

Preface

I am greatly fascinated with societies way of separating genders and the effects of this separation primarily through sexuality. As a society we have given roles to each gender. The male: showing emotion is a sign of weakness and the female: showing strength is out of place. This appears everywhere: Advertisement, pop culture, and exists in every Americans mind. Pornography is a direct impact of this divide between genders. I have been interested in cases where women have been taken advantage of and used as sex slaves without consent. This is what the media shines light on. A deeper subject that is of more interest to me are the women who choose to be in this business or even think that this work is positive to society. I want to question what part of does society play in affecting the women socially and physically who choose to be in the porn and or prostitution industry. It becomes instantly more complex to try to understand something that is so puzzling to me: What would drive a woman to subject herself to the treatment in pornography? This is why I am pursuing deeper research on these social issues.

Introduction

The business of selling sex is one of the largest in the world. Ranging from the legal act of pornography to the illegal act of prostitution. The pornography business is a 10 billion dollar industry that is on the constant up rise. Pornography and prostitution are both similar in the fact that they run their business around “sex for money,” a statement that is generally not accepted by society. I am researching to understand what makes this not accepted by society. Going past the women who have been put in hopeless situations is a question I think has not been addressed as thoroughly and something that is incredibly hard for me to understand: What would drive a woman to subject herself to the treatment in pornography or prostitution?

Comparing Pornography and Prostitution

You cannot deny that women are being exploited and taken advantage of every day in the Prostitution industry. We hear dozens of stories based in foreign countries about how women have been trafficked into prostitution but the United States seems to turn a blind eye when it happens down the block from the police station. *Very Young Girls*, a documentary about young women in New York City who have been exploited and taken advantage of “in the life. The entry age to prostitution in the United States is 13 years old. The young girls in this film usually come from a harsh background where in many cases they cannot return home. Being left on the streets and having nowhere to go they get picked up by a man, sometimes triple her age, who says he will “Be her Daddy, he will love for her and care for her”. In hindsight this is appealing to these girls. A young girl that may have not felt loved in her life; to them it is a dream come true. As time goes on the love comes at a very high price- selling herself. This “love” results in being taken advantage of, beaten, and sometimes hospitalized for abuse. These men are brainwashing young children. In most cases these under aged girls are charged for prostitution when in any other case they are legally to young to consent to sex. It proposes the question: Would these crimes increasingly diminish if prostitution were to be legalized?

A large number, about 61% have legalized at least some kind of prostitution around the world. In the United States, 49 out of 50 states, prostitution is illegal. In rural counties in Nevada about 300 women work in brothels regulated by local ordinances (Ronald Weitze, CNN). Many of the reasoning for legalizing prostitution is for better regulated and more accepted work. In the article on slate magazine, Emily Bazelon discusses Martha Nussbaum's opinion on the situation. Nussbaum discusses that it is entirely about context and there is an incredible difference between a street worker controlled by a pimp and a high-end call girl who chooses her clients. In conclusion, she states legalizing prostitution "is likely to make things a little better for women who have too few options to begin with". Ronald Weitze discussed that this should be a right, "Consensual adult prostitution should be officially recognized as work and the participants be accorded the rights and protections available to those involved in other occupations." What makes pornography legal and prostitution illegal?

The major difference in pornography as opposed to prostitution is the consumer. Although the labor and physical act of the job appears to be the same, the way it is being received is vastly different. In terms of business, pornography is supplying to a larger demand. Obviously pornography is watched all over the United States or the industry would not be one of incredible profit. But if you go to the core of the act as opposed to the people watching it in the privacy of their homes, essentially it is the same as prostitution. Exploring Feminist against pornography vs. Feminist pornography can give us better grasp on the situation at large.

Feminists Against Pornography Versus Feminists in Favor

Feminist against pornography and Feminist pornography believe in the same basic principle: Equality for women. Although this principle would appear in agreement in many social issues, prostitution and pornography is a heated debate for feminist in the United States.

A strong representative of a Feminist against Pornography is Catherine McKinnon. Catherine McKinnon believes heavily that prostitution and pornography is abusive to our society.

"The pornography industry is an industry of trafficking women, and it's covered up as a form of speech, and it defended as therefore a First Amendment right. So the ways in which women are hurt by it begin with the women in it who are being prostituted through it and are typically gotten into it either as children or through a whole range of coercive means, all the way from physical force through economic coercion to being victims of sexual abuse, typically as children, and a whole range of means, and then exploited in it" (PBS.com).

McKinnon speaks to women who have been exploited and taken advantage such as the women in the documentary "Very Young Girls" earlier mentioned. She believes the industry is for taking advantage of women therefore continuing sexism in our country. Gail Dines another active feminist in the fight against pornography and prostitution agrees heavily with Catherine McKinnons views. She believes that the sex industry at its core is about, "(1) the control of women (2) to facilitate the presentation of women (3) for male consumption (4) in the pursuit of profit."(uutexas.edu). The views of these women are clear and at first glance any feminist would nod their head in agreement. However while looking at the opposite end the feminist in favor of pornography and prostitution bring a new approach to what taking control of your femininity can mean.

Feminist in favor of prostitution and pornography live by the basic feminist value: “control of your own body and destiny” (Margot St James). As you question further of what taking control of your own body exactly means the way you can interpret this becomes more complicated. To these women taking control of your body means having the freedom to make money for sex. Sasha Grey, a former Pornstar that made it on to the big screen for movies and television shows says, “I do not see the difference between porn and a main stream job.” While this point of view could be wildly debated another perspective that could be better understood is people who believe they are truly benefiting society. Feminist pornography is a genre that is made by and for women. A feminist pornographer, Madison Young, makes her work just for this reason, “The work I do is to create space for people to explore themselves with no judgment who usually receive hate crimes”. The intent of making pornography for and by women challenges the point by Gail Dines that the sex industry is “for male consumption”. Although the industry may primarily be for male use these women are trying to explain that they do not feel victims of sexism and are fighting to create space for a variety of users.

Margot St. James founded Coyote in 1973 to work for the repeal of the prostitution laws and an end to the stigma associated with sex work. In an interview from 1985, Margot St James states that she is not just fighting for the legalization on prostitution but what she considers the three inequalities for women: Abortion, Lesbian, and Prostitution rights. Margot St. James bases her work around testing the “rigid lines people have to adhere to.” Unlike other feminist in opposition to pornography, Margot believes that the “whore stigma” is the reason for the rape, abuse and violence involved with prostitution. With the social recognition of prostitution being an active choice would come disassociation of the whore equaling less. Many people also believe that the crime of the customer is lesser than the provider, “The whore is shamed and the victim of abuse is blamed” (archive.org).

In the interview by Judy Pasternak, Margot also addresses Catherine McKinnon point of view and responds to McKinnons criticism of the sex industry. McKinnon stated, “pornography portrays women as whores by nature.” This is the exact point of view Margot is trying change. She believes this view as a society is the core reason for the rape and abuse. Margot St James believes that the whores are actually the only emancipated women, “they have the same privilege men, to sleep with whomever they like.” In considering the amount of causalities when it comes to sex, Margot does not see why the dynamics suddenly change when money is involved. This rises questions of whether prostitution is a taboo to American culture seeing the trend in the legalization all around the world.

Concluding Analysis on Scholars

Margot St. James and Catherine McKinnon are leaders on both sides of the sex industry. They both make highly educated and respectful points of view, however I think both of them are rather one sided. It is important to note that it is all about circumstance, anyway you look at this issues the situation changes whether the women chose to be in this industry or trafficked in as a small child. McKinnon is broadly speaking to the women who have not come from a necessarily descent upbringing and out of desperation have been picked up or trafficked at very young age. All feminists can agree that this is a crime even if the opposite ends have different ways of solving the issue. However, McKinnon does not acknowledge the women who choose to be in the industry. She treats all these women as victims when in some cases such as feminist

pornographers, a victim is the last title they want. Margot St. James feels equality with this act and believes she is gaining the same rights as men. Where I think Margot is one sided in her argument is she primarily speaks to women who choose to be in this industry when in actuality many women are persuaded. While considering both points of views, my beliefs are more aligned with Margot St. James way of thinking. I believe prostitution and pornography are perceived as a taboo to American culture. It is easy to solve the problem by stopping the act. But Margot St. James view of believing the “whore stigma” is why the abuse takes place challenges my previous views and proves this same stigma existed in my mind as well.

I began my research trying to answer the question: Why would a women subject herself to the treatment in pornography or prostitution? For asking this question in the first place it proves that I see the sex industry as a sort of taboo that Margot addresses. Making your living off of your body and what it can do seemed morally incorrect to me but I wanted to challenge this view. I put into different perspectives: What if it was something I cared about, for example art? I came to the conclusion that under circumstances I would be willing to subject myself to this treatment if the piece demanded it to portray its message. With this realization came a certain hypocrisy on my part. After researching women who believe they are benefiting society and rapidly changing the “male centered industry”, I understand now we are both speaking to a cause that is important to the individual and in theory it would not be just for me to say what they are doing is morally or ethically wrong.

With that said I realize that this is still an industry that abuses and takes control of women. Whether the reasoning is the stigma or the act itself will continue to be wildly debated but it is important to address the problem of what the first steps could be to help the people who do not have a choice. In addition to helping the sex positive movement of reducing the “whore stigma”. I believe that the legalization of prostitution would not only begin to brake down the whore stigma but also make things better for the women being abused and taken advantage of. With the legalization of prostitution at best there would be a significant decrease in child pornography, rape, abuse, and disease. With prostitution being illegal it makes it impossible for women to report crimes of assault because they would be arrested. This creates an endless cycle of crime and sexism.

In conclusion, I believe prostitution should be legalized. With the legalization would come more acceptance and better working conditions for women in the field. This job could be taken seriously and be given equal pay without women being taken advantage of. I believe prostitution is not a crime and that the modern day stigma that exists in many Americans’ minds needs to be broken down. Hopefully in the process of breaking down the stigma a greater level of respect could be formed.