

Women, Body and Sex Work: A Philosophical Inquiry Into Women's Autonomy, Patriarchy and the Market

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Introduction

- Sex work has strong connotations depending on the social, cultural, geographical, historical and financial context from which it is viewed
- This is because sex work has emerged in different parts of the world for very different reasons - some women have had greater amount of autonomy in determining their participation in the field
- Controversy surrounding legal regulations makes this philosophical inquiry, concerning the extent to which sex workers have autonomy, a relevant topic of discussion with impactful revelations
- Problem arises because of multitude of contexts and the lack of voiced perspectives from people of different cultural backgrounds

Outline

➤ Objectives:

- To examine whether sex work is an inherently patriarchal practice
- To examine the extent to which sex workers have absolute autonomy

➤ Methodology:

- Secondary and Philosophical Research on Women Body and Sex Work through the Writings of Scholars
 - Liberal Feminism - Laurie Shrage
 - Radical Feminism - Catherine A MacKinnon
 - Marxist Feminism - Silvia Federici
 - Post Structuralist Feminism - Judith Butler
 - Postcolonial and Intersectional Feminism - Laura María Agustín
 - Neoliberal Perception of Self-Commodification - Elizabeth Bernstein

Liberal Feminism on Women, Body and Sex Work from Laurie Shrage

- Focuses on personal freedom, individual rights and legal reform
- Decriminalisation of sex work - reduce violence, discrimination and danger
- Sex work is a legitimate form of labour that deserves the same protection and rights as any other labour
- Women must have the right to make autonomous choices about their own body
- Women must be allowed to negotiate their own terms in society, including the roles they play in the market

Radical Feminism on Women, Body and Sex Work from Catherine A MacKinnon

- Sex work is inherently tied to the patriarchy and its societally enforced power dynamics
- A women engaging in sex work is an exploitation of her identity as a women
- Practice of sex work propagates objectification and subjugation of women as mere products of sexual satisfaction and male domination
- Partaking in sex work is not an autonomous decision, but rather coerced by patriarchal power dynamics, including economic disadvantage
- Decriminalisation must take place

Marxist Feminism on Women, Body and Sex Work from Silvia Federici

- Economic structures exploit women and commodify their bodies
- Sex work is not just the product of socio-psychological patriarchal subjugation, but also the consequence of systemic inequalities propagated by capitalism
- Exploiting female identity in the name of financial profit - degrading and disrespectful
- Economic inequalities, sustained by capitalism, limit women from expressing their autonomous choices
- Dismantle capitalism

Post Structuralist Feminism on Women, Body and Sex Work from Judith Butler

- Gender and sexuality is performative - the consequence of social constructs and norms
- Sex work can only be studied with reference to each individualistic context that influences a women's choice to engage in sex work
- Importance in embracing the fluidity and multiplicity in experience as a sex worker - to move beyond the binary of oppression and liberation

Post Colonial & Intersectional Feminism on Women, Body and Sex Work from Laura María Agustín

- Significance of being conscious of the multiple cultural contexts that have given rise to the practice of sex work - liberation and oppression swing between different societies
- Ambition of 'rescuing' sex workers by criminalisation, or even decriminalisation, is ultimately just Western feminists projecting their own ideals on other women while being disrespectful of the cultural nuances
- A close examination into race, class, and poverty plays a crucial role in understanding the concern identified

Neoliberal Perception of Self Commodification on Women, Body and Sex Work from Elizabeth Bernstein

- Bounded Authenticity: Neoliberalism promotes the objectification of personal and sexual lives as products in the market
- Commodification of elements like intimacy and connection through the practice of sex work
- Sex work is an entrepreneurial manner of self-expression and identity
- Allows women to exert control over their own finances and lives
- Nonetheless, this construct still does sustain the socio-economic inequalities that push women into sex work

Conclusion

Patriarchal conduct has persisted across several societies, beyond most cultural or geographical barriers - sometimes, because of colonisation - so, it is difficult to assert that choices can be made without the influence of such an unavoidably ingrained psycho-social norm.

Therefore, because women do not have autonomy in current modern societies - their choice to do sex work cannot be an absolute display of autonomy.

Nonetheless, criminalisation of sex work is not the adequate response. People must instead focus on deconstructing patriarchal norms to improve female autonomy in society instead of deconstructing modes of female livelihood.