

High Class Prostitution is the New Black

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Introduction

Emotions and perceptions that arise at the mention of prostitution are largely negative. The stigmatization against sex workers are mostly derived through the impressions left by street-based (low class) prostitutes who are repeatedly thought to endure violence, abuse, and victimization due to over-representation in the media. Street-based prostitutes are portrayed mainly as victims of violence to their ‘pimps’ and ‘johns’ (clients): Usually noted as coming from non-nuclear homes, growing up in abusive or addiction-ridden families. These women are seen as helpless and in need of intervention, social support, and moral assistance.

Previous research has been directed towards the correlation between adverse histories of street-based prostitutes and the violence, addiction, and hopelessness that result from involuntarily prostitution. Supporting studies have found that prostitution is usually associated with “early-life sexual abuse and incest, and depicted prostitutes as victims of abuse searching to regain their sense of control through sexual relations” (Levin and Peled, 2011, 583). The other major topic concerning prostitution is HIV control.

However, another branch of prostitution women may be involved in can be labelled high-class/end prostitutes, escorts or call girls. These women, unlike street-based prostitutes, are not under the authority of a pimp. They are inherently entrepreneurs; they have agency and autonomy in the business they conduct: they can set their own prices (or work with a woman-run agency that does not overly exploit their employees’ wages), pick their own clients, and generally earn their livings as often or not as often as they please.

With this in mind, this paper will focus on post-feminism theory as supporting evidence to examine the increasing speculations that high class prostitution can be and is in fact an empowering and beneficial opportunity for women. The idea that high end prostitution is a

positive career choice could even be further emphasized when compared to other fields such as academia and administration work, and can even prove an advantage in relation to marriage.

The significance of this research stems from the need to fulfill the eradication of the stigmatization that arises from social and economic inequality, rather than the gender inequality that radical feminism is thought to have already successfully dealt with. Rather, “post feminism is the popular idea that girls and women no longer need—or want for—feminist politics [because] girls now have the power to do, be, and have anything they want (Pomerantz and Rabty, 2010, 549-550): Pro-prostitution feminists believe in the empowerment and respect of women through independent choice of occupation while abolishing societal disapproval.

These women are not forced into sex work; rather, they enjoy their chosen career, relish the entrepreneurial experience, and do not struggle financially. Many women who are highly educated and acclaimed by society, even prostitute on the side. This essential control over one’s body and career promote self-confidence and assertiveness, which can lead to an improved quality of life and higher self-esteem.

Furthermore, high class prostitution is argued to be beneficial through other theories; for example, supported through social functionalist theory, prostitution plays a functional role in keeping together a happy marriage.

Method

The theoretical trope taken for this research is that of post feminism (pro-prostitution feminism), which contests that feminism is dead. Gender equality has already been established and now is the prime generation for women to begin to freely choose any industry to work in, even if it was previously objectified and stigmatized because “gendered oppressions that once

plagued the school, the workplace, the home, and the wider social world have evaporated, and we are now living in an age of equality, making feminism irrelevant” (Ibid, 549).

The criterion in this research includes high-end prostitution (high end agencies, escort, and call girls), and excludes street-based (low class) prostitution and brothels. This paper explores the lives of three women who were or are engaged in the sex industry. Raw, qualitative data, mainly in the form of two case studies and one personal pro-prostitution essay allow us insight into the positive experiences met by high class prostitutes, and even fare the comparisons between working as a call girl versus working in a vocation needing post-secondary education.

These self-written accounts leave little biometric data available, as would be expected due to the possible repercussions these women could face. The first author is an American allegedly named Laura, who composed an online blog dated from 2004 that recaptures how she first entered the business and the day to day activities of her life such as: the meticulous, time-consuming but well worth self-promotion of her prostitution, juggling her other in-home office job, her ten year relationship with her boyfriend, and the normal errands and friendships common to the average citizen.

The second author is known by the pseudo name of Belle de Jour; she is “an educated, middleclass woman in her thirties” (Ferreday, 2010, 282) and published a book of her online blog, which confesses her life as a call girl for a high end agency from 2003 to 2004. It is thanks to women such as Belle de Jour “whose online writings are worthy of further study” (Ibid, 288) that society and researchers alike can begin to openly penetrate the surface of this offbeat career. “Belle de Jour is the *nom de plume* of Dr. Brooke Magnanti, a research scientist at Bristol University, who subsidized her graduate studies by working as a high-class prostitute in London

for eighteen months between 2003 and 2004” (Ibid, 273), after realizing how hard it was for her to find a respectable, academic job; “Belle [is seen] as a postfeminist heroine” (Ibid, 285).

The pro-prostitution essay, written by Anonymous, is a woman with her Ph.D. in California. She argues that, although her second job is illegal, working in academia is essentially on par with prostitution, if taken into account the exploitation and authority academics face from their superiors and institutions. In contrast, she claims high end prostitution leads to higher profits, more autonomy and even more respect and dignity than she receives in the academic realm.

The methodology of choice for this study uses secondary academic data, as well as reviews and supporting articles pertaining to Belle de Jour to support the current hypothesis and the case studies present. Secondary supporting articles, journals, essays and editorials were derived from academic searches, or through mention in the case studies or references used within already found secondary writings (snowball sampling). Other forms of research, such as interviews and ethnographies, were not encouraged for this study due to the ethical issues involved and the presumed anonymity these women would prefer to keep due to the illegalities and stigmatizations they could face that commonly come with prostitution, which in turn could jeopardize their current ‘real-life’ careers.

Data

Post feminism plays a fundamental part of this research and findings on post feminism generally state that “a girl can now be successful because she exists in a gender-neutral society without structural barriers, where she ‘doesn’t feel limited by her sex; she is a person first and then a woman’ [...] the alpha girl is an unstoppable juggernaut because feminism has completed its job. As a result, girls no longer need feminism to succeed; all they need is a gutsy attitude and

a strong sense of individualism” (Pomerantz and Raby, 2010, 556). Taking into account Laura’s ‘Happy Hooking’ blog, we see her attitude toward the old roles women have had prior to feminism, as well as an interviewee’s from Lucas’s study:

“Had one of my girl friends over for dinner this evening. She's married with a goofy husband and two little kids. She hates her job, too. I really don't have any envy for her Married With Children Lifestyle. She's miserable. She's living the American Dream and feeling instead like it's a long boring nightmare” (Happy Hooking, posted Feb. 26, 2004).

“The thing I get a lot is, ‘How did a smart girl like you get into the business?’ and I tell them it’s because I’m too smart to work for corporate America . . . I hear my friends talk about their jobs and they hate them. They hate the work they do, they work for people who won’t listen to their ideas and they have them doing these asinine things, and I can’t work like that. It would make me nuts” (Lucas, 2005, 523).

Post feminists support prostitution because it symbolizes women as physically validating that they now should not be afraid to exploit the equal freedom feminists have brought upon women and take charge of their opportunities. A more profound statement (quoted from Lopez-Jones, 1998, 273) argues that ““for some women to get paid for what all women are expected to do for free is a source of power for all women to refuse any free sex”” (Lucas, 2005, 520). Activists argue that:

“prostitution must be an option for women if women are to achieve self-determination: ‘As long as women [are] not allowed to voluntarily use our bodies to make a living, we [will] always, on some level, be denied the right to choose our own destinies. Everyone’s body is a commodity.’” (Lucas, 2005, 537).

Data: Prostitution is empowering

Feminist studies have previously measured empowerment based on three levels: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and societal. Intrapersonal requires liberation from personalized oppression (feeling good about one’s self and actions); interpersonal requires liberation from group (women) stereotypes and oppression; and societal deals with liberation from typical social, cultural, and political structures (traditional male and female roles in society) (Green, 2008, 372).

Each of these levels then lead to positive self-images and independence. Here Laura shares some of her inter- and intrapersonal experiences:

“My angle has so far been basically what's known in the trade as a 'girlfriend experience'... Many of the men that answer my ad tell me they did so because I don't sound like all of the other girls that are advertising and they felt compelled to get in touch... I'm happy to say that my endorphin high lasted throughout the entire drive home and my late afternoon nap was fantastic” (Happy Hooking, posted Mar. 16, 2004).

“[When asked by blog readers why she prostitutes] I've been thinking, and I have to admit that a large part of it is an ego thing. It amazes me still that there are perfectly attractive, even dare I say--hot! men that are willing to fork out big bucks to play with me. I'm just an ordinary early 30something woman, not some supermodel. (Happy Hooking, posted Mar. 17, 2004).

Similarly, prostitutes interviewed by Tamara O'Doherty emphasize the passion they feel in helping others who have problems with their sexual relationships, and how rewarding and opportunistic the field of high end prostitution really is:

“[Interview 2] I've been in bed with men who are blind or quadriplegic. Climbed right into the extended care bed... it's totally wonderful to do those kinds of things” (O'Doherty, 2011, 188).

“[Interview 8] I have options. That's all I can say. I have a degree, I have a job, and it's good extra cash. I meet interesting people and I feel good about myself” (Ibid, 192).

And to argue feminist views of prostitution to further enable men to control and overpower women, one prostitute retaliates:

“[Interview 1] It's a very empowering thing... Anyone who thinks a man is in power in these transactions has never worked—the women are controlling these transactions” (Ibid, 2011, 192).

It has also been deduced that the main reason for entering prostitution is because it requires no previous job experience, and a large amount of money can be made in a short amount of time, whereas in most jobs, the correlation is reversed. Belle de Jour claims that her fee through the agency was set at £300 per hour plus tips—30 times the pay she would receive in

many other vocations. Many single women who have no real world experience realize the economic and autonomic value that comes from prostitution:

“In America (a country with a per capita GDP of U.S.\$21,558), many women and girls ‘elect’ to prostitute themselves rather than join the 35 percent of the female workforce earning poverty-level wages... There is no dignity in poverty, which denies the person full powers of agency” (Davidson, 2002, 94).

Data: Empowerment in Prostitution versus Other Vocations

It can be argued that, after breaking down the definition of prostitution to its intrinsic elements, what we have left is the conclusion that prostitution can be generally defined as the exploitation of the body. Following this rationale, it is safe to suggest that virtually anyone can be categorized to experience daily prostitution. “A Nation of Hookers” provides many provocative examples of extortion, ranging from mild to extreme: “there are programs like “The Newlywed Game,” where our scrubbed young brides and grooms recall—or should we say, expose—private and often intimate moments for public exhibition, for a price or a prize” (Bier, 1995, 41) and Bier finishes his article by predicting the extent this exploitation will go:

“sooner or later I expect the ultimate ad, which will begin with a medium shot of Jesus on the crucifix. Suddenly he awakens, tears himself off the cross, and descends to us. In closeup, he plucks out a nail and says, ‘Only at —’s can you find old-fashioned, truly tempered precision nails. Buy some—today!’” (Ibid, 41).

Further studies have also investigated call girls’ own views on working in their typical ‘real life’ jobs as opposed to high end prostitution. Laura provides one of her personal encounters:

“Hmm. I have to say that when I was waiting tables at night to supplement my income I felt far more exploited and undignified than I have ever felt doing this. Having a shift manager who was 7 years younger than myself and about half as intelligent ordering me about and questioning my every move just because he thoroughly enjoyed his little power trip was quite possibly the most degrading experience I've ever had. Having to crawl around on the floor wiping crumbs off the bottoms of chair rails after being on my feet for 6 hours, smiling at rude people who snapped their fingers at me and frequently would shout “Hey you, waitress,” ---these things were far more soul crushing to me than anything that's ever happened to me during an appointment with a client” (Happy Hooking, posted Apr. 2, 2004).

Similarly, Anonymous Ph.D. compares her experiences within academia and prostitution, and how she feels academia is in fact, more degrading than high class prostitution:

“In many ways, academia is like the stereotype of street prostitution, but it's also far more degrading than the kind of whoring I've done. The power that academic institutions wield over academics resembles that of the pimp who rents the whore out to different johns and confiscates most of her profits. There's no question that my experience as a whore is far less degrading than this. I get to choose where I want to live, I'm far better paid per hour, and I often get a lot more respect. Oh sure, I'm still a commodity bought and sold on the market -- like everyone else in this capitalist world. But my value as a commodity has generally increased, since there's so much demand for what I do. Ironically perhaps, I feel less like a commodity and more like a person” (Anonymous, 1999).

In many ways, we can even attest that high class prostitution is quite similar to other fields of work. Although the physical labour may be different, the working/job mentality is the same, and as such, should be recognized simply as work, just as any other legal occupation. You get hired, get trained, and shadowed just like any other entry-level job. “New call girls [learn] their trade through a type of apprenticeship” (Lucas, 2005, 517). An interview with a prostitute from Lucas’s study reveals her learning experience:

“I’ve learned so much from [prostitutes] who have worked longer than I have about valuing yourself and doing what you think is right and so I don’t think it threatens women’s rights . . . I don’t think it threatens women’s power, I think that it really empowers a lot of women” (Ibid, 2005, 519).

Call girls and the like do not receive the adequate respect and dignity that other people have in prestigious and highly acclaimed jobs, but prostitution serves society just as comparably to many other fields of work such as hospitality, health care, and education:

“Prostitutes should be socially honored because they facilitate the gratification of erotic needs that would otherwise go unmet, just as health care professionals and teachers should be honored because they meet the population’s health and educational needs. And because it meets human needs, prostitution, like medicine and education, would persist in a society that had achieved full gender, race, and class equality” (Davidson, 2002, 89).

We must further this notion of respect between analogous jobs; one must question why a masseuse is not stigmatized: Their clients are worked on while they are naked, and his or her job is to sensually touch and rub the client's body. Likewise, gynecologists and salon workers who work in very intimate and personal settings, and even though there are stories circulating alleged rape-attempts by doctors, they are not negatively stereotyped like prostitutes.

“Critiquing such analyses, many ‘sex work’ feminists point to similarities between prostitution and other personal service occupations, arguing that prostitution is better understood as involving a form of emotional labour [...] that in some settings, emotion work is ‘socially rewarding and personally gratifying,’ and yet, ‘the respect given to emotional labour in the theatre, a psychotherapist’s office, or a day care centre rarely extend to the brothel’ (Davidson, 2002, 87-8).

Data: Prostitution, Dating and Marriage

Prostitution is easily comparable to the schematics of dating: whereas prostitution involves exchanging sex for money, dating essentially involves survival sex. Survival sex entails exchanging sex for food, shelter, and protection. Is that not inherently prostitution? Men ‘wine and dine’ women, shower women in gifts and affection all in hopes of bringing her into bed. Women thrive on the power they have over men in this sense. Women love to be ‘chased’ and swooned by men, and may even prolong this stage of dating as long as possible. The only difference is sex with an escort is guaranteed. As a side note, engaging in sex with a high end prostitute allows for a lower risk of disease as compared to dating or one-night stands, as prostitutes understand the severity of contracting STIs—their careers are ruined.

Prostitution benefits marriage because it has been argued that with prostitution, men need not leave their wives for another woman. Prostitution is a clear cut solution to a man's temporary sexual frustration. Call girls do not intend to break down marriages, as recounted in Laura's blog:

“Renting a whore for an hour or two seems to be satisfying the need for *variety in sex vs. the need for sex itself*. From what I can tell, these men are happy in their relationships and prefer to not risk these relationships by having an affair to get some ‘strange’ [...] If I were to consider the ‘poor wife’ of a client, I’d actually consider the ‘poor wife’ lucky that her husband has spent time with me, a person who has no emotional designs on her husband and who has no ulterior motives to upset the ‘poor wife’s’ marriage. And if an occasional afternoon spent with me keeps a husband from deciding to start boinking that hottie in accounting (who might just decide she wants the husband for herself), again, I consider the wife lucky” (Happy Hooking, posted May 18, 2004).

In contrast to marriage, women in prostitution may even experience similar—or slightly better—sexual relations compared to a wife because “historically [...] by law, a woman was required to provide sexual services to her husband whether she wanted to or not, and in return for this she received financial support” (Kissil and Davey, 2010, 7) whereas call girls can choose which clients they do and do not want to associate with.

Analysis

Feminists who opposed this post-feminist viewpoint depict the average prostitute as a victim of abuse and neglect under a patriarchal society. Gillette, a former ‘hard core’ feminist argues that as long as feminist women continue to sing the ‘I AM THE VICTIM’ song, they rely on others to support them, even though feminism exists to support women. Feminists who judge and feel threatened by prostitutes divide women when they should stand together in order to create effective resolutions to the issues they are tackling (2008, 78-80). Lucy Prebble notes that when she met Belle de Jour and many other call girls, “every single one, said ‘please don’t portray us as victims’” (Hoskin, 2009, 128).

The discrediting of street-based prostitution is largely over-represented in the news and media. A prostitute’s character is perceived as weak willed, unnatural, dishonest, and treacherous which makes viewers see prostitutes as less than human (Goffman, 2011, 105) resulting in a huge moral panic. To precede this idea, however, is Becker’s hard labelling theory stating that:

“no act—even murder or rape—is inherently criminal. If society does not create the criminal label, then there is no criminal act; crime and deviance are considered to be social constructs” (O’Grady, 2011, 55).

Taking this into account, the quality of the information collected in this study clearly depicts the pros of escorting and high-class prostitution. Greater society, unfortunately, rarely get a chance to see the positive sanctions within high-class prostitution. It can be hypothesized that this is due to the under-representation of successful prostitutes in the media. This is a form of social control that governments and authorities try to uphold upon their citizens: By placing upon society unreasonably strict censorships. So these women working as call girls and escorts need to continue to show off a positive, powerful impression to deteriorate the black mark placed upon prostitutes and stand up for what they believe is right:

“I think it’s important to have a strong positive vision why you do this work. Because if you don’t, and I see this all the time, you’re in danger of internalizing society’s stigma, and then that can be destructive to oneself, and also to the clients. And I think you have to care about what you’re doing and the quality of the service that you’re providing, and you have to see it as a business” (Lucas, 2005, 530).

Synthesis

There are always deviations to what is considered normal or average within any situation, but given the data observed and collected within this research, there is sufficient evidence to confirm high class prostitution is in fact a positive and empowering force for women to behold. High-end prostitution promotes confidence, assertiveness, high self-esteem, and female empowerment; in many instances it provides more respect and dignity than many other legal, socially acceptable occupations.

Further research in this field must persist as exploration into prostitution in a positive light is still in its earliest stages of development. Society must then be exposed to this future

research and these favourable life scripts so that this type of research can set the foundation to exterminate prostitutes' stigmatization on a grander scale. This research can also help pave the way for the legalization and regulation of prostitution so women who currently fear the negative repercussions, but do wish to work in the sex industry, can finally do so with ease. As well, men who are wary of using these services will also reap the rewards.

I propose that another direction for future research, is examining the lives of men working in prostitution—media focuses only on female prostitutes, and little is known about whether men experience the same hardships that women in prostitution do.

Overall, this research is important because, as said by Jeannette Angell, we must control the stigma we place on prostitutes because more often than not, these women are our sisters, our mothers, our neighbours, and even our college professors: The last thing we need to do is hurt the ones we love (2008, 46).