

# Magdalene sisters

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Movie Review Magdalene's Sisters Brief History of Magdalene Asylums The establishment of Magdalene Asylums varies as it operated throughout Europe, Britain, Ireland, Canada and the United States from nineteenth to the twentieth century. In Ireland, the first asylum was pioneered by Lady Arabella Denny in 1767 in Leeson Street in Dublin. The Glasgow Magdalene Asylum in Britain was set up in 1812. Meanwhile, the Magdalene Asylum in Philadelphia was founded on 1836. By mid 19th Century, Magdalene institutions became most prevalent in Ireland when the Catholic Church took over the secular asylums. Significant changes arised, asylums were transformed from being reform institutions for prostitutes and bringing them back to the society was transformed into prisons of any girl or young woman discerned by the society with no sexual discretion (Stewart Clegg).

Consequently, the asylums veered away from they're original objectives and eventually widen the definition of fallen women as stubborn, outcasts, undesirable or even unwed mothers were put into the Magdalene's laundries. However, women in the asylum were generally labeled as protstitutes even if its from different contexts and situations that brought them there. These asylums were put under stringent clerical supervision. A strict regimen of spirituality, frugality and sexual restraint were imposed to all the young women under the custody of the asylums. It was believed to be that over 30,000 women worked in these asylums. And their work was physically-intensive. It involves washing, scrubbing and ironing. These works were chosen as symbol that through their work they were away their sins with the stains affixed in their sexuality (Stewart Clegg). Irish attitude toward female sexuality Historically, Ireland has a reputation of having an ultra-conservative attitude towards female sexuality or towards women in general. <https://assignbuster.com/magdalene-sisters/>

The strict Catholic sense of decency has a strong influence in the country's perception about women. Women who did not fit in the mold of the standards of morality by the Romans were hidden away to keep the women under control. Absurd, as it may seem now, but there was a point in Ireland's history that the society believes it is only the women's sexual drives that can not be trusted, that women's sexuality, per se, is already considered a sin (Alan Hayes). For the women in Ireland, there was only one acceptable life path for women – marriage and motherhood. The Irish and American attitude toward female sexuality during the 1960's and why they are different

Generally, feminism, or the uplifting of women's role in the society began much earlier in America than in Ireland. During the 1960s, breakthrough pro-women legislations brought significant changes in the acknowledgement of women in America: The Equal Pay Act of 1963 provided that men and women doing equal work requires equal income; The Civil Rights of 1964 which prohibited the discrimination among women by any company and a Presidential Executive Order in 1967 prohibited prejudiced against women in hiring federal government contractors. Meanwhile, in Ireland, it was not until the 1970s that legislation provided significant steps to improve the condition of women. Until the 1960s, housewives could not access free legal aid.

Domestic violence or wife battering was considered to be a natural dynamics within the marriage. A battered wife could not keep out her husband from the home except by resort to the most cumbersome procedures. If she fled the home, her husband had a right to damages from anyone who enticed her away, or who harbored her or committed adultery with her (Alan Hayes).

Society's response to women who were placed in the asylums Society's response to women who were placed in the asylums can be viewed from two

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different perspectives. Considering the historical context the asylum existed, where the prevalent gender ideology at that time was subjugation and control over women's sexuality, society had been tolerable. There were no victims, then, only women in need to be rehabilitated to put back into the social norms. However, looking at these asylums from the framework of the women liberation movement, the acts committed against the women are violations of their basic human rights, not only as women but as human beings. As women empowerment advances, significant changes in valuing women's rights influence the society's perception on women as gender at present. As a matter of fact, there is now a growing public sentiment that pursues justice to all the women who were victimized by the asylums especially in Scotland and Ireland. Asylums in controlling women's sexuality If control means over empowering the minds of the women to repressed their sexuality and human dignity, yes. Asylums, especially in Ireland (as depicted by the movie, Magdalene Sisters) majority of the women might have felt violated and harassed, but blamed themselves and had done nothing to free them from the situation. However, the thrust to control women's sexuality per se is problematic. It's rooted from an erroneous Catholic dogma of the Old Testament, that the bearer of original sin was a woman tempted to eat the apple the snake offered her. Labeling these asylums from a New Testament biblical character also undermined Christ's treatment to Mary Magdalene with the explicit code on the women taken in adultery was to let he who is without sin throw the first stone, the exact opposite of the code that came adopted in his her name (Stewart Clegg). In the light of human rights and equality, with the advancement of people's history, society one way or another, have already realized that women's

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sexuality must be enhanced rather than control. The last asylum in Ireland was closed in 1996. References Alan Hayes, Diane Urguhart. *The Irish Women's History Reader*. London: Routledge, 2001. Finnegan, Frances. *Do Penance or Perish: A Study of Magdalene Asylums in Ireland*. Kilkenny: Congrave Press, 2001. Luddy, Maria. *Women and Philanthropy in the Nineteenth Century Ireland*. New York: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1995. Manhood, Linda. *The Magdalenes: Prostitution in the Nineteenth Century*. London: Routledge, 1990. McCarthy, Rebecca Lea. *Origins of the Magdalene Laundries An Analytical History*. North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc, no year available. Ryan, Mary. "A Feminism of Their Own? Irish Women's History and Contemporary Irish Women's Writing." *Estudios Irlandeses Journal*, Issue 5 (2010): 92-101. Stewart Clegg, David Courpasson, Nelson Phillips. *Power and Organizations*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2006.