are the most and the least acceptable to you, and to most Canadians?

- 1) *You plan to have an abortion.*
- 2) *You wear a mink coat.*
- 3) *You favour killing convicted murderers.*
- 4) *You think the dying have the right to commit suicide with a doctor's help.*

5) *You don't care if the drugs you buy have been tested on animals.*

6) *You support medical research using the stem cells of human embryos.*

Let's start by saying there's never been a better time to be a Canadian mink, or a seal, or a lab rat. Canadians today are more likely to moralize about the treatment of animals than about the lives of our fellow humans. Just 22 per cent oppose euthanasia, but 41 per cent condemn medical testing on animals, the survey found. Abortion is considered morally wrong by 22 per cent of Canadians, fewer than the 31 per cent who have moral qualms about wearing fur. But while four in 10 oppose animal testing, only 17 per cent take issue with researchers using human embryonic stem cells. As for capital punishment, 53 per cent of Canadians consider it "morally acceptable," a jump of six percentage points since Reid last asked the question in 2007.

As a nation, most of our sexual attitudes today would be shocking to earlier generations. Gay relationships, sex between unmarried men and women and having babies outside of marriage are “morally acceptable” to two-thirds or more of respondents. But that’s where it stops. Just 15 per cent condone marital infidelity. And pedophilia is universally condemned. Just one per cent considered sexual relations with minors to be “morally acceptable.” Moral views are liberalizing, but the public has said, “this is where I draw the line,” Mario Canseco, vice-president of public affairs for the polling group, says of infidelity and pedophilia.

Where and how the line gets drawn is something of a mystery. “Morality is actually very complicated stuff in terms of where it comes from and what we hang onto, and how we change,” says Kerry Bowman, a bioethicist at the University of Toronto’s Joint Centre for Bioethics, a clinical ethicist at Mount Sinai Hospital in Toronto who deals frequently with end-of-life care, and a conservationist who has worked with great apes and chimps for 20 years. Bowman says ethical choices are shaped to an extent by a complex response to the issues of the day, but that a person’s ethical core goes far deeper, to an evolved instinct that predates religion and even humans themselves. “Contemporary religions, the great religions of the world, are really only a few thousand years old and they really would not resonate if they weren’t plugging into something that already existed,” says Bowman.

Still, it wasn’t much more than a generation ago when the answers to life’s Big Questions were handed to us. They came from our families, our good books and religious leaders, and from our monochromatic and like-minded circle of friends. Today, church attendance for most denominations has plunged, but scratch the surface and some 60 per cent of Canadians identify as Christians, says Andrew Grenville, chief research officer for Angus Reid Strategies. “Even though we’re unchurched, there is still a lot of religious faith out there. We’re believers, but not believers.” And not necessarily followers. The greatest acceptance of abortion and euthanasia is in Quebec, despite the opposition of the Catholic Church, which dominated the province’s religious and social life for centuries.

We are inclined today to work out our moral answers from a more worldly point of view. Or, more cynically perhaps, we find a morality that justifies our lifestyle. We are an increasingly diverse nation, drawn from the full spectrum of races, religions and cultures. It’s no longer a case of living within a tight homogeneous circle where the orbit consisted of seeing the same people at work, at church,

at the same clubs and at bowling on Thursday nights, says Grenville. Today sociologists talk of “network individualism,” where daily life takes people into a variety of social groupings. “The more you’re exposed to people of different beliefs and different ways of living, the more you realize, you know, they’re not really crazy,” says Grenville. “It’s not weird. It’s not bad. It’s not a threat to us.” And so, views change. Sometimes dramatically:

ANIMAL VS. HUMAN LIFE

Abortion is morally acceptable to 66 per cent of Canadians, an increase from 61 per cent in two years. It is one of a remarkably few areas where men and women agree in similar proportion. Support for the death penalty has jumped six points in two years to 53 per cent. The result is that more people (41 per cent) consider it morally wrong to conduct medical tests on animals than the diminishing 34 per cent who oppose capital punishment. (The remaining 13 per cent are undecided on the death penalty.)

Reconciling those two views is a bit of a challenge, concedes Grenville, who says the poll signals a heightened sensitivity to animal life. “If everybody lived on a farm, or knew farmers, it might be quite different,” he says. To him, the poll’s greatest surprise was the hardening attitude in favour of the death penalty. “To see it in the majority is really striking, particularly when we see other things becoming more permissive or morally acceptable,” he says. “For it to become more acceptable to kill someone as punishment, that seems almost a countervailing trend and, to me anyway, a disturbing one.”

Moira McQueen, a University of Toronto theology professor and executive director of the Canadian Catholic Bioethics Institute, says the poll shows a higher level of reverence for animals than for facets of human life. “It just seems to me we’ve got something a little bit out of proportion. I’m obviously downplaying my words there,” she says. McQueen, a practising Catholic, says in light of the support for animal life, it’s “paradoxical” that attitude doesn’t extend to abortion, human embryonic stem cell

research, euthanasia and capital punishment, which all have majority support. “It’s always strange that there is so little regard, it seems to me, for human life at different ends of the spectrum.”

The shift from viewing animals as merely property is one of the greatest changes in Western morality, says Bowman. “Attitudes toward non-human life, and I include both

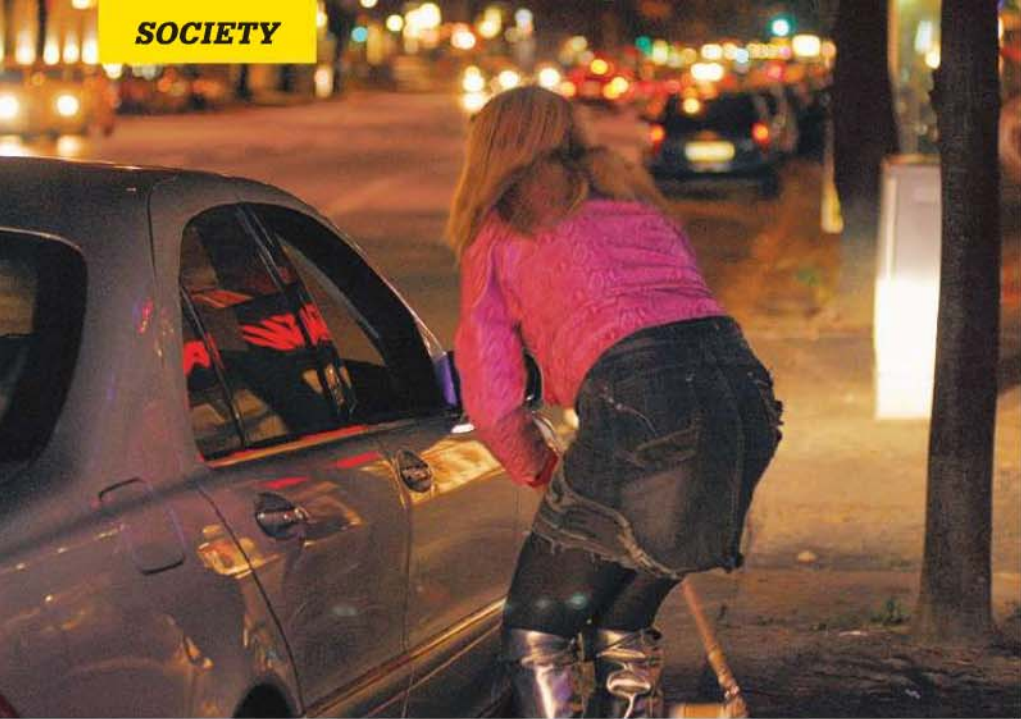
SEAL HUNT protest at the Canadian Embassy in Washington



Good times for animals: 31% of us have qualms about wearing fur. 53% say capital punishment's okay.

the environment and animals in that, is in rapid transition,” he says. “When animals are abused the public reaction is phenomenally strong,” he says. “Whereas people aren’t lining up to help street people. It’s very complex and strange stuff.”

Perhaps it’s a case of finally listening to our instincts and according our first teachers the respect they deserve. Bowman considers it a conceit to believe that morality is what separates humans from the rest of the animal kingdom. “Morality predates human existence because you can see it in our primate heritage,” he says. “You can see moral instinct in our non-human primates.” Bowman—who is also president of the Canadian Great Ape Alliance—points to many studies and recorded observations of primates exhibiting such altruistic acts as compensating for the disabilities of fellow primates or even rescuing humans. Steven Pinker, a Montreal native



and Harvard psychology professor, writes in his essay *The Moral Instinct* of rhesus monkeys who go hungry rather than pull a chain that delivers food to them but also a shock to another monkey.

RELATIONSHIPS

On marital and relationship issues, Canadians are liberal—to a point. Same-sex relationships are acceptable to two-thirds of Canadians, a seven-point jump from just two years ago. Some 87 per cent had no qualms about sexual relations between unmarried women and men. Divorce is morally acceptable to 84 per cent of national respondents, and 92 per cent of those living in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Even siring children out of wedlock (there's a quaint term) isn't an immoral issue for 79 per cent of Canadians—and 87 per cent of those in very liberal, and once very Catholic, Quebec. In terms of relationships, the poll shows an uptick in the desire for personal liberty, with less concern for others, or, in some instances, for life.

Marriage itself would seem increasingly irrelevant, except for the curious and contradictory fact that people keep getting hitched. Says Granville: "I think it just speaks to the fact that we've asked these people if [unmarried family life] is morally acceptable, not if it's a good idea."

McQueen is troubled that Canada's free-wheeling sexual ethics have strayed so far from Catholic doctrine. "It's not that these behaviours are new, it's that they're societally approved now." She believes Canada is in the midst of a sexual social experiment, one that

Prostitution is acceptable to 56% of men, but only 29% of women.

Nine of 10 women oppose polygamy.

may take three generations to work itself out. "I don't think that we're any less moral, or more immoral. Canadian society still seems to have its act together and is willing to make a judgment that some things are wrong, so we're not completely relativist," she says. She points to things like the strong objections to pedophilia, polygamy and infidelity. "I find that quite encouraging but quite normal. Most of us know when things are wrong and we're willing to call it wrong."

In her definition, "something is wrong if it's causing harm." Premarital sex, children out of wedlock, divorce in many cases—all have the potential for harm, she says. If they are morally wrong, it's not because of Catholic doctrine but because that doctrine identifies their potential risk. "I wouldn't be surprised if there is a return to more committed faithful relationships," she says. "Unless we're programmed to self-destruct, which I don't think we are, I really think we'll see what's harmful and continue along the path of adjusting [behaviour] to what helps."

Bowman, from a secular point of view, sees no evidence of moral decay. "Society is not collapsing in any way, shape or form. You've got falling crime rates. In some ways you've got more social cohesion than you

did 20 years ago," he says. "If you take something like gay relationships, a lot of what's happened with that is that people had not thought very deeply about this as a form of prejudice. Is this a perversion, or is this just an element of human diversity?" In his view, it reflects a healthy and continuous ethical evolution.

POLYGAMY

It's little shock that nine out of 10 women consider polygamy (defined in the poll as a man with multiple wives) to be morally wrong. Or that fewer males, about seven in 10, share that view. Still, taken together there is solid 81 per cent opposition to the practice.

MEN AND WOMEN differ in their opinions about prostitution and polygamy:
(below) Winston Blackmore, leader of the polygamous community of Bountiful, B.C.; (right) marriage celebration in Ottawa



While most Canadians consider the practice immoral, the question vexing the B.C. government is whether polygamy remains illegal in an enforceable way. It has tried and failed over the past two decades to convict many of the males of Bountiful, B.C., the breakaway Mormon sect that claims a religious right and imperative to take multiple wives, many of them perilously close to the age of sexual consent. In Victoria last month, the government asked the provincial supreme court to rule on two questions regarding Canada's rarely enforced law prohibiting polygamy. Is the law constitutional? If not, is polygamy illegal if the multiple marriages involve minors or those exploited through an imbalance of power? The impact of any eventual ruling would extend beyond Bountiful. Polygamy is practised by some Islamic fundamentalists,

so the courts will determine if Canadian law overrides their religious rights.

PROSTITUTION

Three women—a prostitute, a dominatrix and a former sex trade worker—were in a Toronto courtroom recently challenging the constitutionality and contradictory nature of laws that make prostitution legal but outlaw most everything around it, from discussing money with a client to operating or working in a brothel. Government lawyers and those representing Christian groups argued the laws protect public morals. But the lawyer for the women also made a compelling point. The current laws drive women into furtive, risky transactions in streets and alleys. Where is the morality in that?

While the judge has yet to rule, the verdict, according to the Reid poll, is a split decision.



Prostitution is morally acceptable to 56 per cent of men, but just 29 per cent of women. In Reid's survey two years ago, only 46 per cent of men found prostitution acceptable and 25 per cent of women. While opinions on prostitution are liberalizing, men seem to favour personal freedom, whereas women are concerned by the moral implications, and the potential for exploitation.

In a related survey, the pollster asked other questions dealing with the Ontario case. Allowing prostitutes to work indoors or in brothels won the support of half of Canadian women surveyed and 71 per cent of the men. Half of Canadians think actions surrounding prostitution should be legalized to allow adults to engage in consensual prostitution. Again there is a gender divide, with 62 per cent of men but only 40 per cent of women



Two-thirds of Canadians are fine with same-sex relationships. Only 15% are okay with marital infidelity.

agreeing with the idea. While many of the arguments in the case are related to safety, the pollster notes in an analysis, "Canadian women are, at this point, not convinced that decriminalization is the solution."

EUTHANASIA

In Ottawa, Bloc Québécois MP Francine Lalonde pushes gamely ahead on a private member's bill, C-384 (Right to Die with Dignity), which would amend the Criminal Code to allow for doctor-assisted suicide. It is her third attempt since 2005 to push through such a bill. While it is unlikely to pass, the issue isn't going away. McQueen's Catholic bioethics group sent a message last month to every member of Parliament urging them to defeat the bill, saying, "Physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia are not human needs or rights." The group instead urged a focus on better palliative care, to "allow all Canadians to live life well, until its natural end."

In a powerful essay published recently in the *National Post*, Conservative MP and Minister of State Steven Fletcher, a 37-year-old quadriplegic, showed the issue is far more than an esoteric debate. Fletcher was 23 when his car struck a moose: "In an instant, my head was neurologically disconnected from my

body below the neck." He wished for death, and while that eventually changed, he says his living will calls for euthanasia under certain circumstances. Though most in his party are unlikely to support the bill, Fletcher says he will abstain. "It is flawed," he says of the bill. "But I cannot vote against empowering Canadians to make deeply personal decisions for themselves."

Bowman, who consults on end of life issues as a clinical ethicist at Mount Sinai Hospital, predicts there will be increasing pressure for euthanasia as baby boomers age and demand a greater measure of control. Emotionally loaded terminology is often an impediment to the debate, he says. Active euthanasia, using drugs to speed the death of a terminally ill patient, is illegal. But removing life support or feeding tubes from a failing patient and letting nature take its course happens on a daily basis in intensive care units across the country. "Yet," he says, "the moral difference between the two is an open question."

McQueen says Canadians apply morals more humanely than they theorize about them. "I think I'm a bit more optimistic about human nature. I don't think most ordinary people would think of their really old end-of-life parents as being just a burden or something to be dispatched," she says, though that is hardly the stated intent of the bill. "For the vast majority of people, we look after our children, and our children look after us. It just seems very natural. It's not a Catholic approach. It's not Presbyterian. It's a human thing. It's deeper than religious stances."

THE GENDER DIVIDE

Only a fool would hazard an opinion as to which gender is more ethical, but it seems the sexes live on different moral planets. Women are far more likely than men to declare it is morally wrong to wear fur, clone animals or humans, gamble, commit adultery, use

ONE ETHICIST says pressure for euthanasia will increase



Only 22% of Canadians oppose euthanasia, while 41% condemn medical testing on animals

animals for medical tests, or condone euthanasia, polygamy, pornography, prostitution or illegal drug use. As for the view from Mars, men are more likely than women to oppose abortion, contraception and having a baby out of wedlock—issues following a related, if somewhat contradictory, theme. (In fairness, the number of males in opposition is small: 18 per cent of men oppose having children outside of marriage, for instance, compared to 13 per cent of women.)

The pollster Canseco says women are more attuned to the risks of being “objectified and sometimes exploited” and as a result are less likely to accept issues like porn, polygamy, infidelity and prostitution where there is a perceived power imbalance.

RIGHTING WRONGS & VICE VERSA

In an era where condoms are advertised on television and radio, the inclusion of contraception as a moral question in this poll seems an anachronism. Just five per cent of men and one per cent of women call birth control a moral wrong. Yet not that long ago druggists hid condoms behind the counter, and contraception was deemed a sin that thwarts procreation and leads to promiscuity—another example of evolving morality.

Harvard’s Pinker often writes about the shifting moralization and “amoralization” of issues. Smoking went from a social activity with a personal health risk to a moral issue of second-hand smoke. Food became an ethical minefield, “with critics sermonizing about the size of sodas, the chemistry of fat, the freedom of chickens, the price of coffee beans, the species of fish and now the distance the food has travelled from farm to plate.” Meantime, once-loaded issues like divorce, children outside marriage, homosexuality and marijuana use have largely shaken off the bonds of immorality.

As for contraception, it’s made a conversion from sinner to saint. A recent report by the London School of Economics, titled “Fewer Emitters, Lower Emissions, Less Cost,” concludes that money invested in family planning not only helps women in the Third World, but every unborn child lessens the eventual production of greenhouse gases.

Perhaps Canadians, with our low birth rate, already knew that. We’re a pragmatic bunch—as moral as possible, under the circumstances. **M**

Angus Reid Strategies conducted online interviews with a representative sample of 1,003 Canadian adults on Oct. 7 and Oct. 8, 2009. The margin of error for the complete sample is 3.1 per cent.

DITCHING THE PILL FOR GOOD

New health concerns have women looking for different choices

BY KATE LUNAU • Teresa Lambert was 15 years old when she first went on the pill. Her family doctor, she says, talked up its benefits: “She said my skin would be clear, and I’d know when my periods were coming.” At the time, it sounded “great,” she says, but 10 years later, she’s feeling differently: the 26-year-old recently went off the pill, and says a lot of her friends are doing the same. “I didn’t want to be taking something that altered my body any more,” says the Calgary native, who now uses condoms instead.

Lambert isn’t alone. While the pill remains one of the most widely used methods of birth control in Canada—only the condom is more popular—a growing number of women are feeling ambivalent about it, or ditching it altogether. In fact, oral contraceptive prescriptions in Canada levelled off in 2008, reports pharmaceutical industry analyst IMS Health Canada. Health care workers are seeing a growing demand for non-hormonal methods. Spurred by concerns about their health, the environment, or even frustration with family doctors, who sometimes seem to push the pill as a modern-day cure-all, Canadian women are looking for other options.

In this age of organic produce and yoga studios on every block, it’s no surprise that a growing number of women don’t want to take hormones every day. Yet a spate of recent studies left some, Lambert included, doubly concerned. In April, U.S. researchers announced that birth control pills seem to impair muscle growth: in 73 healthy women aged 18 to 31, those who weren’t taking oral contraceptives gained 60 per cent more muscle mass than those on the pill. Birth control pills typically contain a mix of estrogen and progesterone, the “pregnancy hormone,” says Steven Riechman of Texas A&M University, one of the study’s authors; the results could be due to the fact



CHINA: WOMEN COMPETE FOR PRINCE CHARMINGS

In a country where the rich keep getting richer, women are lining up for a golden ticket. More than 7,000 would-be Cinderellas have applied for just 40 spots at a fairy-tale ball in China, where multi-millionaires will cough up \$5,670 for the opportunity to sweep them off their feet. But for women, it’s mostly what’s on the outside that counts: as well as intellect, applicants will be screened on looks and physique.

MAC HOLIDAY.

WORDS TO THE WISE AT HOLIDAY TIME



GIVE THE GIFT OF MACLEAN'S AT WWW.MACLEANS.CA/GIFT