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Betancur C.B., Cortés A.F.M. (2011). *Cuerpo, comercio sexual, amor e identidad. Significados construidos por mujeres que practicaron la prostitución*. “CES Psicología”, 4(1): 32–51

Review of the literature

The authors of this article are Catalina Betancur Betancur, Psychologist at the San Buenaventura University, Seccional Medellín, and Andrés Felipe Marín Cortés, Psychologist and Master in Psychology, Professor and Researcher at the Pontificia Bolivariana University, Seccional Medellín. They published this article in the Journal “CES Psicología” on 30 May 2011. I decided to choose this article because it combines two topics that are of great interest to me. I wanted to talk about the romantic myths and beliefs we have about love, as well as prostitution as a social problem of renown. I decided to put them together by choosing the article by Betancur and Cortés (2011), where they make a study of the meanings that women who practiced prostitution have constructed about the sex trade, love, and identity. In this review, I will summarise the article and comment on some aspects, such as what is the purpose of this research, what advances it provides to our field of sociology, if the authors have reported the problem well and have structured the article correctly, etc.

Article summary

The authors of this article have proposed an investigation on subjectivity in prostitution and the social constructions related to the practice; through a qualitative design, multiple case study, using in-depth interviews and non-participant observation as techniques. The study involved 5 women between 33 and 50 years of age, who practiced street prostitution in Medellín (Colombia). In the following sections, we will discuss why this may be a sampling error, as it is not sufficiently representative. In the results, it was found that the sex trade is equitable, what both sex workers and clients receive is related to something called “happiness”; but it is important to understand that it is not the same definition of happiness for both parties. Men relate it to deprivation

in their daily lives, leaving aside their problems; and for women it is simply a way to guarantee their economic independence, therefore they relate it to happiness. Despite this supposed fairness, we should not overlook the painful meaning of this practice for the participants, this situation does not happen to clients. Moreover, even though they no longer work participants continue to see it as something that defines their identity and their way of interacting with people.

Critical Reflections and More Research

In my humble opinion, I think the article is on the right track, but the way it deals with certain terms should be revised. Perhaps there are differences in meaning attributed to the fact that it is a Latin American magazine and they have a different culture from the one I may have in Spain or the one they have here in Poland. But I think that some concepts are not entirely well attributed and may lead to errors in the readers' understanding. Furthermore, the results should not be considered extrapolable, despite the fact that being qualitative research, it does not require such a large sample as in other studies; choosing only 5 women, of a reduced age range and all from the same city, does not make the results conclusive.

According to the study by Díez Gutiérrez (2012), 70% of men report having demanded at some point in their lives the prostitution; it is the second most important business in the world, surpassing arms trafficking and drug trafficking; the sex industry moves 12,000 million dollars annually in the world.

I think that something important that is missing from the article by Betancur and Cortés (2011), which Díez Gutiérrez does emphasise, is the role of men in this business. Understanding that if there were not that much demand there would not be that much supply; it is the men who maintain and continue to force the subjection of women and children to this gender violence, understanding sex as if it were right and promoting its trade. Furthermore, it is important to address this situation from a gender perspective; men who turn to prostitution really have a serious problem with their sexuality, they are not capable of establishing a relationship of equality with women, believing that they must be at their service. We must call a spade a spade and highlight that the majority of prostitution consumers, even if implicitly, are sexist. I also think it would be better if the original article made reference to why these women stopped practising; the variety of reasons why women may start, be it economic, family burdens, cheating or trafficking of women, drug addiction, self-determination, etc.

In the study by Triviño (2016), contrary to the original study focusing on female prostitutes; they did research focusing on young heterosexual men who had ever paid for sex. The main conclusions of this study are that the discourses of the interviewees reproduce gender stereotypes and gender sexual roles. And it is suggested that prostitution can be interpreted as a scenario where these men perform their hegemonic masculinity, with the latter referring in particular to a political mechanism, to that masculine

normativity that configures how the authentic man should be, the one that allows the maintenance of patriarchy.

It is important to highlight how we live in a society accustomed to men being the only ones with desires and the capacity to express them openly. In this study, their responses reflected how payment implies the primacy of their desires and satisfaction over that of the prostituted woman. Also, in many of their responses, we can observe the image of the heterosexual man as a conqueror, in which masculine identity is reaffirmed through the number of sexual partners; power is embodied in the male subject, in this attempt to represent his manhood through sexual relations with women. For this reason, I think more research should be done on the place of prostitution in the patriarchal process.

The data obtained in the article (Barrón López de Roda *et al.* 1999) suggest that Spanish society strongly accepts most of the romantic myths (especially, older people, religious people, and people with fewer years of formal education). At the same time, women tend to be slightly more romantic than men, especially with regard to the importance of sexual “loyalty” for them. Finally, with regard to beliefs about love, there seems to be an important trend to link love with sex and with marriage, and this is also more pronounced among women, older people, religious people, and people with fewer years of formal education. Thus, in the women’s study, in contrast to the male clients, they express the need to disassociate sex from love in order to put aside the painful significance of their practices, which do not comply with social ideals about sexuality and love.

Conclusions

Prostitution is a historical practice mainly attributed to women, and which is defined as a commercial situation in which the women involved sell sex in exchange for money; must be understood from the social inequality that affects women. As I have commented in previous sections, we are victims of an economic and social system that always favors men.

In this article, women who are no longer in prostitution have participated and explain how, years after the practice, only becoming mothers allows them to feel valid again, beyond that, they continue to feel eternally objectified, especially in the eyes of others. It is necessary to understand the context, to identify the subjects who are part of it, the specificities of the practice, the meanings attributed to it, in order to intervene appropriately. We must approach this issue from a critical stance, the product of various historical processes and shaped by the particular context of each woman.

Referring to the writing style in this article, I think that sometimes it lacks coherence and a better connection between the ideas, but the general idea of what they are investigating I believe is well argued. In addition, I think it is a very important topic, for our field – social work – as well as to address it as a social problem at a global level.

The methods used by the authors for the research are adequate; but as I have mentioned in previous sections, it would be better if we had more sample size. Also statistics, tables,

graphs, etc. could have been used to make the research more visual, easier to understand and more representative.

I consider that in general terms, the editor should publish the article, because it is an interesting topic that there is not enough research on, and even less, treated from the meanings of love and identity for women prostitutes, it is an original point of view that has not been seen in previous studies. The data have been collected properly and the article follows the proper format with APA standards. Due to my ignorance, not being a professional in this field, I think it has not enough errors to be unpublishable.

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